

ENG 162 ELEMENTS OF DRAMA**MODULE 1 CONCEPTS AND DEFINITION OF DRAMA**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will learn some definitions of drama. You will understand that all actions are not drama. You will be able to distinguish between drama and ordinary activity. You will see that both government and other agencies use drama to educate the people, disseminate information or to mobilize them to accept or reject any concept, action or programme. Most of you relax with dramatic presentations either in the theatre or in your houses as you watch home videos, soap operas or films. As you watch these presentations, you will be able to learn one thing or the other while you are being entertained. This explains why drama is regarded as the mother of all arts; it is used to inform, educate and entertain the people.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify drama as a genre of literature;
- Define drama;
- Explain when an action could be regarded as drama; and
- State the basic elements of drama

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Drama as a Genre of Literature

What is Literature?

Literature springs from our inborn love of telling a story, of arranging words in pleasing patterns, of expressing in words some special aspect of our human experience. It is usually set down in printed characters for us to read, though some forms of it are performed on certain social occasions. There are a number of different branches such as drama, poetry, the novel, the short story, fable, allegory; all these are works of the imagination arising from man's ability to invent things. The primary aim of literature is to give pleasure, to entertain those who voluntarily attend to it. There are, of course, many different ways of giving pleasure or entertainment, ranging from the most philosophical and profound. It is important to note that the writer of literature is not tied to fact in quite the same way as the historian, the economist or the scientist, whose studies are absolutely based on what has actually happened, or on what actually does happen, in the world of reality. Take for instance, a historian tells stories of what had happened; a literary writer tells a story of what might happen. Moreover, history is dead and silent but literature is alive; it mirrors life.

Why is Literature Important?

We soon discover, however that the literature which entertains us best does not keep us for long in the other-world of fantasy or unreality. The greatest pleasure and satisfaction to be found in literature occurs where (as it so often does) it brings us back to the realities of human situations, problems, feelings and relationships. The writers of literature, being less tied to fact than the historian or the scientist, have more scope to comment on the facts, to arrange them in unusual ways to speculate not only on what is, but on what ought to be, or what might be. Writers are sometimes, therefore people with visionary or prophetic insights into human life.

Literature is an imaginative art which expresses thoughts and feelings of the artist on events around him. In most cases, it deals with life's experiences. The

author/artist uses words in a powerful, effective and captivating manner to paint his picture of human experience. Literature is a form of recreation. The three genres of literature are prose, drama and poetry. You have seen that drama is a genre of literature. A person who writes a novel is called a novelist; the person who writes a play is a playwright while the poet writes poetry. All of us who read literature will find our knowledge of human affairs broadened and deepened, whether in the individual, the social, the racial or the international sphere; we shall understand the possibilities of human life, both for good and evil; we shall understand how we came to live at a particular time and place, with all its pleasures and vexations and problems; and we shall perhaps be able to make right rather than wrong choices. Literature can be in written or oral form. It could also be presented in the form of performance.

3.2 What is Drama?

Drama as a literary genre is realized in performance, which is why Robert Di Yanni (quoted in Dukore) describes it as “staged art” (867). As a literary form, it is designed for the theatre because characters are assigned roles and they act out their roles as the action is enacted on stage. These characters can be human beings, dead or spiritual beings, animals, or abstract qualities. Drama is an adaptation, recreation and reflection of reality on stage. Generally, the word, dramatist is used for any artist who is involved in any dramatic composition either in writing or in performance.

Drama is different from other genres of literature. It has unique characteristics that have come about in response to its peculiar nature. Really, it is difficult to separate drama from performance because during the stage performance, drama brings life experiences realistically to the audience. It is the most concrete of all genres of literature. When you are reading a novel, you read a story as told by the novelist. The poem’s message in most cases is not direct because it is presented in a compact form or in a condensed language. The playwright does not tell the story instead you get the story as the characters interact and live out their experiences on stage. In drama, the characters/actors talk to themselves and react to issues according to the impulse of the moment. Drama is therefore presented in dialogue.

You can see that as a genre of literature, drama occupies a unique position. It is also the most active of other genres of literature because of the immediate impact it has on the audience. It is used to inform, to educate, to entertain and in some cases to mobilize the audience.

Most people associate funny action or other forms of entertainment as drama. An action could be dramatic yet it will not be classified as drama.

The dramatic is used for any situation or action which creates a sense of an

abnormality or the unexpected. Sometimes we use it to describe an action that is demonstrated or exaggerated. For instance, if you are at a bus stop, a well-dressed young girl passes by and cat-walks across the road; her high-heeled shoes break and she slips, the immediate reaction will be laughter from almost everybody there. For some people, this is drama. Although she was walking in an abnormal way and unexpectedly her shoes break, her action could be called dramatic but it is not dramatic action. Again, the action of a teacher who demonstrates, by injecting life into his teaching as he acts out certain situations, is dramatic but it is not drama.

What then is drama? Drama is an imitation of life. Drama is different from other forms of literature because of its unique characteristics. It is read, but basically, it is composed to be performed, so the ultimate aim of dramatic composition is for it to be presented on stage before an audience. This implies that it is a medium of communication. It has a message to communicate to the audience. It uses actors to convey this message. This brings us to the issue of **mimesis or imitation**. We say that drama is mimetic which means that it imitates life. You may have heard people say that drama mirrors life. Yes, it is the only branch of literature which tries to imitate life and presents it realistically to the people. It is this **mimetic impulse** of drama that makes it appeal to people. Drama thrives on action.

The term drama is used at the following three (3) different levels:

1. Performance
2. Composition
3. Branch of Literature.

(1) Performance

Drama is used for plays that are acted on stage or screen. These plays are different from musical performances because they must tell stories which are acted out by actors and actresses. You remember what we said earlier about imitation or re-enactment and impersonation. These actors and actresses must be playing roles by imitating other characters. It means, therefore, that they must assume other people's personalities by bearing different names, ages, occupation, nationalities, etc. Finally, they must be conscious of themselves as actors by trying hard to pretend that they are the characters they are representing.

(2) Composition

Drama is used to describe a dramatic composition which employs language and pantomime to present a story or series of events intended to be performed. Sometimes, especially with written compositions, they may not be presented on

stage but this does not stop it from being drama. In as much as a play is enjoyed more when it is performed, you can still read a play and be entertained by it.

(3) Branch of Literature

Drama is a term used for that branch of literature that covers dramatic composition. In other words, it is called one of the literary genres. You know already that drama is a literary art. The basic difference between drama and other forms of literature (prose and poetry) is that drama is presented in dialogue from the beginning to the end. Any information by the playwright is given in stage-direction. We have dialogue in prose and poetry but they are interjected in the course of the story. But dialogue is mainly applicable to drama.

3.3 Definition of Drama

There are many definitions of drama.

Martin Esslin in *Anatomy of Drama* has the following definitions of drama:

1. Drama can be seen as a manifestation of the play instinct as in children who are playing mother and father.
2. Drama is something one goes to see, which is organized as something to be seen.
3. It is an enacted fiction an art form based on mimetic action.
4. In arts, drama is the most elegant expression of thought nearest to the truth (reality).
5. It is the most concrete form in which art can recreate human situation, human relationship (57).

Aristotle's definitions sum up these and other numerous definitions of drama by different scholars. He defines drama simply as an imitation of an action. He links it to the mimetic (imitative) impulse in human beings like children playing father and mother in a childhood play. This means that imitation is part of life. Human beings have the desire to imitate others, situations or events.

However, Bertolt Brecht insists that drama is not just an imitation of action, but a tool for the demonstration of social conditions; it mirrors society. It is not just an entertainment but an instrument of political and social change. From these definitions, we can conclude that drama is a way of creating or recreating a situation, an articulation of reality through impersonation or re-enactment. An action becomes drama if it is an imitation of an earlier action real or imagined. For instance, the story of a hunter who goes to the forest, kills an antelope and takes it home even if he is dancing as he goes home, is not drama. It becomes drama if the same story is re-enacted maybe as part of a festival. In the later

case, some people (actors) will represent the hunter and the antelope to the audience for entertainment or education. A young man who aspires to be a hunter could learn, from the presentation, how to stalk an animal or how to aim the gun or bow while being entertained. This story could be represented through mime, dance or in dialogue.

3.4 Imitation

Imitation to some extent is a reflection of an action in real life. It is close to reality but not reality. In imitation you assume a role and not pretend. You take on or claim the personality of the person you are imitating. An imitation therefore involves an illusion of the reality and a willing suspension of disbelief. The actor creates an illusion of reality to make his action credible. The audience in order to believe him suspends its doubt (disbelief) and believes that what it is watching is real. This explains why sometimes you are moved to tears as you watch the suffering of a particular character when you are watching a home video or any other dramatic presentation. This is called empathy. According to Aristotle, mimesis (imitation) entails some copying but not verbatim copying. The artist adjusts or adds to it. He therefore contributes to the original as he creates another world through imitation. Consequently, the product becomes not an appearance but a reality or at worst, a reflection of the reality. It is important to note here that the action might not have existed before in reality. The playwright could imagine or conceptualize an action, then write it down or present it.

3.5 Impersonation

Imitation is a broader term for copying somebody or something. In drama, this impersonation is called **mimesis**. In impersonation, we narrow it down to copying people. Generally, we impersonate or pretend to be somebody in order to deceive people or to entertain them. Usually, in an impersonation, the actor tries to be as convincing as possible. In acting this is called getting into the role. Impersonation could be interchanged with role-playing.

You have seen that impersonation is an important ingredient in drama because for the action to be real or life-like, the actors must convince the audience that they are the person or characters they are impersonating.

3.6 Re-Presentation

Re-presentation is to give or show something again. In drama, the artist may have been inspired by a particular action and decides to re-produce it or re-represent it on stage. Here, it is not possible to re-present the action exactly as it appeared in its original form. Sometimes, the dramatic composition is based on

that action. We also use re- presentation when a particular performance is being presented again after its premiere or the original and first performance.

From our discussion so far, you have seen that the universal elements of drama are imitation, re-representation of action, impersonation or re- enactment. In any dramatic presentation, the actors must be conscious of themselves as actors, and also conscious of the audience. On the part of the audience, there must be an element of make believe or willing suspension of disbelief. This simply means that, they will pretend that what the actors are doing is real. On the part of the actors, they try as much as possible to convince the audience that they are presenting real life experience. This explains why you see actors who display realistic emotions on stage. For instance, an actor can cry realistically if the need arises. In order to achieve this feat, they try to get into the role they are playing so that the action will be as realistic as possible. Aristotle calls this serious imitation a willing suspension of unbelief. That is, presenting your actions in such a manner that an audience will not doubt you when you are acting on stage.

3.7 Re-enactment

Re-enactment is similar to re-representation. However, in re-enactment, there is a clear indication that a particular action is being re-enacted. Persons or actions will impersonate **specific** characters in the original action. In traditional societies or oral literature, re-enactment is common and popular. During festivals, depending on the cultural background of the people and the environment, some events like hunting expedition, fishing, physical prowess and special feats at wars are re-enacted. In the enactment of a hunting expedition, some people are chosen to impersonate the animals while some impersonate the hunter who stalks and kills the animal. The jubilation and the dance of triumph end the performance.

Some dances like the “Egwu amala” from Delta State and some masquerades are used to re-enact past events or actions. Historical plays are mainly re-enactments of past events.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

- i. In your own words, define drama.
- ii. What is the basic difference between drama and other genres of literature?

4.0 CONCLUSION

Drama is an imitation of an action. It is a branch of literature which is both literary art and representational art. As a literary art, it deals with fiction or an

imaginary story that is presented through characters and dialogue. However, it is a special kind of fiction because it is designed to be acted out rather than narrated. That is why dialogue is a very important feature of drama. When we read a novel or a short story, we understand and appreciate the story, through the narrator or author but in drama, the characters live out the story for us. The playwright does not comment or explain anything. So, drama gives us a direct presentation of life experiences. That is why we say that it is a representational art. Drama, therefore, uses language in the form of gesture....or dialogue to present or to re-present an action. Characters are used to present the story. These characters are called actors.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have tried to explain the meaning of drama. We have also tried to distinguish it from other forms of literature. By now you must have been familiar with the basic elements of drama which make drama unique. You have seen also that the term drama is used at three different levels. It is a performance, it is a composition to be read or performed and it is a branch of literature.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Give two definitions of drama by two different scholars and discuss them in the light of your understanding of the genre.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 2 ORIGIN AND FUNCTIONS OF DRAMA

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In unit 1, we learnt some definitions of drama. In this unit, we will trace the origin of drama. You will also learn the functions of drama and be able to distinguish between drama and theatre.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Give an account of the origin of drama
- Distinguish between drama and theatre
- Distinguish between festival theatre and theatre as a building

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Origin of Drama

The word ‘drama’ comes from the Greek verb ‘dram’ which means ‘to act’ or to perform. Many scholars trace the origin of drama to wordless actions like ritual dances and mimes performed by dancers, masked players or priests during traditional festivals or ceremonies. One account traces the origin to ritual performances. In the traditional society or in the earliest times, sometimes, the seasons did not come as expected. When this happened, men felt that they had offended the gods, so they devised means of appeasing these gods. That act of appeasing the gods is what we refer to as ritual. This ritual, as expected, involved a ceremony in which the priest played an important role at a designated location, mostly shrines. The priest would

normally wear a special dress for the occasion. That role, the dress (costume), and the utterance or incantations are regarded as dramatic elements and performances. Drama could therefore be said to have emerged from these actions. So, if it is presented for entertainment and there is an element of impersonation, imitation of an action, and re-enactment of an action, it is drama. Another account traces the origin to man's desire for entertainment. Here, during festivals or other ceremonies, they re-create the achievements of some legendary or mythical heroes and heroines to entertain the people.

Scholars' opinions are divided on the origin of drama. Some trace the origin to Greece but others insist that drama in its definitive form or pattern evolved from Egypt which is regarded as one of the cradles of civilization in the world. The latter group argues that it was borrowed by western merchants who developed and documented it, and who now trace the origin to Greece. However, the account of tracing the origin of drama to Greece is more acceptable. The evolution is clearer and well-documented.

Apparently, Greek drama evolved from religious festivals (rituals) that were celebrated to ensure the fertility of the land and the wellbeing of its people. These festivals were connected with the worship of the god Dionysius, a native god who like the vegetation dies and was reborn each year. The festival involved singing and dancing by a chorus of fifty men. The choral song, known as Dithyramb, was sang in honour of the god. The men danced around the altar of Dionysius in a circular dancing setting called orchestra. Sometimes, a story about the god was improvised by the leader of the chorus, though remaining part of the chorus. Sometimes, he dresses like a character from mythology. At this stage, individual actors were not involved in the performances.

The dramatist, Thespis, is believed to have been the first person to introduce the individual actor and the element of impersonation in the 6th century B.C. During a particular performance, he stood out from the chorus and instead of singing in the honour of the god, he sang as the god. He performed between the dances of the chorus and he conversed at times with the leader of the chorus. Thus drama was literally originated. Thespis, therefore appeared as the first actor, and when he broke away from the chorus and he added the dramatic potential of impersonation.

It is impersonation because, instead of describing the god, Dionysius, or his actions, he pretended to be the god himself. Thus, the performance changed from poetry performance to drama. Aeschylus added the second actor and this gave drama a new thrust forward because the additional actor enabled the dramatist to show in action, a dramatic conflict rather than talk about it. Sophocles' addition of the third actor further enlarged the scope of the dramatist and provided him with the means of complicating his plot and devising more complex structural arrangement of his action. It is important to note here that some dramatic performances may be presented without words or without the accompaniment of music/dance. Examples

of such performances are mine and opera

The important feature of drama is dialogue. It induces a personal communication and an immediate experience between the actor and the audience. This makes drama a concrete art and the message is immediate and direct. It is concrete because you can see the actors performing and presenting a real life story which affects you positively or negatively and you re-act immediately. Accordingly, drama exists in both oral and literary traditions.

In this course, we will concentrate more on the literary tradition, i.e. the written drama. The text is called a play and the writer is called a playwright. However, we will make reference to drama as performance on stage from time to time because it is difficult to separate the two in the study of dramatic literature. Drama is the philosophical aspect of the play while performance or theatrical performance is the physical aspect of the play.

3.2 The Nature of Drama

You learnt in unit one that drama has a unique nature. It has developed and been improved upon by various dramatists over the ages. It has also been influenced by the developments and changes in the world. The unique nature of drama makes it possible for it to be read and also, to be performed. Unlike the prose and poetry which depend on narration, drama is presented only through dialogue. The novel is divided in chapters and the poem is written mostly in stanzas, drama is presented in acts and scenes, movements or parts. William Shakespeare made the five-act structure the standard for his plays. Each dramatist is free to adopt his/her own style.

In addition to the fact that plays can be read and enjoyed by people in the privacy of their homes, people also watch and enjoy the plays as an audience in a theatre when the plays are presented on stage. The audience gives an immediate reaction to the performance on stage.

Drama is temporary in nature. Every performance has a definite duration (i.e. it lasts for a certain length of time). This duration may be termed the unity of time. Each performance of a play is therefore a distinct work of art. Even if the actors, the composition and the decors remain unchanged throughout the production, each performance varies in nature and quality as one may be better than the other. A good example is in a case where an actor may have performed badly in one production and better in another one. It means therefore, that “every performance of a play, even by the same actors, represents a different realization of its possibilities and no single performance can fully realize all its possibilities”(Scholes 17). Once a performance is conducted, it ceases to exist except in one’s memory. Ritualistic presentations could also be viewed from the same perspective.

3.3 Uses/Functions of Drama

Drama is said to have originated from ritual performances. It is an important branch of literature and the most concrete of all art forms. It is devoid of the distant intimacy of the novel, the abstract message of fine arts, the incomplete message of music or the specialized and complex language of poetry. It presents a story realistically through the actors to the audience. Drama is therefore used to entertain, inform and educate people. You can see that it is the most effective tool for mass mobilization by the government and private agencies. For instance, most campaigns against AIDS, DRUG ABUSE, CHILD ABUSE and so on, are presented in form of drama to educate and enlighten while at the same time entertain the people.

Of all the creative artists, the dramatist is in the best position to mirror his society and to effect social reforms. This is because his work has a unique characteristic of presenting events in a vivid, pictorial and realistic manner. This helps to imprint social conditions realistically in the minds of the audience. Its message is therefore immediate. The rich and the poor, the young and the old, the literate and the illiterate enjoy and assimilate the message of drama once it is presented in the appropriate language as the actors live out the story (message) on stage.

In most traditional societies, drama forms part of the communal rites. In Africa, re-enactment of some feats like hunting, warfare, and other events, are usually part of bigger festivals. Some of these events are presented in the form of drama to entertain the audience. In Greece also, drama formed part of a bigger festival. Greek drama is acclaimed to be the earliest recorded form of drama (5th century B.C). It is said to have originated from the Dionysian religious rites, and also remained a communal rite during the classical period. The dramatists of this age gave insight into the philosophy and religious beliefs of the ancient Greece. These early Greek plays treated life's basic problems with utmost honesty and attacked social ills using legendary and mythological themes. This helped to ensure sanity and equilibrium in society.

In the Medieval period, drama was used to elucidate the message of the gospel through the re-enactment of the biblical stories during mass. It was later expanded to include the dramatization of the lives of the saints and other notable stories of the Bible that did not form part of the Sunday's lessons. It was therefore used for the spiritual and moral growth of the people. Drama and theatre also played important roles in the social lives of the people in the ancient Roman Empire. In England, Germany and France, playwrights like Shakespeare, Brecht, Goethe, Moliere, and others, in varying degrees, used their works to enable their respective countries "... to carve out and affirm a unique identity" for themselves (Hagher 145). The American industrial sector was radically but positively affected through the intervention of one play, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. This play is regarded as being responsible for the spirit of industrial revolution in America. In

Africa, Kenya to be precise, a playwright, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o was arrested and detained because of the political and social consciousness which his play, *I Will Marry When I Want*, aroused in the audience after the production. The play was written and presented in his Gikuyi language; this enabled the audience, to assimilate its message immediately and to react accordingly. Ngugi was forced into exile. The drama of any society, therefore, reflects the problems, aspirations, philosophy and cultural background of the people. Drama is educative, informative, entertaining and therapeutic. By therapeutic, we mean that drama can be healing. Drama therapy is discovered to be an effective treatment for people who have severe emotional and psychological problems.

You see that dramatists can use their works to help to shape the future of the societies. They can do this not only by reflecting the ugly sides of the societies but also by promoting the positive aspects of the people's way of life that are worth emulating or cultivating. They also help to ensure the continuity of their tradition and culture by reflecting them in their plays. Each dramatist, therefore, tries from his perspective to use his art to enlighten his audience on the goodness, imbalances and shortcomings of his society. Apart from their thematic concerns, each dramatist, in his own style of relaying his message, tries to highlight his cultural background through the use of myths, legends, music, songs, dances, proverbs, riddles, and other local expressions. In this way, dramatists all over the world are regarded as the consciences of their societies, and custodians of their moral and cultural values.

3.4 Theatre

It is important to explain to you what theatre is. This is to avoid the erroneous impression which some people have as they interchange drama and theatre at will. Theatre comes from the Greek word "Theatron" which means "a place for viewing". Theatre, therefore, refers to the space used for dramatic presentations or for other performances. Hence you have the National Theatre in Lagos, Oduduwa Hall in Obafemi Awolowo University, The Crab at UNIPORT, the Open Air Theatre at UNIJOS and other theatres. One play could be performed or presented in many theatres. There are different types of theatres. It could be a house or an open space, depending on the performance. If you have visited the Obafemi Awolowo University, for instance, they have three theatres. The Oduduwa Hall which is big and modern theatre in all its ramifications, the open air theatre behind it and the pit, a smaller theatre where the actors hold most of their rehearsals. You see, the shape does not matter; what is important is the acting space.

Theatre is also used for other performances that are not necessarily drama. These performances include masquerade displays, dances, puppet shows, music jamborees and other forms of festival. The basic elements of theatre are actors, space and audience. The following elements help to enhance the aesthetic aspect of the performance: scenery, costume and make-up decor, light and sound effects.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

- i. What is the difference between drama and theatre?
- ii. Discuss briefly the origin of drama in Greece.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Drama is an imitation of an action. It is said to have originated from the Dionysian festival in Greece. All ceremonies and funny actions are not drama even though they may contain some dramatic elements. An action becomes drama if and when there is an element of impersonation, re-enactment or re-representation of an action. Drama mirrors society. So playwrights are influenced by their socio-cultural backgrounds. They draw their themes or subject matters from myths, legends, history or contemporary issues. From the days of Thespis in Athens to the modern period, dramatists have tried to use their works to mirror their respective societies. During the early part of the development of drama, the dramatists tried to follow laid down rules of literary compositions. However, as time went on, the hard and fast rules of the theories of dramatic forms gave way to other techniques and forms. This is because each age tried to make its own innovations based on the socio-political or cultural peculiarities of their times. Some modern critics argue that playwrights should not be forced into accepting any rule on artistic creation.

Drama is used to teach, inform and also entertain and its message is immediate. This explains why it is used in campaigns and social mobilization.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have tried to explain what drama is and we traced its origin to ritualistic performances in primordial times and ancient Greece. Drama in simple terms is an imitation of life. Through make-believe and willing suspension of disbelief, drama brings life realistically to the audience and the message is absorbed immediately. This immediate appeal of drama makes it different from other forms of art. It is devoid of the distant intimacy of prose fiction, the often complex, sentimental, condensed and confined language of poetry, the incomplete and inconclusive message of music, and the abstract and cryptic message of fine and applied arts. The rich and the poor, the young and the old, the literate and the illiterate enjoy and assimilate the message of drama once it is presented in the appropriate language.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

What is the role of Thespis in the origin of drama.

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UNIT 3 ELEMENTS OF DRAMA: IMITATION

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines element as a necessary or typical part of something or the basic principles of something of a subject you have to learn first. In simple terms, therefore, elements of drama refer to the basic principles of drama which you must learn first for you to fully understand and appreciate drama both as a subject and as performance, Aristotle in his *Poetics* points out the following elements of drama which are imitation (mime), plot, character, thought, diction, music and spectacle. In this unit and the next three units, we are going to discuss the elements of drama. We will start with imitation which is the basic and most important element of drama.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify and explain the most important element of drama
- Understand why it is regarded as the most important element of drama.
- Be able to differentiate between imitation, impersonation and re-enactment.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Imitation

In simple terms, imitation means the act of copying somebody or something. It is an act of copying the ways somebody talks and behaves, especially to entertain. In literature, imitation is used to describe a realistic portrayal of life, a reproduction of natural objects and actions.

This type of imitation includes writing in the spirit of the masters using merely,

their general principles; borrowing special “beauties” in thought and expression from the works of the best poets, or adapting their materials to the writer’s own age.

In drama, as we discussed in Unit 1, imitation is more pronounced in performance. This is understandable because a play is written primarily to be performed. What is being imitated in drama is basically life. Drama tries to present life as realistically as possible on stage. This is why we say that drama mirrors life. Aristotle insists that imitation is part of life. He likens the imitation in drama to the children’s play instinct. If you cast your minds back to your childhood experiences, you will recall that sometimes when you were playing, one child will say, “Let me be the ‘mother’; While another child becomes the ‘father’”. In most cases, the “mother” collects discarded empty cans and uses them as pots, collects sand and some leaves to cook food. She uses sticks as spoons. When the food is ready, they eat by taking the “food” close to their mouths and throwing them away. In some cases, they try to dress like their parents and some of them try to talk like their parents while those who are the children try to behave the way children are expected to behave. This is imitation. The children are imitating their parents or imitating life as it is lived in the family.

Imitation in drama involves a story. For it to be called drama, a story must be told through dialogue as the characters interact among themselves and that story must have a beginning, middle and an end. That is Aristotle called the plot. It is different from musical presentations. Musicians in these presentations do not imitate anybody. They may wear costumes and act in weird manners but they are their real selves. Some of them take on other names like Lagbaja, African China, Weird M.C, 2FACE, PSQUARE, Baba Frayo, Daddy Showkey and many others. In show business, each artist tries to create an image for him or herself, so instead of imitating anybody, they would want to be imitated. However, in the video productions, some musicians try to dramatize the message or the stories of the songs. The people dramatizing these stories are imitating life in the dramatic sense.

Over the ages, the attitude of dramatists on imitation differs from one dramatist to another and from one age to another. Some dramatists advocate the imitation of life exactly as it is lived these group of dramatists are called the naturalist dramatists; others insist on the imitation that is as close as possible to life. In the imitation that is as close as possible to life, the dramatist tries to create his characters to dress and act as close as possible to real life. That explains why we have different styles of imitation both in play-writing and acting skills. They include Emile Zola’s **naturalism**, Bernard Shaw’s **realism**, Bertolt Brecht’s **epic theatre**, Constantine Stanislavsky’s realistic **acting**, Gordon Craig’s **theatre of cruelty**, Gerzy Grotowsky’s **poor theatre** and many others.

Generally, the most popular form of imitation is the realistic one where the story is a representation of life and the characters are those we could identify in real life. This is why we say that drama mirrors life. This is why in *Hamlet*, Hamlet advises the Players to:

*Suit the action to the word, the word to the action;
with special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature;
for anything so overdone is from the purpose of
playing, whose end, both at first and now, was and is to
hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature...(Act III Sc ii)*

Holding up to nature here means that they should reflect nature in their words and actions. Drama is like a mirror because its mode of imitation is selective and intensive. Most plays do not last more than three hours so the time is very short. Another issue to be considered is the space. The stage is so small that it will be difficult to reproduce all the life experiences of a particular character. Despite the fact that the celluloid can, with the aid of a camera, present three-dimensional pictures, it can never present everything within the period for the play. This explains why you have expressions like 'two months later' to make up for the limitations in terms of time and space.

In his own mode of imitation, Sophocles, in *Oedipus Rex*, one of the plays you will study in this course, does not present all the incidents on stage. Those actions which he felt could not be imitated to look as realistic as possible are reported and not presented on stage. Some critics argue that some of the reported events are too gruesome to be presented. They are right because one of the Aristotelian postulations on tragedy is that violence should not be presented on stage. He called it decorum. That notwithstanding, one could also argue that in realistic acting, it is almost impossible for Jocasta to hang herself or for Oedipus to gorge out his eyes.

In discussing reported action, we have seen how the second messenger moved from story-telling to commentary, and this brings us to what is referred to as **choric commentary** in drama. Remember that in drama the story is told through the characters. The playwright does not narrate the story the way the novelist does. In order to make his play realistic it is difficult for him to present some of his views on particular issues which the characters could not imitate realistically. This is because he cannot suspend the action in order to comment or generalize on characters and events or appear suddenly in the play or on stage to provide a point of view on the action. The dramatist's alternative is the chorus or choric characters that are persons in the play but are relatively detached from the action. They can therefore stand off from it, somewhat like a narrator, to reflect on the significance of events. In Greek drama, the chorus performed this function, and the detachment of the chorus was theatrically manifested by its continuous presence in the orchestra. Thus the chorus literally stood between the audience and the action. In some plays, dramatic functionaries like messengers, servants,

clowns and others not directly involved in the action, can carry out the functions of the chorus, and the attitudes they express should be examined for the point of view they provide for the action.

We are not saying here that all the choric commentaries are representative of issues which the playwright could not express through the characters in the play. However, the presence of the chorus in a play does not mean that its opinions are always to be trusted. Sometimes, it can be as wrongheaded as any of the involved characters. Certainly this is the case in *Oedipus Rex* when the chorus repudiates Teiresias' prophecies, insisting that his "evil words are lies." At other times, the chorus is completely reliable, as in its concluding remarks about the frailty of the human condition. Choric commentary then provides a point of view, but not necessarily an authoritative one nor one to be associated with the dramatist. In each case, the commentary has to be examined as closely as any other material in the play. In the first instance, we have cited, Sophocles is using the chorus to project what we might call public opinion which would naturally be sympathetic to Oedipus because most people would be legitimately shocked by the accusations and prophecies of Teiresias. In the second case, the chorus is being used to express the wisdom drawn from the experience of Oedipus.

You will understand the concept of imitation in drama more if you have gone to watch a stage play, especially when the actors and actresses are the people you know very well. Imagine a situation where a play is to be presented in theatre you are familiar with and you are going to the theatre with one of the actors or actresses. As you get to the gate, you pay, obtain your ticket, enter the **auditorium** and sit down, ready to watch the play while your friend goes backstage to get ready for the performance. Assuming your friend is John or Jane, when he/she appears on stage, he/she assumes another identity apart from his/her own. Let us use one of the plays we are going to study in this course; Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*. The play opens and you see John or Jane as he/she appears on stage as Lakunle or Sidi. He/She ceases, momentarily to be that friend of yours because you have willingly suspended your disbelief. You remember what willing **uspension of disbelief** or **make believe** means. John or Jane makes you believe that he/she is Lakunle/Sidi. They try their best to convince the audience that they are really the characters they represent. They achieve this by speaking and acting like the characters they represent. This is called **role-playing or acting**.

In films and home videos you watch occasionally, you see actors and actresses like Liz Benson, Pete Edochie, Shan George, Sam Loco Efe and many others play different roles in different movies. Liz Benson could play the role of a wicked young step-mother in one film and in another one she plays the role of a loving wife and mother. Generally we call it acting. In acting she pretends to be what she is not. She tries as much as possible to convince the audience that she is that character she is imitating.

Imitation in drama does not claim to present a literal copy of reality. This is because the truth of drama does not depend on reproducing the world exactly as it is. When we say that drama is true to life we mean that it is being falsified to our conventional notions of reality. This means that some plays present stories that we find difficult to believe or a particular actor acts in a manner that is unbelievable. Sometimes, we ask ourselves if it is possible for a man to be so wicked, insensitive and selfish that he would kill his own mother for ritual for the acquisition of material wealth. In most cases we still feel that maybe a person in a particular circumstance could be forced or persuaded to behave like that. If you look at the story of Oedipus for instance, you will believe that the story is highly improbable; yet it creates a world that we recognize as being in some sense like our own. This depends on the perspective of the dramatist, the aspect of life he wants to focus his mirroring. He may choose to focus on the beautiful, or on the ugly, the ideal/ harmonious or the chaotic. He may, for instance, focus on bad leadership. He therefore presents an insensitive despot as a leader who uses his position to emasculate all oppositions and oppress the masses. He may or may not succeed depending on the message of the play. In most cases, nemesis catches up with such characters.

In mirroring the society, each dramatist decides on a particular perspective. When a play presents an idealized vision of the world as a place where everything is beautiful and orderly, we call it romance. On the other hand, when a play focuses on the ugly and chaotic as it presents a debased view of life we refer to it as satire. Satire and romance present extreme and sometimes, unrealistic conditions of life. Imitation in tragedy and comedy is very close to life as we live it as they emphasize the dominant patterns of experience that characters go through in life. In most comedies, the major characters begin in a state of opposition against one another or what they stand for. As the play progresses they get to understand one another better so that by the end of the play they get into harmonious relationships and the play ends on a happy note. The opposite is found in tragedy, where the play presents a harmonious life for the hero at the beginning. As the play progresses, his world disintegrates and ends in catastrophe.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The basic concept of drama is imitation. This is why we say that drama is an imitation of life. In dramatic imitation, we should not expect an exact reproduction of life because drama is limited by time and space. Besides it is very difficult even in real life for any imitation of human action to be exactly like the original.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have tried to explain the concept of imitation in drama and why it is the most important aspect of drama. We have also illustrated how imitation occurs in drama, the extent to which a dramatist can imitate and his limitations. You understand now what we mean when we say that drama mirrors the society.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

“Imitation in drama is limited by time and space”. Discuss the statement.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 4 ELEMENTS OF DRAMA: PLOT

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Definition of Plot
 - 3.2 Structure of the Plot
 - 3.3 Types of Plot
- 4.0 Summary
- 5.0 Conclusion
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Plot is the most important aspect of drama. Plot is the arrangement of the action of the play. In other words, it is the architectural pattern of the play. It is plot that gives the play its tension. Whenever you are reading or watching a play, you are concerned with the story that it tells. The play may be about an orphan whose step-mother maltreats so much that you feel that he will die. Incidentally, it is not only that he survives but eventually becomes very wealthy. What makes this story interesting is the way the incidents are arranged. This arrangement is what we refer to as plot. If you have been watching Nigerian home movies, you may have observed that there are many movies that deal with ritual killings either for the purposes of making money or for acquisition of power. The way the story is presented is what makes a particular movie better than all the others on the same subject. You are going to learn everything about plot and why Aristotle believes that it is the 'soul' of drama.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- You will be in a position to appreciate plays
- You will be able to identify different types of plots
- You will be able give different definitions of plot
- You will be in a position to understand and define plot in your own words.
- You will be able to differentiate between plot and story

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Definition of Plot

A lot of volumes have been written on drama and aspects of drama of which plot is one of them. *The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* defines plot as a “plan or line of events of a story especially of a novel or a story”. In dramatic plot, unlike in the novel where the author describes the characters and incidents they are involved in, the playwright presents the characters in action. This means that plot in drama develops through what the characters do or say, what is done to them, and or what is said about them or to them. This is why in his opinion, Grebanier describes plot as “a matter of action of deeds that are done during the course of the story”.

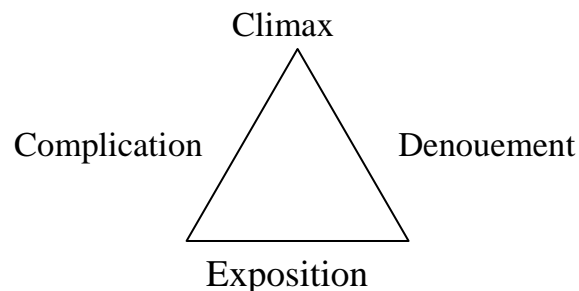
In *One World of Literature*, Shirley Geak-Lin Lim, compiles the following definitions of plot from different scholars which I believe will give you a broader view of plot;

- The plot as the organization of action was traditionally conceived as a sequence of important moments arranged chronologically, with an introduction, series of complications intensifying the conflict, a climax clinching the fate of the central characters, a resolution and a denouement that concludes and summarizes the issues (p. 1107).
- Plot is the organization of a series of action or events usually moving through conflicts to a climax and resolution. The arrangement often implies causality and achieves certain effects (p.1135).
- Plot does not concentrate on an individual hero or his fate or her fate. Instead, its open structure permits the inclusion of other important but minor characters (p. 1108).

In his own contribution, Oscar Brockett maintains that plot is not just a summary of the incidents of a play but that it also refers to the organization of all elements into a meaningful pattern; the overall structure of the play(6). In *Play Production*, Nelms sees plot as the anecdote told to illustrate the theme, and the bare bones of the action and therefore the key to the structure of the play. According to Scholes and Klaus, plot is a highly specialized form of experience. In drama, every event is part of a carefully designed pattern and process. And that is what we call plot. He explains that plot is “...a wholly interconnected system of events, deliberately selected and arranged, in order to fulfill a complex set of dramatic purposes and theatrical conditions... it comprises everything which takes place in the imaginative world of the play. And the totality of the events must create a coherent imitation of the world” (65).

You have seen that there are many opinions on plot but I cannot conclude without looking at the insistence of the foremost critic Aristotle that tragedy is an imitation not of men but of an action and of life. He further explains that since life consists of action, plot is the most important aspect and the soul of tragedy. He mentioned tragedy specifically because then, the comic writers were allowed to invent their own plots. The Greek tragic plots were based on the destiny of man and the gods were involved in the action. The tragic poet (playwright) was expected to base the plot on true events, myths and legends and so his choice was limited because not many families were “doomed” and not many individuals were driven to murder or incest that aroused pity and fear. He maintains that incidents presented, must be according to the law of probability and necessity.

Plot is the structure of the actions which is ordered and presented in order to achieve particular emotional and artistic effects in a play. It helps to give the play an organic unity and a coherence that makes the play easy to understand. A good play should therefore possess a unified plot. Plot in simple terms is the arrangement of a story in such a way that there will be a sequential, logical and chronological order. The plot should be arranged in such a way that the action starts from the beginning, rises to a climax and falls to a resolution. It is arranged in this form – **exposition, discovery, point of attack, complication, crisis, climax, denouement or resolution**. In its simple illustration, the chart below shows it as follows:



Some people confuse plot with story. To them, plot means a story which the play tells. It is therefore necessary at this point to make the distinction between plot and story so that you will not fall into the same error. A story is a series of incidents whose development does not necessarily depend on each other which means that the incidents may or may not be related or connected. Plot on the other hand, is the way the story is arranged and it thrives on causality and logical unity. In it, one incident happens and as a result the next one happens and the situation must be related to each other. It has a beginning, middle and an end. A beginning gives rise to the middle, which in turn raises the dramatic question that is answered in the end, thus completing what was started in the beginning.

Dramatic plot is also expected to produce a result or an effect on the audience. The playwright, therefore, tries to fashion his play in a particular way to produce a particular impression on his audience. This explains why a theme like corruption, could be treated by different playwrights. Each playwright by the use of plot and

other devices gives his own perspective, understanding of what corruption is, its effects on the society and why it should be eradicated. He could, also, in the course of the plot, suggest means or ways through which corruption can be reduced to a barest minimum or its complete eradication. The success of a play depends mainly on the plot. It helps the audience or reader to understand the theme and the motivations of the characters in the play.

Playwrights design their plots in most cases, to achieve different purposes like creating tragic comic or ironic effects. As the plot progresses, it arouses the reader's curiosity and expectations concerning future events in the play especially the fate of some characters. This is called **suspense**. A good playwright makes an effective use of suspense to sustain his audience. Plot is a highly specialized form of experience. Let us use our daily experiences to illustrate and see just how specialized it is by considering what happens to us daily: we probably converse with a number of people and perform a variety of action. But most of these events have very little to do with one another, and they usually serve no purpose other than to satisfy our pleasure, our work, or our bodily necessities. Thus the events that take place in our daily existence do not and cannot embody a significant pattern or process even in a boarding school.

There is an extent to which a person's life can be patterned. But in drama, every event is part of a carefully designed pattern and process. And this is what we call plot. In a good plot, the interest of spectators has to be deeply engaged and continuously sustained. This means that the plot must be arranged in such a way that the interest must be aroused and engaged by events that make up a process capable of being represented on stage. This means that plot is not confined merely to what takes place on stage. Plot includes reported, as well as represented, action. In *Oedipus Rex*, for example, we witness what we might call a process of criminal investigation, in which the investigator discovers himself to be the criminal and inflicts the appropriate punishment for his crime. You will also notice that in the play, we do not witness all of the events that make up that process and contribute to its development.

The three types of action in drama are **reported**, **physical** and **mental**. In reported action, an action that is not part of the present action on stage is reported by a character or a group of characters. The action could be about an incident in the past like the death of Polybus or an incident that happened in the course of the action of the play. In the play, the wisdom of the oracle is reported by Creon, the death of Polybus is reported by the First Messenger, the suicide of Jocasta and the self-blinding of Oedipus are reported by the Second Messenger. Obviously, all of these events take place in the imaginative world of the play but are not presented directly to the audience. They are called off-stage report. The off-stage reports are used to create decorum on the stage. (Can you recall other reasons why some of these events are not presented on stage?) They are part of the plot. But they are not part of what we call the **scenario**----- the action that takes

place on stage. Thus, if we wish to identify the plot of a play, we will have to distinguish it from the scenario because it is not the same thing as the plot. We can recognize this distinction in another way if we consider the order in which events may be presented to us in a play. In *Oedipus Rex*, for example, the death of Polybus takes place before the time of the action on stage however it is reported to us only after the stage action is well under way.

The physical action is based on the current incidents in the play and the concrete action on stage. It includes the movements, gestures, facial expressions and other forms of physical action made by the characters and seen by the audience. The mental action includes the action in which the audience is left to imagine what happened. In most cases, it comes at the end of the play as the audience is left to imagine what happened to a character or a group of characters. This is one of the main reasons why movie producers produce the part two of some of their films. In the plot, of course, these events are linked to one another by an unalterable chronology. But in the scenario, these same events have been presented to us in an entirely different order. Thus, in studying the plot of a play, we must examine not only the events of which it consists, but also the complex ways in which those events are presented by the scenario.

3.2 Structure of the Plot

As stated earlier, a good plot should have a beginning, middle, and an end. Brockett explains further that the **beginning** contains the **exposition** or the setting forth of information about earlier events, the identity of characters and the present situation. Another aspect of the beginning is the **point of attack** which is the moment at which the main story starts as a potential conflict is identified. This is more obvious in classical plays usually, is focused early on the potential conflict or a question and its resolution leads to the end of the play. Such plays start with the **inciting incident**. This incident is usually an occurrence that sets the main action in motion. A good example is found in *Oedipus Rex*. In the play, there is a plague in Thebes, the people are suffering and lamenting. Oedipus seeks solution from the oracle of Delphi and this leads to the major dramatic question (in this case, the identity of Oedipus) around which the play revolves.

The **middle** is made up of series of complications. A **complication** is a new element which changes the direction of the action. It leads to the **discovery** of new information. The series of **complications** culminate in **crises** and **climax**. In the play *Oedipus Rex*, the **complication** starts with the arrival of Creon with the information that the killer they seek is in their midst. Consequently, the blind seer is invited and there are more complications as he accuses Oedipus of being the murderer. There is a crisis with the shepherd's revelation of the true parentage of Oedipus and this leads to the climax. The end is the last part of the play. Here, issues are unravelled, untied and resolved. In the play, the killer of Laius is discovered towards the denouement. Oedipus realizes that he has fulfilled the

Delphic oracle's prophecy; he actually killed his father and married his mother.

It is important to note here that you may not find all these elements in one play. Each playwright adopts his own style. Remember that Aristotle based his theory and postulations on already –written Greek plays. Apparently, he read and studied the plays critically to arrive at his conclusions.

3.3 Types of Plot

We have tried so far to explain to you, that plot is just the summary of the play's incidents. Although it includes the story-line, it refers basically to the organization of all the incidents into a meaningful pattern that has a beginning, middle and end. There are different types of plots and each is designed for a particular purpose. Some plots, for instance, are designed to achieve tragic effect and others the effects of comedy, satire, or romance. However all plays do not have what we might call good plots, that is, with the beginning, middle and end. So, we have different types of plots.

In a play, as said earlier, we have the main plot and **subject (sub) plot**. The main plot deals with the major events and the sub plot deals with other incidents which can be complete and interesting stories on their own. However, a skillful playwright uses the sub plot to advance our appreciation and understanding of the main plot. According to Abrams, "the sub plot serves to broaden our perspective on the main plot and to enhance rather than diffuse the overall effects" (129) of the play.

Aristotle divides plot into two – **complex** and **simple** plots. A simple plot is that in which the action is simple and continuous and in which a change of fortune takes place without reversal of the situation and without recognition. In a complex plot, on the other hand, the change is accompanied by a reversal of the situation or by recognition or by both. He also identified two types of plots (a) the **unified** plot and (b) the **episodic** plot. He refers to the unified plot as the well-made plot. In the unified plot, the incidents are presented in a logical order and there is a causal arrangement. What do we mean by causal arrangement? The play starts from the beginning followed by the middle and the incidents in the middle are consequences of what happened in the beginning and these are resolved in the end. It is a kind of cause and effect presentation. The incidents will be so related that when anything is removed, it will create illogicality.

In episodic plot, there is no causal relationship between the incidents. The only unifying factor is that the incidents are related or happening to one man. The events in such plot occur in batches or in different episodes. In unified plot, the removal of any incident affects the organic structure of the play, but in episodic plot, you can remove an aspect of the plot without changing or destroying the plot. It means, therefore, that the part that was removed is not necessary. *Death of a Salesman*

(one of the plays set for this course) has an episodic plot. It is made manifest more by the presentations of the incidents in Willy Loman's head, especially the appearances of his brother Ben.

He recommends that a play should contain a single and not a double plot and condemned the episodic plot which is a plot in which the episodes have no probable or inevitable connection. He suggests that although plot is an imitation of an action, this must not be any action but an action in which the various incidents are constructed in such a way that if any part is displaced or deleted, the whole plot is disturbed and dislocated. This is the unity of plot. A good plot must therefore not end haphazardly but must have a beginning, middle and an end, and should be well co-ordinated to give a coherent whole. The action which makes up the plot should be distinguished from a series of unrelated incidents because a plot must contain a logical unity within the play. It begins at a point and the middle raises the question which is answered in the end and that completes the action started in the beginning. All the incidents in the play are expected to contribute to the plot.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

- i. What is plot?
- ii. What does the unity of plot mean?

4.0 CONCLUSION

Plot is the arrangement of incidents in the play. Like all other elements of fiction, it has interdependence with character. Any competent writer organizes the incidents in such a way that each will have the maximum impact on the reader's response and advance the story's total objective. If the incidents are arranged sequentially from the beginning to the end and one event leads to the other, you will say that the play has a chronological, causal plot. If however they are presented in a disjointed manner, you say that it has an episodic plot. Simple plot is when the story is straightforward and easy to understand but when it is difficult, you say that it has a complicated or complex plot.

5.0 SUMMARY

Plot is the incidents in a play. It helps to give the play an organic unity and a coherence that makes the play easy to understand. A good play should therefore, possess a unified plot with a beginning, middle and the end. Plot in simple terms is the arrangement of the events/actions in a story in such a way that there will be a sequential, logical and chronological order.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain what you understand by unified plot and episodic plot.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 5 ELEMENTS OF DRAMA: ACTION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Dramatic Action
 - 3.2 Motivation
 - 3.3 Types of Dramatic Action
 - 3.3.1 Physical Action
 - 3.3.2 Movement/Gesture
 - 3.3.3 Mime
 - 3.3.4 Pantomime
 - 3.4 Reported Action
 - 3.5 Mental Action
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to another element of drama which is action. You will learn the importance of action in drama in this unit. You will also find out if there is a difference between dramatic action and action the way you understand it. The story in drama is presented through the interaction of characters as they talk to one another- dialogue. However, you know that dialogue alone (two people just talking to each other) does not constitute drama.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain what constitutes dramatic action; and
- Appreciate the motivation behind certain actions of certain Characters in a play.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Dramatic Action

In simple terms, action is the process of doing something or the performance itself. If somebody slaps you and you retaliate, there is an action. The series of events that constitute the plot in any literary work is referred to as action. It

includes what the characters say, do, think and in some cases, fail to do. Action involves activity. This activity becomes more pronounced in drama where the action is presented in concrete form as the actors present the story to the audience for entertainment and education. In drama, especially during performance, you see the characters moving around to perform certain tasks, talk to one another, laugh, cry, fight, shoot or do anything according to the needs of the moment. All these are dramatic actions. In the novel, you read the story as is told by the novelist and see the action in your imagination but in drama the dramatist presents the action through what the characters do or say. In fact it involves all the activities of all the characters in the play.

Drama is the only genre of literature in which the story is presented in dialogue form from the beginning to the end. However, dialogue alone does not constitute dramatic action. What makes it drama is the action that is involved. Dramatic action includes facial expression, gestures and movements. So, what makes dialogue dramatic is the presence of action. It is only through action that the playwright can portray the human situations he chooses to dramatize. It is the action that propels the plot and helps to advance the theme. In simple terms drama is a story told in action by actors who impersonate the characters in the story on a stage.

Dramatic action is a "...series of incidents that are logically arranged by the playwright to achieve specific response like joy, pity, fear, indignation, ridicule, laughter, thoughtful contemplation, from the audience". (Brocket 68) Each character is specially created to fulfill the specific design of the dramatist. In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, for instance, Efua Sutherland deliberately created Ananse to be an intelligent, witty, crafty and easy-going man. His nature helps him to get not only a rich husband for his daughter but also ensures that the man who marries his daughter actually loves her. The playwright also advances her theme of excessive materialism and ostentation in Ghana through the easy-going nature and action of Ananse. If you have read the play, you will recall that Ananse, decides to go to church only when he became rich. It shows that people go to church to show off and display their wealth; according him:

*Yes, tomorrow, I go church,
To deposit with the best of spenders.*

He also decides to attend the memorial services 'which promises to draw the biggest crowds'. This helps to highlight the playwright's view on the ostentatious nature of society.

You remember that in our discussion of plot in Unit 4, we talked about causality and logical arrangement of incidents. What is causality? Is there any relationship between causality and dramatic action? Yes. According to Brocket, "the cause to effect arrangement of incidents sets up the situation; the desires

and motivations of the characters out of which the later events develop” (32). This logical arrangement of incidents presupposes that the action must be presented in such a way that it should make sense to the audience. Any action performed by any character must be as a result of an earlier action. Thus, in the play *The Marriage of Anansewa*, Ananse is poor so decides to take an action that will help him to get rich. What does he do? He decides to give his daughter out in marriage and in the process make money for himself. He writes to four wealthy chiefs. The effect of this action is that they send money and gifts to him. The effect of this is that he becomes rich. The effect of the wealth is that he pays her daughter’s school fees and renovates his house.

The action in drama is usually organized in a climatic order with the scenes; increasing the interest by increasing suspense and emotional intensity. In the play, from Ananse’s action in the opening scene, when it appears that Ananse wants to sell his daughter Anansewa like ‘some parcel to a customer’, your interest is aroused. The next thing is to find out how he is going to do it. As the play progresses, and Ananse entangles himself in the mess, the suspense and emotional intensity is heightened. You can see now that dramatic action is constructed in such a way that it answers the suspenseful question, ‘what happened’. Action in drama involves gestures, facial expressions, inflexion of voice and movement. Some gestures and expressions actually present more actions than words.

Dramatic action also includes what the character fails to do. In *Hamlet*, the popular quote ‘to be or not to be’ refers to the action. Hamlet is contemplating on the proper action to take against his uncle whom he suspects killed his father. He does not want to act until he is sure of it. He therefore organizes a play and presents a similar experience in the play. Luckily, he gets the desired effect as Claudius’ reaction points to his guilt. It would have been possible for Hamlet to kill Claudius immediately but that would have been the end of the play. So, Hamlet’s inaction helps to increase the suspense and emotional intensity of the play.

You can see that all the actions mentioned here are logical. For the action to be logical, the characters must be well- motivated.

3.2 Motivation

Motivation is the drive behind every action a character takes in a play. In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, poverty drives Ananse to ‘sell’ his daughter. In *The Lion and the Jewel*, the girls are excited as they discuss the magazine that contains Sidi’s pictures. Their excitement is motivated by the fact that they have never seen the picture of anybody from their community in a magazine. Also in the play, Baroka’s motivation for marrying Sidi is to subdue her and prevent her from being more popular than him. What this means is that there must be a reason for

any action taken by every character in the play. In drama, because the action is presented in dialogue and the playwright does not have the space to explain the action like the novelist, some of the actions that cannot be incorporated in dialogue are presented in the stage direction. The explanation of the action in the stage direction helps the reader to enjoy the action and also helps the director in the blocking of the play during rehearsals before the performance.

3.3 Types of Dramatic Action

In the drama could be presented in the following three forms:

- (a) Physical Action;
- (b) Reported Action; and
- (c) Mental Action.

3.3.1 Physical Action

The physical action in drama refers to the movements made by a character in the play. It is visible and may or may not involve dialogue. Physical action could in form of movements/gestures, mime or pantomime. These are explained in details below.

3.3.2 Movement/Gesture

This includes the steps taken by the character while he is speaking or in the process of undertaking other tasks. Movement is used to describe mainly the actual movements like walking, running, pacing, kneeling, lying down, standing or sitting. Movement is simply the process of moving, change of place, position, or passing from one place to another. It involves the activities or whereabouts of a character or a group of characters. These movements are usually accompanied by dialogue. This differentiates it from mime and pantomime, which are actions without words. Closely related to movement is gesture. Generally, gesture refers to body movements like position, posture, and expressions. Gestures are used by characters to express their thoughts, feelings, or as a rhetorical device. It could be used as a symbol to indicate intentions or evoke a response. Characters also use gesture as a signal, motion, or an indication for his feelings or an action to be taken by another character.

In plays, you identify the movements and gestures through the dialogue and the stage direction. Can you identify the movement/gesture in this excerpt from *The Marriage of Anansewa*:

AYA: [Entering to find him in this state] My son, is this weeping you're

weeping?

What is the matter?

ANANSE: [*Wringing out the handkerchief,*] Mother!

AYA: My stalwart son.

ANANSE: Mother. [*He returns the handkerchief and acting like a Man in conflict.*

Yells out:] Destroyers! Evil-doers! They won't rest until they have ruined me.

Enemies whose outward appearance makes you think them are not enemies.

AYA: [*Wide-eyed with confusion*] *Enemies?* It's that woman Christy, isn't it? The minute I met that woman here I felt instinctively that trouble marches alongside people of her kind.

ANANSE: [*Bursting into fears afresh*] Handkerchief! (Act 3, p52)

3.3.3 Mime

Another form of physical action is mime. Sometimes, certain actions are presented without words to show meaning for the purpose of entertainment by dramatists. This is mime. *The Oxford Dictionary* describes mime as a dumb show, mummery; pantomime, the use of gesture to indicate certain action or indication by sign language. It is regarded as a simple facial drama that is characterized by mimicry and the ludicrous representation of familiar types of characters. Mime is therefore, the art or technique of expressing or conveying action, character, or emotion without words but using only gestures and movements. In other words, it is an expression of action or performance, using such means. In a play, the actions in mime are usually enclosed in the stage direction and mostly in italics. Some of these mimes are flashbacks. That is, those events from the past that are recalled to help explain certain things in the play but some of them are presented as part of the present action in the play. In *The Lion and the Jewel*, for instance, the mime on the arrival of the journalist in the village and the one on the road construction are used to recall past actions.

LAKUNLE: [*A terrific shout and a clap of drums. Lakunle enters into the spirit of the dance with enthusiasm. He takes over from Sidi, stations his cast all over the stage as the jungle, leaves the right to-stage clear from the four girls who are to dance the motor-car. A mime follows of the visitor's entry into Ilujinle, and his short stay among the villagers. The four girls couch on the floor, as four wheels of a car. Lakunle directs their spacing then takes his place his place in the middle, and sits on air. He alone does not dance. He does realistic miming. Soft throbbing drums, gradually swelling in volume, and the four 'wheels' begin to rotate the upper halves of their bodies in a perpendicular circles. Lakunle, clown in the*

driving motions, obviously enjoying this fully. The drums gain tempo faster, faster, faster. A sudden crash of drums and the girls quiver and dance the stall. Another effort at rhythm fails, and the 'stalling wheels' give a corresponding shudder, finally, and let their faces fall on their laps. Lakunle tampers with a number of controls, climbs out of the car, and looks underneath it. His lips indicate that he is swearing violently. Examines the wheels, pressing them to test the pressure, betrays the devil in him by seizing his chance to pinch the girl's bottom. One yells and bites him on the ankle. He climbs hurriedly back into the car, makes a final attempt to re-start it, gives it up and decides to abandon it. Picks up his camera and helmet, pockets a flask a flask of whisky from which he takes a swig, before beginning the trek. The drums resume beating, a different darker tone and rhythm, varying the journey. Full use of 'gangan' and 'iya ilu' the 'trees' perform a subdued and unobtrusive dance on the same spot. Details as a snake slithering out of the branches and poisoning over Lakunle's head when he leans against a tree for a rest. He flees, restoring his nerves shortly after by a swig. A monkey drops suddenly on his path and gibbers at him before scampering off. A roar comes from somewhere, etc. His nerves go rapidly and he recuperates himself by copious draughts. He is soon tipsy, battles violently with the undergrowth and curses silently as he swats the flies off his tortured body.

Suddenly from somewhere in the bush, comes the sound of a girl singing. The Traveller shakes his head but the sound persists. Convicted he is suffering from sun-stroke, he drinks again. His last drop, so he tosses the bottle in the direction of the sound, only to be rewarded by a splash, a scream and a torrent of abuse, and finally, silence again. He tip-toes, clears away the obstructing growth, blinks hard and rubs his eyes. Whatever he has seen still remains. He whistles softly, unhitches his camera and begins to jockey himself into a good position for a take. Backwards and forwards, and his eyes are so closely glued to the lens that he puts forward a careless foot and disappears completely. There is a loud splash and the invisible singer alters her next tone to a sustained scream. Quickened rhythm and shortly afterwards, amidst sounds of splashes, Sidi appears on stage, with a piece of cloth only partially covering her. Lakunle follows a little later, more slowly, trying to wring out the water from his clothes. He has lost all his appendages except the camera. Sidi has run right across the stage, and returns a short while later, accompanied by the Villagers. The same cast has disappeared and re-forms behind Sidi as the villagers. They are in an ugly mood, and in spite of his protests, haul him off to the town

centre, in front of the 'Odin' tree.

Everything comes to a sudden stop as Baroda the Bale, wiry, goateed, and tougher than his sixty-two years; himself emerges at this point from behind the tree. All go down, prostrate or kneeling with greetings of 'Cabbies' 'Baba' etc. All except Lakunle, who begins to sneak off.] (14-15)

This is also a good example of the play-within-the-play. You know that the playwright has no time and space to explain or describe every situation and event as much as the novelist. That is why he uses the stage direction to present the action that could not be incorporated in dialogue.

3.3.4 Pantomime

Pantomime is synonymous with mime. It is a term for silent acting; the form of dramatic activity in silent motion, gesture, facial expression in which costumes are relied upon to express emotional state or action. It was popular in ancient Rome where it was a dramatic entertainment in which performers expressed meaning through gestures accompanied by music. It also refers to some traditional theatrical performances, originally significant gesture without speech, in mime, but now consisting of a dramatized fairy tale or stories with music, dancing, topical jokes and conventional characters frequently played by actors of the opposite sex. It is chiefly performed in Britain around Christmas.

The actual pantomime opens on Boxing Day. Pantomime is also used to dramatise absurd or outrageous behaviour.

3.4 Reported Action

In dramatic action, sometimes, it is not possible to present every action on stage. This could be as a result of the prevalent convention or because the action cannot be realized on stage. In the Classical Period, for instance, violence was not presented on stage. The playwrights were expected to maintain single settings in door actions and violence were reported on stage. In *King Oedipus*, the death of Jocasta is reported on stage. In other words, they are called the off-stage report. In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, the taxi that takes Aya and Kweku to Nanka is not brought on stage because the stage cannot contain it. Also in *Arms and the Man*, the cavalry charge by Sergius is reported and not presented because it will be very difficult to bring a cavalry on stage.

3.5 Mental Action

Mental action is an action that takes place in the character's mind that is, a psychological action. In most cases, mental action is manifested in facial expressions.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, we have tried to explain dramatic action. We have also used many plays to illustrate this. Most of the plays are the ones you will study for this course. You should therefore ensure that you read all the plays because they will help you to understand the discussions better.

5.0. SUMMARY

Dramatic action is simply the activities which the characters are involved in any dramatic piece. This includes movements, gestures, and other expressions used to communicate the message of the play to the audience. Ideally, dramatic action should be properly motivated and presented in a logical order. However, there are some cases where illogical action is used in some aspects of the play or for the entire play. This is usually for a purpose. Action in drama could be with or without words hence we have mime and pantomime.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Explain logical and illogical action in drama

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Brocket, Oscar G. (1980). *The Essential Theatre*. New York: Holt Reinhart and Winston.

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UNIT 6 ELEMENTS OF DRAMA: DIALOGUE

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
- 3.1 What is Dialogue?
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

We have said in different units that what makes drama unique is the fact that the story is presented in dialogue from the beginning to the end. What then is dialogue? In simple terms, dialogue is a conversation between two or more people. It is used mostly in fiction especially, plays. In this unit, we will discuss it as another important element of drama.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to

- Explain dialogue.
- State what makes dramatic dialogue unique.
- State the importance of dialogue in drama.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 What is Dialogue?

Dialogue is a discussion between two or more people. In literary works, it refers to a composition in a conversational form. In the novel it is incorporated in the narrative voice, that is, as the story progresses, the novelist gives two or more characters the opportunity to discuss or comment on certain issues and the story continues in prose form. However, in drama, the entire story is presented in dialogue. This explains why some people find it difficult to read plays because you see the name of a character, then, what the character says, the name of another character and the response as seen below: In addition to that, you must read the stage direction for you to understand the story, the motivation of the characters, the place where the action is taking place and other information provided about the environment and the personality of the characters.

Many people therefore find the reading of a play cumbersome and prefer to read a novel where they read and enjoy the story without interruption. Can you identify the names of the characters, the stage direction?

ANANSE: [*When the song is over*] While life is whipping you, rain also pours down to whip you some more. Whatever it was that man did wrong at the beginning of things must have been really awful for all of us to have to suffer so. [*He calls:*] Anansewa ! Where is that typewriter of yours? Bring it here. [*Pause*] I've been thinking, thinking, and thinking, until my head is earth quaking. Won't somebody who thinks he has discovered the simple solution for living this life kindly step forward and help out the rest of us? [*To the audience:*]

*Oh the world is hard,
Is hard,
The world is really hard.*

[*Taking off his raincoat and calling again*] Anansewa! Where is that typewriter I bought for you at a price that nearly drove me to sell myself? Bring it here. [*He closes up the umbrella.*]

[*Enter ANANSEWA dressed for going out, and receives the typewriter from PROPERTY MAN.*]

ANANSEWA: Oh father, is it raining?

ANANSE: Yes, it's raining. It's rain combining with life to beat your father down. [*He leans the umbrella against the wall.*]

ANANSEWA: Oh. I didn't even know you were not in the house.

The short dialogue above is taken from *The Marriage of Anansewa* and it is an exchange between Ananse and his daughter. Their names are written in bold letters to indicate that what follows is what the person says. This is unlike what we have in the novel where what is said by a character is marked off with inverted commas and the novelist will indicate who said it.

Dialogue could be described as a verbal interchange of thoughts or ideas. *The Oxford Dictionary* explains that dialogue involves two or more people and could be in the form of expression, conversation, talk, chat, tête-à-tête, chit chat, debate, argument, exchange of views, discussion, conference, converse, interlocution, confabulation, gossip, parley, palaver, spoken part, script, and lines.

The forms of dialogue listed above can be found in drama depending on the perspective of the play; the particular section of the play, the dramatic mode

or the message the playwright wants to convey. You may ask how debate or conference could form part of dialogue in a play. It is possible for the playwright to create a scene on a conference and as the conference is going on, there could be question and answer session which involves dialogue. This applies to other forms of dialogue listed above.

According to Adewoye(1993), quoted in Iwuchukwu(2001),dialogue in drama is expected to embody these literary and stylistic values:

- It advances the action in a definite way because it is not used for mere ornamentation or decoration.
- It is consistent with the character of the speakers, their social positions and special interests. It varies in tone and expression according to nationalities.
- It gives the impression of naturalness without being actual, verbatim record of what may have been said, since fiction is concerned with “the semblance of reality,” not reality itself.
- It presents interplay of ideas and personalities among the people conversing; it sets forth a conversational give and take and not simply a series of remarks of alternating speakers.

Dialogue is a highly specialized form of conversation that is designed to suit various contexts and modes of drama. It is not exactly like everyday conversation where we adjust style to suit the occasion and the personalities we are discussing it with. In doing this, unconsciously, we use particular facial expressions, bodily gestures, vocal inflections. Sometimes, we pause or rephrase our feelings and ideas, as we adjust to circumstances to suit our thoughts and the thoughts of those we are talking to. It is not possible to reproduce it like that in drama. The playwright imagines these feelings and ideas, put them together in a more condensed form. This is because of the limitations of dramatic performance. The dialogue is designed in a way that it must be heard and understood by the audience. As a result, the continuity of the dialogue should be marked out clearly at every point.

Drama is presented only in dialogue so that it should be designed in such a way that through it, the reader or audience must be able to infer the nature of each character, the public and private relationship among the several characters, the past as well as the present circumstances of the various characters. From the discussion so far, you will agree with Scholes and Klaus (1971) that dialogue is an extraordinary significant form of conversation because it is through it that every play implies the total make-up of its imaginative world. It is also important that dialogue imply the whole range of expressions, gestures, inflections, movements and sometimes information on the environment and the total atmosphere of the play. Read the example below, an excerpt from *The Lion and the Jewel* and see what you can infer from it.

LAKUNLE: Sidi, my love will open your mind
Like the chaste leaf in the morning, when
The sun touches it.

SIDI: If you stat that I will run away
I had enough of that nonsense yesterday.

LAKUNLE: Nonsense? Nonesense? Do you hear that?
Does anybody listen? Can the stones
Bear to listen to this? Do you call it
Nonesense that I poured the waters of army soul
To wash your feet?

SIDI: You did what?

LAKUNLE: Wasted! Wasted! Sidi, my heart
Bursts into flowers with my love.
But you and the dead of this village
Trample it with the feet of ignorance.

SIDI: [*shakes her head in bafflement*]
If the snail finds splinters in his shell
He changes house. Why do you stay?

LAKUNLE: Faith. Because I have faith.
Oh Sidi, vow to me your own undying love
And I will scorn the jibes of these bush minds
who know no better. Swear, Sidi,
Swear you will be my wife and
I will stand against earth, heaven, and nine
Hells...

SIDI: Now there you go again.
One little thing
And you must chirrup like a cockatoo.
You talk and talk and deafen me
With wit words which always sound the same
And make no meaning.
I've told you and I say it again
I shall marry you today, next week
Or any day you name
But my bride-price must first be paid.
Aha, now you turn away.
But I tell you, Lakunle I must have
The full bride-price. Will you make me
A laughing-stock? Well, do as you please.
But Sidi will not make herself
A cheap bowl for the village spit.

LAKUNLE: On my head falls their scorn.

SIDI: They will say I was no virgin
That I was forced to sell my shame
And marry you without a price.

LAKUNLE: A savage custom, barbaric, outdated, Rejected, denounced, accursed, Excommunicated, archaic, degrading, Humiliating, unspeakable, redundant.

SIDI: Is the bag empty? Why did you stop?

LAKUNLE: I own a Shorter Companion Dictionary, but I have ordered The Longer One you wait!

SIDI: Just pay the price.

From this dialogue between Lakunle and Sidi, you can see that Lakunle is an educated buffoon who wants to marry a lady in the village without fulfilling the requirements of the people's customs. He apes the white man and despises the African cultural heritage. Sidi is a decent but uneducated village girl who wants to maintain her dignity.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

- i. Open any page of one of the plays recommended for this course, read that page very well and write the things you learn about the characters and or the central idea of the play.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Dialogue is a verbal communication between two or more people and it is very important to the dramatist especially in written plays. The story of drama is presented through the characters as they talk to one another and relate to one another. Characters are revealed through dialogue. Also incidents and events are exposed and explicated through dialogue.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit you have learnt the importance dialogue in any dramatic presentation. You learn everything you should know in any dramatic piece through the dialogue. Every dramatist must construct the dialogue in a logical and coherent manner. However it is not compulsory for the dialogue in absurdist plays to be coherent or logical.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain what you understand by dialogue and state its importance in drama.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Brocket, Oscar G. (1980). *The Essential Theatre*. New York: Holt Reinhart and Winston.

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MODULE 2 CONVENTIONS AND TECHNIQUES

Unit 1	Dramatic Technique: Characterisation
Unit 2	Other Dramatic Techniques
Unit 3	Dramatic Conventions

UNIT1: DRAMATIC TECHNIQUE: CHARACTERISATION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Characterisation
 - 3.2 Character Analysis
 - 3.3 Types of Characters
 - 3.4 Discovering a Character
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/ Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

We have made a lot of references to characters in drama. This unit is devoted to characterization as a dramatic technique. You will therefore learn what you are expected to know about characterization and character analysis.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- distinguish between characterization and character analysis;
- discuss characterization as a dramatic technique; and
- list and explain the major types of characters in drama.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Characterisation

Characterization is the playwright's imaginative creation of characters that can effectively dramatize his story. That is, the roles played by the individual

dramatist personae in a play. The action of the play is presented through such characters. He does so by imbuing the characters with certain recognizable human traits and qualities. These qualities include physical attributes, moral, psychological and emotional dispositions, their attitude towards other characters and situations, and so on. At the point of conceptualization of the idea he wants to present in his play, he thinks of the best way to present it to make it interesting and at the same time make it informative. He builds this idea into a story form and thinks of the type of characters that can tell this story effectively.

So he uses the characters to explicate his theme and propel the plot. His ability to craft the play in such a way that each character blends well in the plot is called characterization. These characters are presented and they develop in the course of the action. In most cases, the characters grow from innocence to maturity or from ignorance to knowledge. They also change according to situations and events. When this is done, the characters are referred to as round characters.

In *Arms and the Man* for instance, Raina grows from innocence to maturity in the course of the play. You will recall that at the beginning of the play, Raina is very romantic and full of fantasy first about Sergius and later about her Chocolate Cream Soldier. Her understanding of love is very shallow. By the end of the play, she realizes the difference between reality and fantasy as she marries Captain Bluntschli. On his own part, Sergius realizes his ignorance of the military and also the need to marry for love and not for position.

The important elements in characterization are consistency and motivation. A good playwright must craft his play in such a way that his characters are consistent. You don't expect a character to behave like an educated young woman in the opening scene and in the following acts like an illiterate village girl. This could happen if there is a proper motivation for that. For example, if she is pretending to be what she is not in order to obtain some information, get something or to escape from danger. Motivation in characterization means that there must be a good reason for any action that is taken by every character in the play. What is the reason for Captain Bluntschli's flight from the battlefield? A soldier who is paid to fight cannot just run away like that. He runs away because they do not have ammunition; he cannot fight with his bare hand so he runs away to save his life.

The characters are the persons, in the play. They are endowed with moral and dispositional qualities that are expressed in their dialogues and in their action. The reason or grounds for action, temperament and moral dispositions constitute his motivations. They act out the story of the play from the beginning to the end. They act within the limits of possibility and plausibility. This means that they and their actions should be as close as possible to reality. The playwright therefore creates a story that is credible for them to act.

However, in an allegorical play, each character acts within the limits of what it represents.

Each playwright, depending on his style, chooses how to develop his characters. This brings us to a discussion on characters.

3.2 Character Analysis

The ability to create characters and to ensure that they blend/suit the action of the play is what we refer to as characterization. What is created is called character.

Characters refer to the people who act the play. Drama is the most active form of literary art and is presented in dialogue. It is not like the novel or poetry where the novelist tells a story. The story in a play is told as people talk to one another and interact in inter-personal relationships. These people are referred to as characters. Characters in a play must not necessarily be human beings. Animals or things can be used as characters. This depends on the intention of the playwright and the style he wants to adopt. In allegorical plays like Tess Onwueme's *The Desert Encroaches* or *Everyman*, a medieval play, animals and abstract qualities are used as characters.

In the play, you can identify each character through his name, through what he says, what he does, what other characters say about him and what the playwright says about him. The playwright's comment is contained in the stage direction. The stage direction is usually enclosed in a bracket and in most cases written in italics. You can find it at the beginning of the scene or at any point in the play whenever the playwright want to give information about the character, his action, the environment, the mood or any other information that is relevant to the action and which is not embedded in the dialogue.

3.3 Types of Characters

There are different types of characters in drama. They include the protagonist, the dynamic character, the static character, the flat character, the round character, and stereotypes.

Protagonist/Hero

He is the main character and at the centre of the story. He is called the protagonist or the hero. If he is pitted against an important character, like in *Hamlet*, the opponent is called an antagonist. In the play, *Hamlet* is the protagonist while King Claudius is the antagonist and the relationship between them is what we refer to as conflict. Usually the story revolves around him and in fact, the story is about him. He is easily identifiable because he stands out over and above most

other characters. Everything revolves around him as he influences the action that he is going through. He creates a world for himself which could be big or small, palatable or detestable. He lives to sustain or oppose what happens to him. His role is usually central to the development of the theme, and whatever happens to him or whatever he does has much significance to the outcome of the story. He is often referred to as the hero of the story or the protagonist and he is one of the major characters. His central position in the story places him in a very important position. The playwright therefore portrays him carefully. His many - sided and complex nature is presented in details. He helps to inject life in the story when he is properly presented. In *Oedipus Rex*, for instance, King Oedipus is the protagonist. He is not just one of the major characters but he is the major character. The story that is told in the play is about the birth, the rise and the fall of King Oedipus. Sophocles uses him to show his audience that man is helpless before the gods. This means that a man cannot change his destiny no matter how hard he or the people around him are. In the case of King Oedipus, his parents try to change his destiny by ordering, when he was born and they discovered that he has been doomed to kill his father and marry his mother, that he be thrown into the forest where he was expected to die but the servant spared his life and offered him to the shepherd. As he grows, he tries to change that fate but he does not succeed. Instead, he moves closer to it and eventually fulfils it.

Dynamic/ Round Character

This is a character that changes according to the course of events in the story. He may or may not be the protagonist or the hero. In most cases, he grows from innocence to maturity or from ignorance to knowledge. So, he is consistently alert to his environment with its attendant problem and reacts accordingly. He is found almost everywhere in the story. In his own unique way, he participates actively as much as possible in the course of the action. He seems to have no special alignment to any group but tries not to lose his credibility or acceptability.

Static/Flat/Stock Character

Here the character is complex and does not change in any basic way in the course of the story. He is presented in outline and without much individualization. He is usually stable and is said to be static because he retains essentially the same outlook, attitudes, values and dispositions from the beginning of the story to the end of the story. He is the opposite of the round character but lacks complexity in term of presentation. He is presented with a few and broad strokes. In most cases, his activities are easily recognizable. So, his actions can be predicted. Such values and attitudes may be positive or negative depending on the playwright's intention. He can be a minor or major character as long as he is hardly transformed as the events of the story unfold. Stock characters are character types "that recur repeatedly..." (Abram 163) in dramatic composition "and so are recognizable as part of the conventions of the form."

Character types are created by playwrights to represent particular individuals in society. They could be professionals, ethnic groups, tribes or nationalities. They therefore act and behave in accordance with the dictates of the person(s) they represent.

3.4 Discovering a Character

You identify a character in a play through what he does, what he says, what other people say about him and what the playwright says about him as contained in the stage-direction. In describing a character, you are expected to give in details, his physical attributes and his moral, psychological and social disposition. A character's action helps to define his personality and his behaviour in any given circumstance or situation. It also provides clues to the kind of person he is. Whatever a character says also helps to reveal his inner disposition.

However, before you can draw a valid conclusion about a character's personality from his words, you must consider in addition to the words themselves, the character's mood, the situation/circumstance, his relationship to the person about or to whom he is speaking and the consistency between his words and his action.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

- i. What are the differences between character analysis and characterization?
- ii. Characterization is an important aspect of dramatic technique. Discuss.
- iii. List and discuss four types of characters.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Characterization is a very important aspect of dramatic technique. It is through it that the dramatist presents his story. A good story can only be really good and interesting if appropriate characters are created to tell the story through their actions. The playwright tries to create characters that are as close as possible to reality. He ensures that the characters are consistent and are properly motivated.

5.0 SUMMARY

You have seen in this unit, that as the playwright conceptualizes a play in his imagination, he thinks of the type of characters that will help him to realize his objective of creating a good play. You have also learnt that in character analysis, you are expected to write everything you know about the character you discuss.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

List and explain briefly, the factors that you should consider in character analysis.

7.0 REFERENCES /FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 2 OTHER DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Foreshadowing
 - 3.2 Planting
 - 3.3 Deus ex Machina
 - 3.4 Play-within-Play
 - 3.5 Setting
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, we discussed a very important dramatic technique- characterization. In this unit we will discuss other techniques that are employed by the dramatist to create his imaginative world. They include Foreshadowing, planting, deus ex machine, play-within-the play and setting.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify other dramatic techniques
- explain them very well.
- explain their functions in plays

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Foreshadowing

In drama, foreshadowing refers to actions, words, events, incidents or other things in a play that predict a future occurrence in the play. Sometimes it contributes to the mood and general atmosphere of the play. *Hamlet* provides a very good example for us. We encounter a ghost at the beginning of the play. Its appearance creates an atmosphere of fear. It is an ominous sign of an impending evil or devilish act. It shows that everything is not normal in society. This evil act is revealed later in the dialogue between the Ghost and Hamlet in Act I Scene v:

GHOST: I am your father's spirit...
 If you did ever your dear father love-
 HAMLET: O God!
 GHOST: Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.
 HAMLET: Murder!

This encounter foreshadows other unnatural deaths in the play.

3.2 Planting

In drama, one of the techniques that is used to present the action of the play is planting. It is the use of certain props to give more information about some characters, the environment or situations. If for instance, you are watching a home video, and a particular scene opens in the room where a character is lying on a bed with a wheelchair beside the bed, you will conclude immediately that the person on the bed cannot walk. It might not be that person on the bed that is paralyzed but the presence of the wheel chair indicates that there is a paraplegic character in the play. Thus that wheelchair is planted and without any explanation you are able to get more information about the play. That is, **planting device**. In planting, representatives of certain issues/places/things are used to create an impression or point to an idea that will be exposed as the events of the play unfolds.

Also, in *Arms and the Man*, the 'revolver on the ottoman' gives a clue to Louka that the fugitive might be in Raina's room.

3.3 Deus ex Machina

Deus ex machina is a word from Latin meaning "a god from the machine". In Greek theatre, it "describes the technique used by some playwrights to end their plays with a god who was lowered to the stage by a mechanical apparatus and, by his judgment and commands, solved the problems of the human characters. The phrase is "now used for any forced and improbable device - a telltale birthmark, an unexpected inheritance, the discovery of a lost will or letter - by which a hard-pressed author makes shift to resolve his plot" (Abrams 39). It therefore originated from Greek drama and, in effect, when it is used in a play it means that the gods have come on stage to save a situation. It refers to an unexpected power, event or someone that saves a situation that seemed hopeless. This technique enables the playwright to unravel some secrets, or resolve certain issues that seem to be beyond human capabilities. This 'god' from the machine, in most cases, rescues the protagonist from an impossible situation or enlightens him on how to resolve an issue at the last minute. This causes a resolution of the plot by the use of an improbable coincidence.

In *Oedipus Rex*, the arrival of the shepherd is seen as *deus ex machina*. Before his arrival, the Blind Seer has accused King Oedipus of being the murderer of King Laius. If the Shepherd does not come, the issue will have remained unresolved because King Oedipus has accused Creon of conniving with the Seer to accuse him of being a murderer. The Shepherd arrives at this point and unravels the mystery of the King's parenthood. The servant corroborates the story and it becomes clear that King Oedipus actually killed his father and married his mother.

3.4 Play-within-Play

As the name suggests, a play-within-the-play is a play that is created in another play. Usually, it is a complete play with a beginning, middle and an end. It has its own theme which in many cases is related to the theme of the main play. It is created for a particular purpose. A very good example of the play-within-the-play is *The Mousetrap* in *Hamlet*. Shakespeare uses the technique to confirm the claim made by the ghost. The play is summarized in the "dumb show" presented before *the Mousetrap* in Act III Scene ii.

*The trumpets sound. A dumb show follows. Enter a King and a Queen very lovingly, the Queen embracing him and he her. She kneels and makes a show of protestation unto him. He takes her up, and reclines his head upon her neck. He lies down upon a bank of flowers. She, seeing him asleep, leaves him. Anon comes another man, takes off his crown, Kisses it, pours poison in the sleeper's ears, and leaves him. The Queen returns, finds the king dead, and makes passionate action. The Poisoner with some ... comes in again and seems to condole with her. The dead body is carried away. The Poisoner woos the Queen with gifts. She seems harsh awhile, but in the end accepts his love.
Exeunt.*

As the play progresses, the king becomes uncomfortable and leaves before it ends. It becomes evident from his reaction to the subject of the play that he is guilty.

Hamlet therefore becomes convinced that his uncle killed his father. On his own part, his uncle realizes that Hamlet is aware of his crime so becomes desperate in trying to eliminate him. Each of them plans how to deal with the other person and their plans culminate in their deaths at the end of the play.

3.5 Setting

Setting is the location of a play. It is the time and place when and where the action of the play takes place. Setting is very important in a play because it helps us to appreciate the background of the play. Also in productions it helps the designers to design appropriate locale, atmosphere, and costume for the play. You can identify

the setting through the names of characters. When you read *The Marriage of Anansewa* or *The Lion and the Jewel*, you would know immediately through the names of the characters that the former is set in Ghana and the latter in Nigeria. Some playwrights use known landmarks through dialogue or in stage direction. Ola Rotimi uses landmarks a lot. Try to read his *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again* and through these landmarks you will know that the play is set in Lagos. Shakespeare uses known landmarks. Have you read *Hamlet*? In *Arms and the Man* it is more obvious as the playwright uses real life experiences to show that the play is set in Bulgaria. Can you identify its setting through the known landmarks? There are different types of setting.

Types of Setting

- (a) **Geographical/Physical/Occupational:** This is the actual geographical location of the story and whatever surrounds the place where the story is located. It also includes the manner of daily living of the people. This helps in locating the story; for example, it helps you to know if the action of the play takes place in an urban centre or a village, or a bush, or a market place and so on. You can identify the physical setting easily in some plays because the playwright mentions some known landmarks like the names of towns or other important places in the town.

In the play, *Hamlet*, the physical setting is easy to identify because of the fact that two of the major characters in the play are addressed as the “Prince of Denmark” and the “King of Denmark”.

Physical setting also includes the manner of daily living of the people. This helps in locating the story; for example, it tells if the play has an urban or rural setting? The stage direction in the opening scene of the play, *The Lion and the Jewel* shows that the play is set in a village and that the play starts in the morning as can be seen in the following excerpt. Can you identify some other landmarks that will help you to locate the play appropriately?

MORNING

A clearing on the edge of the market, dominated by an immense ‘odan’ tree. It is the village centre. The wall of the bush school flanks the stage on the right, and a rude window opens on to the stage from the wall. There is a chant of the ‘Arithmetic Times’ issuing from this window. It begins a short while before the action begins. Sidi enters from the left carrying a pail of water on her head. She is a slim girl with plaited hair. A true village belle. She balances the pail on her head with an accustomed ease. Around her is wrapped the familiar broad cloth which is folded just above her breasts, leaving her shoulders bare.

Almost as soon as she appears on the stage, the schoolmaster's face also appears at the window. (The chanting continues- 'Three times two are six', 'Three times three times three are nine' etc.) The teacher, Lakunle now disappears. He is replaced by two of his pupils aged roughly eleven, who make a buzzing sound at Sidi, repeatedly capping their hands across their mouths. Lakunle now re-appears below the window and makes for Sidi, only stopping only to give the boys admonitory whacks on the head before they can duck. They vanish with a howl and he shuts the window on them. The chanting dies away. The schoolmaster is nearly twenty-three. He is dressed in an old-style English suit, threadbare but not ragged, clean but not ironed, obviously a size or two too small. His tie is done in a very small knot, disappearing beneath a shiny black waist-coat. He wears twenty-three-inch-bottom trousers, and blanco-white tennis shoes.

LAKUNLE: Let me take it.
SIDI: No.
LAKUNLE: Let me: [Seizes the pail. Some water spill on him.]
SIDI: [delighted.] There. Wet for your pains. Have you no shame?
LAKUNLE: That is what the stewpot said to the fire.
 Licking my bottom? But she was tickled
 Just the same.
SIDI: The school teacher is full of stories
 This morning. And now, if the lesson
 Is over, may I have the pail? (1-2).

Apart from the information you get from the stage direction on the setting, you can deduce from the short dialogue above that the play is set in a village. In most cases, it is in the village that young girls go to the stream to fetch water especially in the morning.

- (b) **Temporal/Historical Setting:** This is concerned the period in which a story takes place. This includes the date, the season, the general atmosphere in the locale like war, fuel scarcity, democratic or military rule. This, like the physical setting, could be deduced from the dialogue or from the stage direction. It could be stated in some commentaries, especially the ones on the background of the play. Sometimes, some publishers include the commentaries in the play. In *Arms and the Man* for instance, the opening part of Act 1, a date is given in the stage direction. This gives the reader a clue to the historical setting of the play. It says:

ACT 1

Night: A lady's bedchamber in Bulgaria, in a small town near the Dragoman Pass, late November in the year 1885. Through an open window with a little balcony a peak of the Balkans, wonderfully white and beautiful in the starlit snow, seems quit close at hand, though it is really miles away. The interior of the room is not like anything to be seen in the west Europe. ... (15)

- (c) **General Environmental Setting:** The social, moral, emotional, mental and religious backgrounds of the story. This is highlighted through dialogue, stage direction and the characters interpersonal relationships. In *Arms and the Man* for instance, George Bernard Shaw presents a graphic picture of the Bulgarian way of life. (The playwright “was able to pin the action down to actual geographical locations and to a real life war. He took care to incorporate descriptions of Bulgarian life” The playwright admits that many aspects of the play were based on actual facts. (Introduction to *Arms and the Man*)

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

How would you identify the setting of a play?

4.0 CONCLUSION

The dramatic techniques discussed in this unit will help you to understand and appreciate dramatic texts. You need to learn them very well especially those of you who may be involved in literary criticisms in future.

5.0 SUMMARY

From the discussion in this unit, you will be able to identify the different types of dramatic technique. I hope that you would be able to relate them to texts. You are not expected to see all the techniques in one play. In literary appreciation, your ability to identify them, relate them to the texts and decide how effective their uses have been makes you a good critic.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

List and explain different types of setting.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 3 DRAMATIC CONVENTIONS

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Dramatic Conventions
 - 3.2 Prologue
 - 3.3 Epilogue
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 - 3.10 Structure
 - 3.11 The Three Unities
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to dramatic conventions. By the end of the unit, you should be able to identify them in dramatic texts or explain why the dialogue of one play is in verse while another one is in prose and both of them are accepted.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define these conventions
- identify them in plays.
- state why they are found in some plays but not in others

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

Apart from the elements of drama and the dramatic technique discussed above, there are also what we refer to as dramatic conventions. The knowledge you gain from this unit will enable you appreciate any play irrespective of the age in which it was written. It is also necessary for you to be familiar with these conventions so that you can identify them in your analysis or criticism of dramatic literature.

3.1 Dramatic Conventions

In drama, the playwright tries to present life as it is lived in the real world. However it is not possible to present real life on stage so he presents an illusion of reality. He needs certain devices to make this illusion as realistic as possible and the audience accepts the devices. In Shakespearean plays, sometimes a character talks to himself and this is called soliloquy. In real life people do not talk to themselves like that but since the public especially in that age accepted it, it becomes a convention. Also, in the Classical Age the convention was that the dialogue is presented in verse but in the modern convention in most plays the dialogue is presented in prose. Another good example of dramatic convention is in play production where the convention is that a room has three walls instead of the four walls and the action of a play in which the events take place in various places is presented on a single stage. In the words of Abrams, “conventions are necessary or convenient devices, widely accepted by the public, for solving problems imposed by a particular artistic medium in representing reality” (33). There are also conventions in terms of style. Abrams explains further: “conventions are identifiable elements of subject matter, form, or technique which recur repeatedly in works of literature. Conventions in this sense may be recurrent types of character, turns of plot, forms of versification, kinds of diction and style.” It is not compulsory for every work to conform to pre-existing conventions but what matters is how effectively an individual writer makes use of them.

3.2 Prologue

This is the introductory part of the play. It could be an opening scene, a speech or an address. In most cases, it introduces the action and makes a statement on what the audience should expect in the play. In many plays the prologue foreshadows the events in the play and sometimes gives a background to the play as can be seen in the example below taken from Christopher Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus*.

[Prologue] Enter Chorus.
 Not marching in the fields of Trasimene
 Where Mars did mate the warlike Carthagens
 Nor sporting in the dalliance of love
 In courts of kings where state is overturned, . . .
 The form of Dr Faustus’ fortune, good or bad:
 And now to patient judgments we appeal
 And speak for Faustus in his infancy.
 Now is he born of parents base of stock
 In Germany within a town called Rhode;
 At riper years to Wittenberg he went
 Whereas his kinsmen chiefly brought him up.
 So much he profits in divinity

That shortly he was graced with doctor's name
 Excelling all, and sweetly can dispute In th' heavenly matters of
 theology;
 Till swoll'n with cunning, of a self-conceit, His waxen wings did
 mount above his reach
 And melting, heavens conspired his overthrow!
 For falling into a devilish exercise
 And glutted now with learning's golden gifts
 He surfeits upon cursed necromancy: Nothing so sweet as magic is to
 him
 Which he prefers before his chiefest bliss—
 And this the man that in his study sits.

[Exit.]

3.3 Epilogue

This is the direct opposite of the prologue. It is presented at the end of the play. It sums up the action of the play and in some cases, makes a statement (an advice or a lesson to be learnt) on the action or events presented in the play. In Christopher Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, the chorus comments on the fall of Dr. Faustus and cautions those who "practice more than heavenly power permits."

Enter Chorus

Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight
 And burned is Apollo's laurel bough
 That sometime grew within this learned man. Faustus is gone:
 regard his hellish fall,
 Whose fiendful fortune may extort the wise
 Only to wonder at unlawful things,
 Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits
 To practice more than heavenly power permits.

[Exit]

3.4 Interlude

An interlude in a play is a short piece of entertainment that is presented between the acts or major scenes in a play. It is believed that the term came into drama during the Renaissance Period to describe the dramatic form of early Tudor Period. It was then referred to as Tudor Interlude. Queen Elizabeth loved entertainment, funfair and ceremonies so much so that she was accompanied by extravagant display of affluence each time she made public appearance. These displays included some dramatic shows among which the interlude was most popular. It was a short dramatic presentation or a play performed indoors before a small audience. Most of the Mboguo in one of our texts for this course –*The Marriage of Anansewa*, is an example of interlude.

3.5 Soliloquy

Soliloquy is a speech made by a character when he is alone. The audience hears it but the other characters are not expected to hear it. It is device used to expose the character's inner bitter intentions to the audience. It is very common in Renaissance plays. Shakespeare in particular made use of soliloquies in his play a lot. Playwrights use this device to reveal the thoughts or the feelings of specific characters in reaction to certain events or situations. "Customarily, the soliloquy is a means of giving expression to a complex state of mind and feeling, and in most cases the speaker is seen struggling with problems of utmost consequence. This accounts for the intensity we find in soliloquys" (Scholes and Klaus 29). Here, the character thinks aloud as he talks to himself. He pretends that the audience is not there. Soliloquy also offers the dramatist a means of providing a point of view on the action of the play. Apart from serving as a means for revealing characters, it is used to make significant commentaries on events of the play. In the first soliloquy in *Hamlet*, Hamlet presents the state of his mind and his view on the world:

O that this too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into dew,
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon against self-slaughter. O God! God!
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!

From it we learn of his father's death, the incestuous affair between his mother and his uncle and it foreshadows the catastrophe at the end of the play when he predicts that the affair will come to no good. He continues:

But two months dead- nay, not so much, not two-
So excellent a king, that was to this
Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother
That he might not permit the winds of heave
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth,
Must I remember? Why, she would hang him
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on. And yet within a month-
Let me not think on it- Frailty, your name is woman-
A little month, before those shoes were old
With which he followed my poor father's body,
Like Niobe, all tears- why, she-
O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason
Would have mourned longer- married with my uncle, ...
She married- O most wicked speed! To post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not, and it cannot come to good
Break my heart, for I must hold my tongue. (Act i scene ii)

3.6 Aside

Aside is a dramatic convention in which a character speaks to himself or makes a comment in the presence of another character. However, that other character is not expected to hear the comment but the audience hears it. There is an actual stepping aside of the character who utters an aside from the other characters on the stage. This makes it more unrealistic because it is not possible for him to make the remark in their presence and they will not hear it. An aside is a very brief remark and in most cases it is indicated in the stage direction. An aside is different from soliloquy in the sense that soliloquy exposes better thoughts by one person alone but aside involves one, two or more people and it may not be as a result of anger. Here is an example taken from *Hamlet* when Hamlet feigns madness and is discussing with Polonius:

POL. [*Aside*] Though this is madness, yet there is method in it. Will you walk out of the air my lord?

3.7 Dramatic Illusion

Drama thrives on illusion because what is presented is not reality but an illusion of reality. Whenever you are watching any dramatic presentation, you know very well that they are 'pretending' to be what they are not yet you empathize with the characters. Dramatic illusion involves a willing suspension of disbelief. If the play *Hamlet* is presented on stage or if you buy the film, as you watch the graveyard scene, Ophelia's burial, for instance, you would see the actress being 'Buried'. In reality, the actress' name may not be Ophelia; she has not died; the grave is not a real grave; and the grave diggers may be wealthy Professionals but you enjoy the play without bothering about whether they are real or not. In other words, you pretend that what you are watching is real.

3.8 The Fourth Wall

The fourth wall refers to the fourth wall of the room that is pulled down for the audience to watch the play. In reality, a room has four walls so if a play, especially events of the play stage performances, is to be presented with the four walls intact nobody can see the action. That is why a good playwright should always have the stage in mind when he is writing his play. The removal of the fourth wall helps to enhance the illusion of reality in drama.

3.9 Chorus /Narrator

The use of chorus is a dramatic convention that was adopted by playwrights, especially in the Classical Age, to comment on the events of the play. In any play that has a chorus/narrator, the playwright uses it to supply the information that could not be woven into the dialogue. In many cases, it serves as the authorial voice.

Chorus is the indispensable dramatic device during the Ancient Greece and Medieval period. A good example of chorus is seen in T.S Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*.

The chorus is not usually part of the main cast so does not participate actively in the action of the play. In most cases they stand or sit by the side of the stage and make their comments at the appropriate time. Some playwrights use the chorus to comment on the events of the play. In *Oedipus Rex*, the chorus is made up of the elders of Thebes.

The narrator performs the same function as the chorus. The difference is that usually the chorus is made up of two or more characters while the narrator is only one character. Each playwright uses the chorus or the narrator to suit his purpose.

3.10 Structure

The dramatic structure, especially in written a play, is a dramatic convention on the organization of the play. Most classical plays are presented in acts and scenes. The plays are divided in this way for easy presentation and understanding. In a stage performance, a curtain is drawn to signify the end of each scene or act. In the modern stage, and in night productions, light is used to demarcate them. Each scene represents a particular setting. This is to give the actors time to change their costumes. It also gives the stage directors time to change the setting or scene for the next part of the action. During this interval, music or interludes could be used to fill the gap.

3.11 The Three Unities

Classical plays are expected to treat one serious action but later in the sixteenth centuries, dramatic critics in Italy and France added to Aristotle's recommendation of unity of action, two other unities to constitute the rules of drama known as "the three unities." It became a dramatic convention then. They contended that for the dramatist to achieve an illusion of reality, the action presented in a play should "approximate" the actual conditions of life being represented in the play. They imposed the "unity of place" (that the action be limited to a single location) and the "unity of time" (that the time represented should be limited to the two or three hours it takes to act the play, or at most to a single day of either twelve or twenty-four hours). Their decision may have been influenced by Shakespearean plays that involved frequent changes of setting and the passage of many years. In the modern period it is no longer a convention but a playwright might still wish to adhere to it.

The three unities are the unities of time place and action. It means the principles of dramatic structure that involves action, time and place. The principle of the unity of

action entails that the action of the play should contain one subject. There is no room for sub - themes or sub- plots. The unity of place requires that the action of the play must take place in one location. The unity of time insists that the play should not last for more than one day. However these unities are no longer strictly adhered to by the modern playwrights.

We have to emphasize here that you are not expected to find all the devices in one play. A playwright decides what to use and how to use them.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Soliloquy and aside are dramatic speeches; discuss them by highlighting their similarities and differences.

4.0 CONCLUSION

It is difficult to find all the conventions in one play. As a matter of fact, modern playwrights have jettisoned soliloquy and aside. They argue that since drama presents life as it is lived, people do not talk to themselves. It makes drama artificial and unrealistic.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have been exposed to various dramatic conventions. It is expected that this knowledge will help you to understand this course more, especially, as you read the recommended plays.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is the difference between soliloquy and aside?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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MODULE 3 DRAMATIC GENRES

Unit 1 Forms/Types of Drama: Tragedy, Comedy, Tragicomedy,
Melodrama

**UNIT 1 FORMS/TYPES OF DRAMA: TRAGEDY, COMEDY,
TRAGI-COMEDY, MELODRAMA****CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
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- 3.3 Comedy
- 3.4 Melodrama
- 3.4.1 Definition
- 3.4.2 Characteristics of Melodrama
- 3.4.3 Comparison between Melodrama and Tragedy
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- 3.7 Farce
- 3.8 Adaptations and Transpositions
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
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- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to a detailed study of dramatic genres. You need this background to enable you appreciate different forms of drama in the course of your study. The classification is also necessary for both the playwright and the critics in their appreciation of dramatic composition.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify and explain the dramatic genres;
- state and explain the major dramatic genres;
- be able to distinguish in clear terms the characteristics of the different dramatic genres; and
- be able, while reading a play, to determine its genre.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Meaning of Dramatic Genre

Etymologically, the term genre is taken from the French language and it means type, kind, or form. In simple terms, dramatic genre means type or kind of dramatic composition. Drama is grouped into distinct types, kinds or categories because there are qualities that are common to all dramatic compositions. There are also qualities that make each composition unique. It is these similarities and differences that determine each genre.

The dramatic genres include tragedy, comedy, tragicomedy, melodrama, drame, mime, etc.

3.2 Tragedy

We are familiar with the words 'tragedy' and tragic as they are associated with misfortune or things that are negative. Usually, they are used to describe personal misfortunes that do not concern the rest of the society. For example, the breakdown of a marriage or death of a dear one in an accident or even natural causes could be described as tragic. Also, some public events that are unpleasant like the assassination of a head of state or a political leader, natural or human disasters like earthquakes, flood disasters, plane crashes and other such disasters are referred to as tragedies. In this unit we are not concerned with these tragedies or tragic' events in our daily lives but as they relate to dramatic compositions.

Tragedy according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* is “a play of a serious or solemn kind ... a very sad event, action or experience.” The last part of the definition explains why the word is used to describe misfortunes, natural and human disasters in everyday life. However, we will be concerned with the aspect of the definition that sees tragedy as a play of a serious or a solemn kind.

Tragedy in drama is believed to have originated from the Greek worship of Dionysius, the god of wine and fertility. During the festival, the dithyramb, a choral lyric in honour of the god is sang and danced around the altar by fifty men dressed in goat-skin (goat was the sacred animal of the god). This is perhaps from where tragedy got its name because in Greek, “tragoedia” meant goat song. During this song, a story about the god was improvised by the choral leader but later Thepsis stood out and instead of singing in honour of Dionysius, sang as Dionysius. However, the song continued but a minimal part of it was acted by one actor. As time went on, the spoken part was increased and Aeschylus added a second actor while Sophocles added a third actor. As time went on, the number of chorus decreased gradually as more actors increased. Thus tragedy was born. The scope of the plays increased as they started including myths concerning other gods.

The plays became so popular that by 534 BC, the state gave official recognition to tragedy and instituted a prize for the best tragedy presented at the annual Dionysian festival.

Tragedy is the most esteemed of all the dramatic genres. It has attracted many definitions and rules, from the days of Aristotle, who is the first person to write on the circumstances of and what tragedy should be, to the present day. According to him in his "Poetics":

Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornaments, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting a proper purgation of these emotions.

Aristotle explains all the aspects of this definition and moves further to give the elements of tragedy as plot, character, thought, diction, music and spectacle. Try to read Aristotle's "Poetics". These principles have continued to influence the definition till date. However, some dramatic scholars agree with him while some others disagree with him.

In drama, tragedy is a serious play that deals with the misfortunes of man. It presents a man (tragic hero) who is not too virtuous or too vicious but one who aspires for higher ideals. He tries to improve himself and the world around him. In the course of this, he makes a mistake, or commits an error of judgment. This leads to his fall. Traditionally, in classical tragedies, the hero must be of noble birth, suffer and is overwhelmed in the end. Tragedy presents injustice, evil, pain, misfortunes, paradoxes and mysterious aspects of human existence.

Greek tragedy has a set pattern or structure. It starts with the prologue which introduces the play with the episodes of the play and the choral songs in between and finally, the exodus. The play contains a "single integral plot" which is presented in a very short period with one setting. The action could be simple or complex and contains a reversal of fortune or discovery or both. They are very short plays and many of them were presented in trilogies. The tragic hero is drawn from princes and kings. He is a man who is not pre-eminently good, virtuous or vicious but who commits an error of judgment. *Oedipus Rex* is a good example of classical tragedy. It has a single plot, the story of how Oedipus killed his father and married his mother. The setting is just in front of the palace. Oedipus, the tragic hero is a king who by the end of the play, discovers the truth about himself, his fortune reverses from good to bad. His catastrophe is caused by his tragic flaw which is arrogance.

The plays were based on myth and legends drawn mainly from the legends of the house of Atreus and the events of the Trojan wars. They were presented as a part of a

great festival and the state was involved. Music, songs and dances were important elements of the plays. To maintain a single setting, indoor actions and violence were reported on stage. As part of a religious festival, the plays were used to show how vices like arrogance and pride lead men to destruction. The gods also play important roles in Greek tragedy. However, the dramatists differ in their attitudes to the gods as characters in their plays.

Many critics argue that there are no tragedies in the modern period. The argument is based on the fact that many playwrights do not adhere to the Aristotelian principles of tragedy especially as regards the treatment of the subject matter, tragic hero and the language.

Modern playwrights feel that they should not be restricted by any rules. According to them, drama reflects the society, so they should reflect their society in the works. In the modern society, little or no attention is paid to kings, princes and their exploits so a poor man who is hard working can rise to esteem. The society also encourages him to rise. He also has the capacity to fall into misfortune through an error of judgment and according to Arthur Miller, since kings and monarchs are no longer available, tragedy should be based "... on the heart and spirit of the average man" (Dukore: 897). Contemporary issues and human beings should, therefore, be treated in tragedy. There must be a proper purgation of emotion in tragedy, as stated by Aristotle.

The important factor is that the tragic hero pursues a particular goal he believes in relentlessly to its logical conclusion even if he loses his life in the pursuit. Tragedy attempts, therefore, to ask some basic questions about human existence like, is there justice in the world?

3.3 Comedy

We use the words 'comedy' and comic to describe something that is funny in our everyday lives. These include a joke, or a fantastic story that is full of nonsense, or an absurd appearance that makes us giggle, smile or laugh. Comedy is not inherent in things or people but the way things/people are perceived. Comedy is a deliberate presentation of events/experiences drawn from real life but not the same with real life. We should therefore not expect dramatic comedy to be the same as real life. Generally, the plays have good endings or resolutions, so when a play ends happily, we refer to it as comedy. In most comedies, the principal characters begin in a state of opposition either to one another or to their world or both. By the end of the play, their opposition is replaced by harmony. Aristotle in his "Poetics" insisted that in tragedy, men are shown "better than they are", while in comedy "worse than they are". For him it is an artistic imitation of men of inferior moral bent, not in every way but only in so far as their shortcomings are ludicrous. These shortcomings cause no pain.

In the classical period there was no mixture of genres. Horace maintains that tragic characters must be noble while comic characters are ignoble and of lower birth and foolish. Moliero believed that his audience could learn from the dramatization of ridiculous and universal types. Comedy therefore teaches through laughter. Philip Sidney, in “Ars Poetica”, sees it as an imitation of common errors of life which is presented in the most ridiculous and scornful manner so that the spectator is anxious to avoid such errors himself. It should aim at being delightful though not necessarily by provoking laughter. Ben Jonson also believes that laughter does not really help to achieve the aims of comedy but may subvert those aims. He draws his theme from human errors and follies. He insists that the playwright should attempt to improve moral life and arouse gentle affections. John Dryden insists that comedy should portray the eccentricity of character while Northrop Frye says that lightness of touch is the hallmark of comedy.

We recognize comedy through its style, characterization, diction and other elements of style. The purpose of comedy is to delight, to teach and to entertain the audience through the presentation of characters, situations and ideas in a ridiculous manner. This helps to keep man close to sanity, balance and to remind him of human frailties. It helps to keep him humble and mindful of what he is rather than what he might wish himself to be.

Modern scholars believe that the purpose of comedy is to correct vices. Therefore, it should not exclude any class. Satire is an important instrument in comedy because nothing reforms majority of men like the portrayal of their faults. It is easy for people to endure being made fun of. Many people may have no objection to being considered wicked but are not willing to be considered ridiculous. The audience is thus expected to learn from the stupidity of the characters and try to avoid such pitfalls because nobody likes to be made an object of ridicule.

Generally speaking, comedy adopts a different approach from that of serious drama. It presents the incongruity in people and situations. In doing this, the playwright suspends the natural laws; for instance, a man falls flat on the floor but does not really hurt himself. Comedy is usually presented as a moral satire used to attack vices like greed, hypocrisy, lust, laziness, or ignorance. The aim is to correct social ills, social injustice or to ridicule a particular human fault or social imbalance. It thrives on exaggeration of situation and character to show mankind worse than it really is.

Since drama is a conscious and deliberate presentation of events/experience based mostly on real life but not the same with real life, one should, therefore, not expect comedy to be the same with real life. We recognize comedy, through its style, characterization and dialogue. In both real life and drama, comedy should indicate a kind of pleasure which finds physical expression in laughter or smile.

3.4 Melodrama

3.4.1 Definition

The word melodrama is coined from melo (music) and dram (drama). It is, therefore, a play that utilizes music extensively. But the utilization of music is not the only factor in melodrama; what really makes it melodrama is its portrayal of the protagonist and the antagonist. The protagonist suffers a lot but triumphs in the end while the antagonist suffers. So, melodrama can be defined as a play that has serious action caused by a villain and a destruction of the villain which brings about a happy resolution in the play. The hero is usually involved in very dangerous circumstances but is rescued or he disentangles himself at the last possible moment. The rescuer is usually a benevolent character who identifies himself with the good role of the protagonist. An ideal melodrama, therefore, must have a protagonist and an antagonist. The protagonist always fights the antagonist who is usually poised to destroy goodness. In the end, the characters are easily identified by the audience. The protagonist is admired and the antagonist is hated.

It is this identification by the audience that provides the grounds for poetic justice because the antagonist loses in the end. This explains the reason some critics insist that melodrama is an honest dramatic form. According to them, it is the only form of drama that expresses the truth of human condition as they are perceived most of the time. This is a condition where vice is condemned and virtue applauded or where the bad man is punished and the good man rewarded.

Like tragedy, melodrama deals with characters in critical situations. The main difference is in the point of view. Outwardly, it tries to create the illusion of real people at genuine risk or in jeopardy but the playwright manipulates the play in such a way that it ends with a punishment or a rescue, a reform or a triumph for the protagonist. There is always an escape from danger in the plot line. In melodrama, there is always serious excitement, suspense and thrills for the audience. The plot is built on tension and great excitement but this is transitory and lends no substantial significance to the action of the play. In melodrama, the events seem not to have taken place in an existing world but a closer look will show that it points the real picture of man.

The plot therefore contains stories with colourful but brave characters. It creates opportunities for strong sensational scenes, powerful emotions, and strong characters that struggle against deadly odds. Sometimes they are trapped in precarious situations but they must hold on until there is help ultimately.

The melodramatic hero is usually a one-dimensional figure who pursues a goal in a straightforward manner. The opposition comes from the world around him. He does not always think well before taking an action. Consequently, he gets

involved in entanglements or dangerous situations which a more rational person might avoid. The characters are usually simple in mind and heart and are conditioned or influenced by their backgrounds and environment. Melodrama contains most of the serious conflicts and crises of daily life. In melodrama, we are resigned as we realize that our failures are not our fault but caused by others and our victories are as a result of help from other people. It is a serious play because most of the time, they rely on strong story lines but lacks the essential magnitude in character and the action is usually over exaggerated.

3.4.2 Characteristics of Melodrama

1. It looks at human beings as a whole. People are expected to interact and help one another in the society. This explains why the protagonist is usually assisted or aided by someone for him to triumph or succeed.
2. It sees human beings as encountering and enduring outer conflicts and not inner ones in a generally hostile and wicked world.
3. These human conflicts end in victory. Melodramatic characters either win or lose. However, in the spirit of poetic justice, the protagonist usually wins despite the difficulties he encounters in the course of the action to show that good triumphs over evil.
4. There is an over simplification of human experiences which are usually exaggerated in such a way that the main thesis of the play is made transparent.
5. It treats a serious subject matter in a serious manner, though exaggerated.

3.4.3 Comparison between Melodrama and Tragedy

1. In tragedy, the tragic hero commits an error of judgment which leads to his downfall. This error of judgement can also be called tragic flaw. In melodrama, the hero faces overwhelming problems but despite his sufferings, he triumphs in the end.
2. Melodrama is usually episodic and contains elements of charm or magic. It, therefore, lacks the honesty of tragedy.
3. While tragedy evokes fear and pity, melodrama arouses suspense, pathos, terror and sometimes hatred. In tragedy, there is genuine pity and fear as the audience empathies with the hero. Pity in melodrama borders on sentimentality and emotion and when fear is portrayed, it is usually superficial. Pity and fear in tragedy are honest and lead to catharsis (purgation of emotions).
4. There is recognition for the hero in tragedy but in melodrama, the protagonist wins or triumphs always.

- 5 Tragedy confronts good and evil with unblinking honesty, while melodrama escapes from life. Tragedy considers eternal spiritual problems and ideals but melodrama deals with the transitory material/physical issues or problems.
- 6 Tragedy is known as a serious dramatic genre but the seriousness in melodrama is only a pretext to create theatrical effects for the audience.

3.5 Tragicomedy

You have seen that tragedy is a serious play that ends on a sad note, while comedy ends happily. In traditional tragedy, playwrights are not allowed to bring in any comic action. If you read *Oedipus Rex*, for instance, you will observe that the atmosphere is tense from the beginning to the end. As time went on, even from the Elizabethan period, comic characters were included in tragic plays. This is called comic relief. Tragi-comedy is a play that mixes both comic and tragic elements in equal proportion of each. It therefore elicits both tragic and comic emotions. It shorts in happy mood and in sad mood vice versa. Example is Shakespeare's *The merchant of Venice* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

3.6 Drame

Drame is a term of the modern period given to a category of dramatic literature which deals with man in common place and contemporary circumstance. The genre is presumed to have evolved from the French drama. The French regarded it as a play of serious intent; dealing with contemporary issues and lives. Playwright like Ibsen, Chekhov, Osborne and many other modern writers are considered as the people that made extensive use of this dramatic genre.

In their plays, they contemplate man with his dealings with contemporary issues and relationships in his society. Drame is noted for its great diversity, technical experimentation and a mixture of general forms of writing. Sometimes, it is difficult to classify it as either tragedy or comedy. The playwright here is not concerned with the genre but he is concerned with the treatment of social issues to uplift his society. It is a product of modern drama that thrives on innovations and experimentations.

Drame has a relationship with other dramatic genres. It relates to melodrama in the sense that it involves the spectator in action through the identification of characters. It also makes extensive use of suspense and tension. However, it differs from melodrama because its interest is on political ideas and other serious issues and this brings it close to tragedy. It has the capacity of provoking thought and discussion on the issues raised after the presentation (reading) of the play.

Melodrama has characters that are easily identifiable. Drame also has the same.

But the difference is that characters in melodrama are divided into protagonist and antagonist for easy audience identification. Drame is close to tragedy with its concern with human conduct and the place of drama in the modern world. It is also close to tragedy with regards to its honest treatment of issues, especially with its portrayal of characters with adequate human (realistic) motivation. It is different from tragedy mainly because of its lack of elevation, narrowness of vision, and, sometimes its lack of universality in its emphasis on contemporary life.

3.7 Farce

Farce which is referred to as comedy of situation, is a humorous play on a trivial theme usually one that is familiar to the audience. It is a comedy of lower kind. The themes that are treated in farce include mistaken identity; elaborate misunderstanding, switched costume (men in women's clothes) heroes forced under tables, misheard instructions, discoveries, disappearances and many such situations.

Farce is not considered an intellectual drama because it does not appeal to the mind. It deals with physical situations and does not explore any serious idea. It presents physical activities that grow out of situations like the presence of something when something is not expected or the absence of something when something is expected.

Its characters are called the clown.

Farce does not treat serious social issues. Sometimes it does not tell a full story or present a logical plot. A good example is somebody walking and slipping on a banana peel and falling in an exaggerated manner. The main objective is to entertain by evoking laughter.

It presents mainly mechanical actions to show that human life is mechanical, aggressive, and coincidental. .

3.8 Adaptations and Transpositions

By adaptation, we mean a dramatic text rewritten into a new form or reworked.

In African literary scene, many playwrights have reworked the western plays or plays of other cultures to suit our own African societies.

According to Etherton, translation transposition and adaptation have been endemic in European drama: they are the means by which play-text have survived the process of history, and have become part of a 'great tradition'. In the past, the European's concern was to 'rework' the great dramatic works of the Medieval stories for emphasis. In setting, African playwrights have also taken over this particular historical perspectives.

Etherton went further to state the features of the reworked plays as follows:

1. The name of people, places, and titles may be changed, as in Ola Rotimi's *The gods are not to Blame*, based on Sophocle's *King Oedipus*, where Oedipus becomes Odewale, the Greek city of Thebes becomes Kutuje, and all other names are given Yoruba equivalents.
2. The period or setting may be changed, as in Oshogbo *Everyman* where the late medieval European town of the mid fifteenth century becomes a Yoruba town in the 1960s.
3. The framework or context may be changed.
4. The story may be changed. Soyinka introduces the slave leader as an important new character in his rework of Euripides' *The Bacchae*, which he calls *The baccae of Euripidis*.
5. The themes may be changed. For example, the inexorability of fate becomes instead, the issue of personal culpability in Rotimi's *The gods are not to be blame*.

In transpositions, originality should be duly maintained.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

- (1) Discuss the characteristics of melodrama.
- (2) Discuss adaptations and transpositions as dramatic concepts.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Categorization in drama helps us in our study of dramatic literature. To a large extent it helps us in the appreciation of different forms of drama. Transpositions and adaptations give us the insight of other people's culture.

5.0 SUMMARY

You have learnt from this unit that there are different forms of drama. Your knowledge here will help you to understand both dramatic literature and dramatic performances. You will then be in a position to understand why some actors act the way they do in certain circumstances.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

What differentiates tragedy from melodrama?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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MODULE 4 TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Unit 1	Analysis of Texts
Unit 2	<i>Oedipus Rex</i> by Sophocles
Unit 3	<i>Hamlet</i> by William Shakespeare
Unit 4	<i>Death of a Salesman</i> by Arthur Miller

UNIT 1 ANALYSIS OF TEXTS

CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit, you will be introduced to how to analyse plays and appreciate their effectiveness as dramatic texts. The common approaches to the analysis of literary texts are content and form. Content deals with the theme and subject matter. Form comprises such stylistic features as plot, characterization, setting, language and other dramatic devices used in the play. All these devices for interpretation of plays have been expatiated in the previous modules. For effective study of any dramatic text, you must have a constant recourse on all those devices given.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Read and appreciate plays.
- Criticize any given play by highlighting its weak and strong Points
- State and explain in details the major dramatic techniques and how to apply them in the texts.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Textual Analysis

Textual analysis in drama is the evaluation of a written play. In the evaluation, you are expected to read the play very well and highlight the thematic preoccupation of the playwright and how he utilizes the elements and devices of drama in the composition of his play. The dramatic techniques used are also discussed. As you analyse a play, you are expected to identify all the dramatic devices, how appropriate the characters are, if they are consistent and their actions are properly motivated. The language is another area that needs attention as you determine if there is consistency. The relationship between the message of the play and the method used to relay the message is also examined. You can take the following steps for an effective textual analysis:

- a) Read the play for the first time and enjoy the story. Picture how it will be performed. Imagine the actors and actresses playing their parts.
- b) Read the play again with your notebook and dictionary by your side. Use the dictionary to find out the meaning of the words you are not familiar with and form notes on the plot, theme, characterization and other relevant information. Remember that anything can happen in a play. Do not expect every play to be realistic. To enjoy drama, you sometimes must accept the impossible as in *deus ex machina* in romance and melodrama.
- d) Read it again and again to fill in the gaps and ensure that you have obtained the required information.
- e) Rewrite your note properly, and revise it as many times as possible. After you finish reading a play, decide what its theme is playwrights have themes in mind just as other writers do. Think about what happened in the play. What main idea about life is the playwright sharing with you?

3.2 Content/Theme

In the analysis of a play, the first issue that comes to mind is the theme. Theme is the main idea in a play that permeates the entire play. How do you identify the theme of a play? Themes are identified through the dialogue, actions and manifestations in the actions of the major characters as they interact with other characters in the play. The interpersonal relationships of the characters help to highlight and advance that particular idea. Themes in drama include corruption, love, revenge, and many others. The theme is the message, that central idea which the playwright wants to send across to his audience and a play could have more

than one theme. The playwright could draw his germinal idea from an incident or event in his contemporary society. It could also be drawn from history, legend, myth or folklore but the important factor is that there is a message he sends to the audience.

Most playwrights try to make their societies better through the exploration of the negative impacts of these ideas in the societies. A playwright is normally influenced by his background and this is reflected in his plays. In Nigeria many contemporary playwrights explore the themes like military dictatorship, insecurity unemployment, bad leadership, bribery and corruption. You will agree with me that these and more are the vices that plague the contemporary Nigerian society. Sometimes, the setting of a play determines the theme of the play.

The playwright is said to be the conscience of his society, a teacher and an entertainer. He therefore strives to educate, inform and entertain his audience. This explains the reason why he presents his theme through an interesting story and chooses the most appropriate dramatic form. For example, Bernard Shaw decides to dramatise the themes of love and war through comedy, while Shakespeare presents his theme of revenge through tragedy.

The theme of the story is what gives it significance because without a recognizable and definable theme, a story will be trite and pointless. A clearly focused theme is the story's "motivating force". In *Oedipus Rex* for instance, the theme is man's quest for his identity. The sub-theme is man's helplessness in the hands of fate or the gods. If we take the main theme, we will see that Oedipus' search for his true parents leads him to kill his father and marry his mother, while his search for the cause of the plague in his kingdom and the murderer of King Laius leads to his search for his own identity. The search for his own identity leads to his doom. *Everyman explores* the summons of death for mankind and man's readiness to meet his creator. In explicating this theme, the play dramatizes the struggle between virtue and vice for supremacy in a man's life. The question of man's ultimate fate is also explored. It concludes with the fact that only man's good deed is important for his salvation. The play emphasizes the crucial importance of good deeds in obtaining salvation.

Consciously or unconsciously, every playwright has his theme in mind in choosing the style to adopt. The characters, the setting, the language, the plot, are chosen in such a way that should advance the major theme of the story. However, you must bear in mind the fact that a story may have one or more themes. It is also possible that each reader may discover a different theme or a multiplicity of themes in the same play. You should not worry about this. Literature is open to different interpretations and as literary student, you should be able to identify your position and substantiate it with facts from the play. You can see that in the example of Oedipus above, I used the first theme of man's

search for his identify. If I decide to use the theme of man's helplessness as the major theme, I will state how Oedipus was born and there was a prophecy that he will kill his father and marry his mother.

His parents believe that they can avert the curse by killing him. Unfortunately the servant who was asked to kill him gives him to a shepherd who in turn hands him over to his childless master. Oedipus is brought up in Corinth but unfortunately, he tries to run away from the same curse (fate) when he realizes that he is doomed to kill his father and marry his mother. In running away from fate, he fulfils that prophecy.

The theme of a play could be given in one word but ideally it is presented in sentence or statement. A play could be complex and it might be difficult to give the theme or the central idea in one word. However, you should realize that whether it is in one word or in one sentence, you must explain it further based on the play. You should also be in a position to identify other themes, if the play has other themes. Usually the theme is identified after you must have read the entire play.

Finally, theme is the controlling idea in a play which the reader extracts consciously as he reads the text. It could be literal or symbolic. It is that idea or message which the playwright wants to share with or convey to his audience. In most cases, the theme emerges after the exploration of the entire play. The theme of a play is always the underlying philosophical view of the dramatic text. Some plays have more than one theme. The major one which stands out is the main theme while the others are called the sub-themes.

3.3 Subject Matter

The subject matter is the topic of discussion in the play. It is easier to get the subject matter from the title of the play. Theme is the central idea of the play while the subject matter is the object of discussion from which the theme is extracted. It means therefore, that the theme is subsumed in the subject matter. The subject matter is just a single idea or statement in a play while themes could be numerous in a play. Subject matter is fixed but themes are not. In *The Lion and the Jewel*, for instance, the subject matter is the fame of Sidi (the Jewel) a young and beautiful girl and her seduction by the Bale (the Lion) who is sixty two years old. In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, the theme is love but the subject matter is the marriage of Anansewa. From the two examples, we conclude that the subject matter is indeed the object of discussion which other events and incidents in a text or work help to highlight.

This is the statement the play makes about the social world. In most cases, plays treat common human problems and make statements that have universal

validity or relevance for all ages. Each playwright treats any of these human problems from his own perspective to give it a touch of originality and uniqueness. This is called the style in the dramatic interpretation.

3.4 Characterization

Characters are the persons in a dramatic work. That is, they are the *flesh and blood* that take part in a play; the roles they play is the concern of characterization. The playwright endows them with moral and dispositional qualities which are expressed (as discussed earlier in Module 2 Unit 1) in their words and actions. The reasons for the character's action, his speech, his temperament constitute his motivation. In textual analysis, one could evaluate the character through the stage direction where some playwrights have some comments on the character's disposition, his age, his physical attributes, his mode of dressing and other information that could be found there. The next thing is to evaluate his interactions with other characters through which you discover whether he is a flat or round character. A flat character remains unchanged in his outlook and dispositions from the beginning to the end but a round character could undergo a gradual or radical change which is brought about by events in the play. It is difficult to predict the actions of a round character because he is usually very close to real human beings.

Anything you write about a character must be contained in the text. You should therefore not infer, guess or suggest a characteristic moral disposition or physical attribute that cannot be identified in the text. For instance, you can rightly say that Baroka in *The Lion and the Jewel* is a crafty rogue who excels in self-indulgence. One of the characters said that about him and his action too in the scene where his current wife is pulling the hairs in his armpit and also in his seduction of Sidi. We have analysed the plays that are recommended for this course in subsequent units and we discussed some of the characters.

3.5 Setting

Setting is the place or the time where or when the action of the play takes place. In textual analysis, setting is also discussed. Setting could be a tribe, a village a town or a country depending on the disposition of the playwright. In some plays like *Oedipus Rex*, *Arms and the Man*, *Hamlet* and many others, the playwrights mention specific towns/countries like Thebes, Bulgaria, and Denmark. However, in some other plays like *The Marriage of Anansewa*, *The Lion and the Jewel*, and *The Song of a Goat*, the setting of each play is identified through the names of characters or other landmarks. In *The Lion and the Jewel* for instance, the reference to 'Sango' by some of the characters highlights the Yoruba background of the play. Setting in terms of time, period, or locale can be mentioned, implied or alluded to in the text.

3.6 Language

Language seems to be the most essential technique in the analysis of any dramatic text. It is through language that the playwright communicates his ideas; so he manipulates it to suit his intention. Language could be in the form of speech, gestures or other bodily signs/symbols. Dramatic language is not just an ordinary language because the playwright is compelled to incorporate descriptions about setting, character and the overall presentation of the story through the characters. The language must therefore be very economical, vivid and expressive. In *Oedipus Rex*, for example, the language is concise but loaded with meaning. Let us look at the following exchange in which Teiresias sums up the misfortunes of King Oedipus.

Oedipus: Man, must you wrap up your words in riddles?

Teiresias: Where you not framed for skill for solving riddles?

Oedipus: You taunt me with the gift that is my greatest.

Teiresias: Your great misfortune and your ruin.

In the last line of this exchange, the Blind Seer states that by solving the riddles and becoming the king of Thebes, Oedipus paved the way for his misfortune, which is marrying his mother after having killed his father. Consequently, there is a plague in Thebes and this leads to the search for a solution. In the course of this search, Oedipus discovers his true identity and this leads to his ruin. Another good example of condensed language in *Hamlet* is Polonius' advice to his son, Laertes: "*Neither a borrower nor a lender be / for loan often loses itself and friend/and borrowing dull that edge of husbandry*".

So, in dramatic language, the dramatist must think in terms of the characteristics of the characters, their speeches, their actions and the environment in which they operate and incorporate them into language. This is important because unlike in prose, where the novelist has enough time and space to describe everything and this includes probing into the inner beings of the character, the dramatist relies only on dialogue to explore characters, describe incident, create environment, atmosphere and mood. This is the reason why he pays attention to the diction.

Diction is the choice or selection of the words which forms the dialogue through which the playwright communicates his ideas to his audience. The diction could be simple or difficult depending on the choice of the playwright. A play that has very simple diction invariably will have a simple and direct language so is said to be accessible to a wider audience. This is because more people will read and understand it. Also, when it is presented on stage, people will understand the story and absorb the message with ease. In a play with simple diction, the playwright uses familiar and simple words.

On the other hand, some plays are difficult to understand. They are usually filled with unfamiliar words, terms, and symbols. Such plays are said to be obscure and the playwright is said to be writing for a selected audience. This is because many people will find it difficult to understand and appreciate the play. Such play could be said to use poetic language. Examples of such plays are some plays of William Shakespeare and Wole Soyinka. The problem here is that if you do not understand a play, you would not enjoy it or be entertained by it. You can read a simple play just once and enjoy the performance but it will take at least a second reading for the story of an obscure play to be understood. For instance, you can read two plays by Wole Soyinka, *The Trials of Brother Jero* and *Madmen and Specialists*. The former is very simple, direct and entertaining. It tells a story of a fake pastor who swindles people to make money. The latter is on the Nigerian civil war but you will have to read it several times to be able to decode the symbols used in it for you to understand the play.

3.7 Other Devices

Imagery

A playwright could employ literal or connotative (suggestive) language in his work. A literal language gives a direct meaning of the words while a connotative language gives more than one meaning to the word. The language here determines how we mentally visualize the object or situation. This is called **imagery**. It also shows the playwright's attitude towards a particular character or situation. In *The Lion and the Jewel*, for example, Baroka is referred to as a 'fox', a 'crafty rogue', 'wiry', 'goated', 'tougher than his sixty-two', these references help the reader to have a mental picture of Baroka. The image of a character and his mode of dressing as described in a stage-direction helps us, to a large extent, to evaluate the character's disposition, personality, and the attitude of the playwright towards that character.

Symbolism

In everyday life, you come across symbols and even use them at times. Symbols are objects or things that communicate meaning or messages without using words for example, a cross or a bible symbolizes Christianity. It could be a character, an object, or an incident which represents an idea, a person, a quality, a profession or situation. Symbols are extensively used in allegorical plays.

Symbolism is an artistic device through which the playwright uses factual language in a way that it deviates from its simple function of describing or recording but used to stand for or represent something else not directly named. This means, therefore, that in a play, you could have symbolic action, symbolic object and symbolic character.

Irony

A playwright uses irony to add flavour to his story. Here, a playwright uses words or action to create certain kinds of discrepancy between appearance and reality; between what is said or done and what is meant or intended. The types are verbal irony, dramatic irony and situational irony.

Verbal Irony

This is the simplest and commonest type of irony. It is a figure of speech where the word is the opposite of what is meant; for example, when he is a giant or the tallest man refers to a very short man.

Dramatic Irony

Here, there is a contrast between what the character does and what the reader knows as the truth. If a speech is meant to be understood in one way by a certain character in a play, but the audience understands it in a different way, the scenario becomes a dramatic irony.

In dramatic irony, the audience know the true outcome of events while the fellow characters are ignorant of the event. It is a device used to heighten comic relief.

In other words, a character is under a delusion of a certain fact which has been overtaken by an intervening circumstance.

Situational Irony

In irony of situation, the expectation does not come out in the way it is anticipated. It is a situation of appearance versus reality. The action of a character here is at variance with the consequences or result of the action. In other words, the character expects one thing and another thing happens. When you expect sun shine and it rains, it is situational irony.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE.

- i. Read and analyze one of the plays recommended for this course.
- ii. Discuss setting in any one of the plays set for this course.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have tried in this unit to give you a detailed discussion on the steps you take in the analysis of a play. This is very important because they are tools you need to possess before you can appreciate, understand and criticize any play. We have also tried to show you how to analyse plays by identifying the dramatic elements

and other devices used and how appropriate they are. The reading of the play may be for an examination, entertainment or even for a job. If for instance, you secure a job as a literary editor in a print or even an electronic media, you need to know these techniques very well to aid you in doing effective and efficient job. Who knows you may aspire to write a play, so the knowledge you have acquired in this unit will be of immense benefit to you.

5.0 SUMMARY

Textual analysis in the study of dramatic literature could be seen as the ‘palm oil’ with which drama is eaten. In other words, you cannot give what you do not have. So, you cannot talk of literary appreciation without knowing what to look out for to determine whether the playwright has done well or not. You have learnt from this unit that you approach the study of a play through its content and form. The content is the theme and the subject matter while the form is the style.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What are the basic steps in the textual analysis of a play?

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UNIT 2 OEDIPUS REX BY SOPHOCLES

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will be introduced to a classical tragedy-*Oedipus Rex*. A classical work is a work that has a historical tradition, aesthetic attitudes, or style of the literature of Greece and Roman antiquity. This play, *Oedipus Rex* is called a classical play because it fits into these features. We will use this play to illustrate the Aristotelian elements of drama. The text is also called *King Oedipus*.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit you will be able to:

- identify the elements of tragedy (drama) in a play
- identify the protagonist/ hero in a play
- determine what makes him a tragic hero

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Synopsis of the Play *Oedipus Rex*

In the city of Delphi, a son was born to King Laius. The oracle of Delphi reveals

that this child is doomed to commit an abomination. He is to kill his father and marry his mother. The King and his wife are sad with this prophecy. Consequently, they took steps to avert its fulfilment. They drove a peg through his two ankles, gave him to a shepherd to expose him at the hillside, apparently for him to die there.

The shepherd gave him to the servant of the King of Corinth, Polybus. This child grew up with them and took them as his parents. One day, he was told that he has not actually what he claims to be. He goes to the oracle to find out the truth. He was told he was fated to kill his father and marry his mother. He tries to defeat the oracle by running away. He resolved to stay out of Corinth until his parents are dead.

On his way, he met an entourage and there was a quarrel over the right of way. He killed everybody except one person who escaped. The city he entered was besieged by a Sphinx who killed the citizens because they cannot answer a particular riddle. Oedipus solved the riddle and was made the king. Consequently, he married the queen who, unknown to both of them, was his mother. He lived with her and they have children.

The city is again besieged by a plague. The general belief is that the city has been polluted, so it is being punished by the gods. They inquire from the oracle and they are told that the unknown assassin of the former king, Laius, is in their midst and unless he is discovered and punished, the plague would continue.

Oedipus sets out in search of the killer and eventually finds out that he is the killer. The queen tries in vain to stop the quest. She commits suicide as the reality dawns on her that she had married her own son. King Oedipus gouges out his two eyes and leaves Thebes with the children.

3.2 Themes

The main theme of the play is fate or destiny. The play dramatizes the helplessness of man in the hands of the gods or in the hands of Fate. It upholds belief in destiny and the fact that what is destined to happen to anybody must happen to that person irrespective of what the person does.

Another theme of the play is man's search for identity. It shows that, sometimes, we are not what we think that we are. If we, therefore, decide to search, we might discover our true identities. In the play, Oedipus' search for his true parents leads him to kill his father and marry his mother while his search for the plague in his kingdom and the murderer of King Laius leads to his search for his true identity. Oedipus' determination to find his true identity makes respond to him positively and to be fearful for him.

3.3 Style

3.3.1 Plot

The play has a single unified plot. It is presented like a detective play which is like an investigation into the cause of the plague. The play therefore commences as a search and proceeds as a search until the messenger from Corinth arrives. The events of the play run chronologically and causally from the beginning to the end. The incidents have causes and consequences (interdependence of incidents). Oedipus assures his subjects that he will solve their problems by ensuring that the killer of Laius is found and punished. He therefore sends Creon to the oracle to inquire and also sends for the seer, Teiresias. Creon returns with the news that the killer they seek is in their midst. The seer confirms this information and goes a step further out of provocation to accuse Oedipus of being the killer he seeks. The play's special impact derives from its structure as much as from its theme: as a play it demonstrates the potential of irony in drama to convey a deeper meaning, of the separate but related theatrical device of dramatic irony to engage an audience in the unfolding action of the play. Etherton observes that *King Oedipus* is, structurally, an extended experiment in the use of irony and of dramatic irony.

The queen tries to refute the seer's claim and unwittingly tells Oedipus the story of his birth. However, this fact is further revealed as the messenger from Corinth arrives to inform Oedipus of the death of his father. He explains the circumstance that took Oedipus to Corinth. This circumstance is that Oedipus is not the prince of Corinth as he had hitherto believed. The truth is that the Oedipus was given to him by the shepherd who was asked to abandon the baby in the forest to die. He, the messenger, gave the baby to his master who was childless then. Oedipus was then brought up and treated like a prince. Thus the arrival of the messenger provides a basis for revealing the true story. The shepherd corroborated his story and this leads to the resolution of the play. This section of the play is replete with dramatic ironies. It is ironical that the killer which the king seeks is himself. Try to identify other ironies in the play.

The play opens with a search. The first search is for the cause of the plague in Thebes. This leads to the search for a murderer and the search continues until the messenger from Corinth arrives with his news. The information from him and the accusation from the seer lead to another kind of search – the search for an identity. The revelations about the true identity of King Oedipus lead to the resolution of the play.

The plot is also ironic because *Oedipus* sets out to secure peace and tranquillity in his kingdom by tracking the cause of the plague. He realizes that this can only be achieved through the discovery and punishment of the killer of King

Laius. He becomes the killer he is searching for. The major ironic twist in the play is that, it is believed that the discovery of his true identity will lead to the solution of his problems. Unfortunately it becomes the beginning of his problems. It is also expected that the discovery of the murderer he is looking for will end the plague in the land but he leaves the city as a blind man who does not know if the plague ended or not. The play conforms to the Aristotelian plot structure of beginning, middle and end. The irony in the play- as opposed to the dramatic irony increases the complexity of the issue. Everything Oedipus does during this day of self-discovery he does in good faith, including the banishment of his 'wife's' brother Creon and the abuse of the old and blind soothsayer, Tiresias.

Exposition - The play opens with a problem. There is a plague in the land and the people are suffering.

Complication - Creon returns and tells him that the oracle says that the killer is in their midst. There is a conflict. He quarrels with Creon and the seer. The search for his identity introduces more complications. There is also a complicating when Queen Jocasta seeks to reassure her husband and gives him confidence in his own identity the closer she brings boyh Oedipus and herself to an awareness of their true relationship: son and mother.

Climax - The climax begins with the arrival of the messenger from Corinth and culminates in the revelation of his true identity.

Discovery - He discovers his true self and real parents.

Reversal - There is a reversal of fortune as a man who was once a famous king is brought down and expelled from the society he once ruled. The king leaves his city as a wandering blind beggar. In the catastrophe, the Queen hangs herself while the king blinds himself and goes on self-exile. The killer of Laius is found and punished, so the plague is expected to stop. Thus the conflicts are resolved.

3.3.2 Characterisation

The characters are consistent and well-motivated. Oedipus remains resolute and exhibits his bravery and arrogance throughout the play. This aspect of his character is manifested more at the end of the play when he gouges out his eyes. Only a brave man can inflict such pain on himself. Each character's action helps to advance the theme and propel the plot. For instance, the insistence of the king on the search for the killer of the late king sustains the play from the beginning to the end. The chorus is used as a character. However, the chorus speaks in an impersonal way. It therefore does not participate in the action. It makes

statements or comments on man and the forces against him which he cannot understand. Sometimes it thinks aloud as it expresses its fears on a particular issue. A good example is when the messenger from Corinth arrives with the news that Polybus is dead. The chorus is apprehensive and wondered aloud. It feels that if the gods have failed, then the whole system is destroyed. In the end, the gods did not fail. The truth is revealed and the chorus reviews the entire action. The chorus acts as the interpreter of events in the play.

Jocasta is an obedient wife. She obeys her husband as she agrees to hand over her son to be killed. She marries Oedipus apparently in obedience to the laws of the land. She is encountered briefly as she pleads with her husband to stop the search. Her husband refuses to stop the search and she does not confront him, instead she leaves quietly to hang herself. She also motherly affection. She goes on talking about her child that was abandoned on the mountain side to die and about the inaccuracy of prophecy, but Oedipus is no longer listening because something she has said by the way has made him uneasy.

3.3.3 Diction

The language is in verse. It is condensed but accessible. The language is used to delineate characters. For instance, Oedipus speaks with the authority and arrogance of a king. The words are well chosen to reveal both characters and incidents. The Blind Seer also speaks with the authority of someone who possesses some supernatural powers. Other characters speak in simple language as people speaking before their king.

3.3.4 Music

There is an alternation of dialogue and songs. The chorus sings part of its lines and dances in accompaniment of the song. The larger part of the play in which the chorus sings is called the choral song or the strophe. The practice is that as they sing the strophe, they dance. The movement from right to left is called the anti-strophe.

3.3.5 Spectacle

The stylized acting, the costume and make-up, and the dance of the chorus, all contribute to the spectacle of the play.

3.4 The Tragic Hero/Tragic Flaw

Oedipus is a typical classical tragic hero. He is of a noble birth. Even when circumstance would have forced him to the lower class, he leaves Corinth, arrives at Thebes and is made the king.

His tragic flaw is arrogance and irascibility. In arrogance, he decides to outwit the gods by running away from Corinth. In arrogance, he refuses to concede the right of way to king Laus and his men. In arrogance, he challenges both Creon and Teiresias. In arrogance, he refuses to listen to a plea, to stop the quest, from Jocasta. In arrogance he refuses to ask for mercy or any other solution but gouges his eyes and leaves the city.

He is also temperamental which is why he kills King Laus and his men. He also threatens to deal with Creon and Teiresias. He pursues the goal he believes in to its logical conclusion even to the detriment of his life. If Oedipus is proceeding by logical deduction, he cannot logically arrive at the truth on the basis of incorrect evidence. For instance, someone in Corinth tells him he is not his father's son- something instantly denied by his adopted parents. When he goes to the oracle to double check he does not get answer to the question: Am I son of the king of Corinth?

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

- i. What is the thematic concern of *Oedipus Rex*?
- ii. Oedipus is doomed to kill his father and marry his mother.
Discuss.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Oedipus Rex is a good example of an ideal classical play that is still relevant in our own times. It meets the Aristotelean postulations on tragedy. It contains a single integral plot which is presented in one single setting within a very short period of time the linear plot structure. It presents the story of how Oedipus killed his father and married his mother. The setting is in front of the palace. To maintain this single setting, indoor actions and violence are reported. For instance Jocasta's hanging of herself is reported and not presented on stage. Oedipus, the tragic hero, is a king who is not pre-eminently good, virtuous or vicious but he commits an error of judgment. Towards the end of the play, he discovers the truth about himself and his fortune reverses from good to bad. His catastrophe is caused by his tragic flaw which is arrogance.

5.0 SUMMARY

You have seen in this unit, through a study/ reading of *Oedipus Rex*, that man is helpless in the hands of the gods. For those who believe in destiny, this play will be very relevant.

With it one can easily understand the Aristotelean postulations on tragedy. He opines that tragedy should treat a single subject that concerns a hero who must be of noble birth. The tragic hero has a flaw which makes him to commit an error of judgement that leads to his fall. The play must have a beginning, middle and an end. Can you identify them in the play?

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Describe King Oedipus as a tragic hero
2. What is the distinctive feature of the plot of *Oedipus Rex*?

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UNIT 3 *HAMLET* BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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- 2.0 Objection
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 - 3.1 Summary of the Play
 - 3.2 Themes
 - 3.3 Style
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces us to the play of the greatest dramatist in literary history. He is William Shakespeare. He is well respected and his plays are widely read and referred to because of the wisdom they contain. William Shakespeare is an English poet dramatist, an actor, often called the English national poet and considered by many as the greatest dramatist of all time. Shakespeare's early life was spent in Stratford-upon-Avon. He attended a local grammar School. At 18 he married a local girl, Anne Hathaway. By 1584 he had emerged as a rising playwright in London. The exact order in which Shakespeare's plays were produced is not known with certainty. He wrote about 36 plays and numerous poems. He died April 23, 1616. *Hamlet* is one of his tragedies. In fact, it is acclaimed to be one of the best.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Interpret Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as a literary work.
- Be able to discuss the play in terms of content and form.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Summary of the Play

The King of Denmark is killed by his brother, Claudius, who marries the late King's wife within two months of assassinating him. The action of the queen, Gertrude, and her marriage to the brother of her slain husband within a short time

is condemned by everyone. So this action of Claudius confirms the people's opinion that he killed his brother so as to become the king of Denmark and marry his widow. The lawful heir to the throne, Hamlet, is therefore shut out of the throne, which he is entitled to as a matter of right.

The result is that the *Hamlet* is troubled by the ignominy of his mother's marriage and the loss of his father whom he loves so much. His mind is troubled and he develops apathy towards his favourite pastimes like reading of books, sports and princely exercises. What is more worrisome is not even that his throne has been usurped, but that his mother has not treated the memory of his father with respect and has to remarry a murderer within two months of his brutal murder. It is this singular stupid maternal action, much more than ten kingdoms, that dispirited the prince.

He heard rumours that a ghost like the dead father has been sighted by the palace guards for two consecutive nights. And his apprehension increases when he learns that the ghost dresses in the attire worn by the late king and that the outward appearance of the ghost looks sorrowful but that it does not make any speech and disappears when the morning cock crows. He decides to keep watch with the guards. The ghost appears and gives him sign to move to another location with him and Hamlet determines and moves with the spirit while his friends dissuade him to no avail.

At a quiet place, the spirit tells him that he is the ghost of the late king who is murdered in cold blood by Claudius. Indeed, Claudius murders him to inherit his widow and his crown by creeping into his garden in the afternoon when he was asleep and poured a poisonous liquid into his ears, which kills him immediately; thus, he is cut off at once from his crown and his queen by a brother's hand. He therefore urges Hamlet, the young prince, to avenge this cruel murder. Hamlet resolves in his privacy to do the bidding of the ghost. He gives his friends the details of the conversation but asks them to keep it a secret. Hamlet, fearing that the new king may discover his intent and prompting of the ghost, decides to feign madness.

He appears henceforth as a mad man in his speeches, dressing and behaviour. He feigns this madness so masterly and craftily that the king and the queen are deceived into thinking that it is love for Ophelia that is driving him so mad. He writes many love letters to Ophelia, and sends rings to her to cover his pretence of insanity.

He is poised to avenge his father's death. In the process, he kills Polonius, who is sent by Claudius to eavesdrop during the meeting between Hamlet and his mother. Ophelia, his girlfriend who is Polonius' daughter runs mad. Leartes, his brother vows to avenge their father's death.

But the mission is not an easy one because of high security presence around the king. Also, Hamlet is noble-hearted and the murder of a creature makes him sad. He wonders whether the ghost's command is right or wrong. He wants further proof. So, he organizes a play that presents a story that is similar to the account of the ghost about the murder of his late father. This play is presented before the new king in the form of a play-within-the-play.

The king calls for light and develops a sudden sickness and quickly leaves the theatre, and that brings the play to an abrupt end. Hamlet is now convinced. He then tells Horatio that he believes everything the ghost said. Hamlet is later invited to a private meeting by his mother. In the meeting, the mother tells him that his behaviour has troubled them, herself, and his uncle. Meanwhile, Claudius sends Polonius to secretly watch and get the details of the meeting, because he is sure that the queen would not tell him everything that transpired.

But Hamlet confronts his mother and accuses her of living in sin. In the course of accusations and the argument that follows, his mother insists on calling Polonius and is prevented by the prince. She shouts for help and a voice is heard behind the curtain, "Help, the queen!" Hamlet draws his sword and strikes, thinking that it is the king but it is Polonius who dies.

Incidentally, Polonius is Ophelia's father. The shock of his death at the hands of her beloved drives her mad and she dies later. Her brother Leartes, decides to avenge the two deaths. The king seizes the opportunity to use him to kill Hamlet. They agree to kill Hamlet with a poisoned foil during a fencing match to be organized for Leartes and Hamlet. Before the match, the king offers a cup of poisoned wine to Hamlet but he declines. His mother who is not aware of the poison drinks the wine and dies as the match is going on. During the match, the foils are exchanged and both of them are wounded. Hamlet stabs the king with the poisoned foil, and forces him to drink the remaining poisoned wine.

As they all die, Fortinbras comes back from Poland, takes over Denmark and promises to restore peace while Horatio arranges for the burial.

3.2 Themes

The main theme of the play is the "natural streak of evil in nature" of the royal house of Denmark which threatens its existence. This evil in nature taints everything that is good in Denmark, disrupts its equilibrium and brings it to ruin. This sin against nature is manifested in the murder of the late king by his brother, young Hamlet's feigned madness, his mother's hasty marriage to Claudius and the eventual death of Hamlet, Leartes, Claudius and the Queen.

Enclosed in this main theme are the themes of betrayal and revenge. Hamlet feels betrayed by his mother and uncle and that both betrayed his late father. However, his mother's betrayal hurts him more for his father loved his mother so much that even in death he (late king) intercedes for her. Olivia feels betrayed by Hamlet. The entire play revolves around Hamlet's decision and move to revenge his father's death.

3.3 Style

The Shakespearean style used in this tragic play is unique as Hamlet tries to avenge the death of his father, the late king of Denmark who was murdered by his uncle, Claudius. The aftermath or consequences of this venture plunge the entire state into a state of cataclysm. The style and dramatic technique adopted therein are as follows. The play makes use of off-stage report. For instance, the death of Ophelia is reported. It is not shown on the stage. By this, Shakespeare maintains the Ancient Greece's sense of decorum on the stage.

1. Plot/Structure

The play has a linear and casual plot. It is presented in a five-act structure. The action follows a chronological, logical sequence from the beginning to the end except for the interruption for the "Mousetrap". Each action leads to the other and they all contribute to the progress of the entire play. However, there are sub-plots but they are equally essential to the play. All of them depend casually upon each other with their climax coming together to re-inforce each other and their denouement (resolution) is interdependent. The play is hinged on conflicts. These are the struggles or conflicts between Claudius and Hamlet, between Hamlet, Polonius and Learthes, and between Claudius's regime and Fortinbras'. The interesting and unique thing is that they are tightly woven together casually and logically from the beginning to the end.

2. Suspense

Hamlet is one of Shakespeare's best constructed plays. It begins at the Castle of Elsinore in Denmark and its exposition carries one of the greatest suspense in dramatic history. It reveals the present, takes us back to the past (flashback) and also foreshadows the future. The suspense is steady till the end of the play. Hamlet knows that his father's spirit is not happy, but feels that probably he died in sin. This fact leads to his indecision which sustains the suspense throughout the play and also to the anticlimax of the play when he dies eventually.

3. Soliloquy and Aside

Soliloquy is employed to reveal the inner workings of the minds of characters in this play, Shakespeare uses it in its finest form especially in the character of Hamlet. The audience, through this technique, shares in Hamlet's psychological disturbances and the innermost aspects of his character. It helps to reveal Hamlet's character and also serves as a form of significant commentary on the events. The first soliloquy, for instance, reveals Hamlet's predicament.- to be or not to be, to kill or not to kill the king- this is a weighty issue that burden him.

Soliloquy is a very important technique used in this play. Although Hamlet's soliloquies do not represent the greater part of the play, but the main action which is the revenge plot, depends to a great extent on the working out of Hamlet's private mental processes. Almost everything he does or does not do, is the result of one soliloquy or the cause of another. You will notice that when Hamlet stops soliloquizing, when he turns from private thought to definite public action, the play comes quickly to an end.

Aside is a dramatic convention that enables a character to speak to himself or make a comment on the action or speech of another character. That other character is not expected to hear it but others could. Sometimes, an aside is directed to a particular character on another character's speech or action. In the example below, Polonius, in an aside, calls the king's attention to what Hamlet says:

Queen. Come hither, my dear Hamlet, sit by me.
 Ham. No, good mother, here's metal more attractive.
 Pol. [aside to the king] O ho! Do you mark that?
 Ham. [lying at Ophelia's feet] Lady, shall I lie in your lap?(Act 111, Scene11)

4. Play-Within-the-Play

The play-within-play is a short but complete play incorporated into the main play. A good example of this in *Hamlet* is the "Mousetrap" which presents a story that is similar to the way the late king was killed. This is another major device used by the playwright as a searchlight directed to Claudius, to examine his soul and mind. It serves as a point of recognition. Hamlet recognizes his uncle as the murderer of his father, Claudius on his part sees Hamlet as a big threat to him and his kingdom. Therefore, the king determines to eliminate him while Hamlet convinces himself that Claudius is responsible for his father's death vows to kill him.

5. Foreshadow

The appearance of the ghost and the directive it gives to Hamlet foreshadows the tragic catastrophe at the end of the play. Its subsequent appearances help to propel Hamlet to action.

6. Language

The play is written in verse and not in prose. That is poetic language. It is written in blank verse which "...has no end rhyme; its rhythm is particularly suited to drama because it so closely resembles the rhythm of normal English speech" (Introduction to *Hamlet* by A.L. Rowse, p xvii). Like all other Shakespearean tragedies, the play is written in five acts, the hero has a flaw, and there is a use of supernaturals as in the ghost that appears to Hamlet. Shakespeare uses supernatural elements to heighten the conflict in the play. Another [point to note here is the injection of comic relief is seen when Hamlet feigns mad. Shakespeare uses comic relief to alleviate fear and tension in the audience.

7. Setting

The playwright captures the beauty of the environment. It is however a turbulent and fearful environment which symbolically reflects the turbulent state of Hamlet's mind. You see that just as the kingdom of Denmark is about to collapse, Hamlet's consciousness is also on the brink of collapse. The play is set in Denmark. The actions take place mainly in the Castle of Elsinore. It is not easy to locate the historical setting as the play is based on the legend of Hamlet which is found in the folk literature of Iceland and Denmark

8a. Characterization

The characters are round/realistic/multi-dimensional. Hamlet, for instance, grows from innocence and indecision to maturity and takes a definite decision to revenge his father's death. It is difficult to predict his actions. The perfection of character development in this play is reflected in a pattern of events as the characters take over the plot and change as it progresses.

3.4 Character Analysis

Hamlet

He is the tragic hero of the play. He is the son of Queen Gertrude and King Hamlet, murdered by his brother, Claudius. The ship that was to carry him to England to be executed suffered in the hands of the sea-pirates and he sees himself rescued by fate and comes back home to avenge the death of his father in

the hand of (king Claudius) who had planned and executed these evils. The Ghost urges Hamlet to avenge but could not guide him to live to tell the story; rather, the story is relayed to the entire Danish people by Horatio his bosom friend. Ophelia says of Hamlet "What a noble mind is here o'erthrown". Thus Hamlet is noble minded, gentle but dignified. Hamlet is a moralist who condemns his mother's "quick but unthoughtful" second marriage to the king. He also criticizes the king's life of pleasure and debauchery. Hamlet is a philosopher and a deep thinker. He refuses to kill Claudius when he had the opportunity because Claudius was praying at that time, and he feels that Claudius will go to heaven, if he is killed at his prayer moment.

His love of Ophelia is incontestable to the point of jumping into her grave possibly to be buried with her. While Hamlet feigns madness, Ophelia's madness is caused by an emotional turmoil and that of Hamlet a deranged mind occasioned by the tragic death of his father, the late king. Thus, Hamlet and Ophelia share the same experience in this respect. Hamlet is one who can wilt in the face of hardship and difficulties; thus, he contemplates committing suicide when he reflects on the futility of life and the whole melancholic situation that have engulfed him.

Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, is a scholar and is very intelligent and these virtues guide him to escape from the wiles and evil machinations of Claudius. Hamlet feels that, though the Ghost's directives should be followed, there is no need to be credulous and sheepish, rather the advice of the apparition has to be subjected to a test by staging a drama on the theme of murder and seeing how the king will react to it. Hamlet is a good student of drama and he usually quotes easily the lines of plays he has studied.

Claudius, King of Denmark

He murdered his brother, the late king and becomes the king and married his brother's wife. He is a schemer, who knows what he wants and how to get it, but his last plot to kill Hamlet boomeranged and he died in the process. He married Gertrude after eliminating her husband, though he later regrets his actions, but refuses to give up the throne and his illegal wife. He does not seriously atone for his sins but plans complete liquidation of the dynasty of the former king by plotting and executing the death of the Prince. He is a selfish ruler who wastes his kingdom's resources in revelries and drunken orgies. The king is vulgar and coarse-natured and is not a man of the people as one can say of the former king. When Claudius, Gertrude, Laertes and Hamlet die, it is the body of Hamlet that Fortinbras asks to be brought to the foyer and not that of the king. His reign as a king is marked by violence and turbulence because he is a hypocrite who came to power by murdering his brother, the late king. Claudius has the ability to seduce one with smile and cunning.

Queen Gertrude

She is the wife of both the late king and the present one. Her hasty marriage to King Claudius which was condemned by her son, Hamlet, brings out clearly her weakness of character for she lacks the moral strength to say 'no' to evil. She is capricious as she emotionally changes from the grief of her late husband to savour the happiness of her second marriage to Claudius. She is betrayal fellow. No doubt, Gertrude loves her son, Hamlet but does not do much to warrant the return of his love. Many examples abound in the play to show that Gertrude would do everything possible to preserve the love she has for Hamlet. The king for instance sends Polonius to eavesdrop and find out the outcome of the meeting between Gertrude and Hamlet because the king is sure that Gertrude would not disclose to him all that transpired in the meeting.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

- i. What is Hamlet's tragic flaw?
- ii. What is play-within-play?
- iii. What do you understand in the character of Prince Hamlet?

4.0 CONCLUSION

Hamlet remains one of the best tragedies written by Shakespeare. It is full of philosophies about life and living that have timeless relevance. You may have heard people say from time to time, "to be or not to be, that is the question". I hope you have identified where it is in the play and its significance in the dilemmas inherent in the plot of the play. Also, have it in mind that in the play, Shakespeare is trying to explore the frailty of women.

5.0 SUMMARY

Hamlet shows Shakespeare's skill as a playwright and a stage director. It is a remarkable play because of its thematic concern and unique form. The play condemns immorality, murder and vaulting ambition.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Hamlet is a tragic hero. Discuss.

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UNIT 4 DEATH OF A SALESMAN BY ARTHUR MILLER

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Synopsis
 - 3.2 Theme
 - 3.3 Plot
 - 3.4 Characterization
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 - 3.6 Tragic Hero and Tragic Flaw
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit is concerned with the study of a play with a peculiar technique. In the play, Arthur Miller challenged the Aristotelian concept of tragedy. He discarded the notion that tragedy befalls only the people from the upper class of society. He tries to toe another lane aside the conventional side of drama. That is to show you that literature is subjective. It can be approached from any angle. He created the tragedy of the common man through the character of Willy Loman.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify the characteristics of the tragedy of the common man.
- State what makes Willy Loman a tragic hero.
- State what his tragic flaw is.
- Appreciate a complex play.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Synopsis

The play presents the story of Willy Loman, a Salesman. In his younger days he is well-liked and popular, at least he believed so. He struggles to maintain his family. He lives a false life and this affects the way he brings up his children. He talks of the

American Dream but does not live up to it. He inculcates this attitude in his children and they grow up believing to be what they are not. He makes them believe that they are excelling in everything when in actual sense they are not. Biff fails Mathematics and does not retake it. Consequently, he is unable to graduate from high school. The reason for his refusal to retake the subject is known only to him and his father (he met his father with a prostitute in a hotel room shortly before the exams) as shown in one of the flashbacks. Consequently, he is demoralized and despises his father. He is not qualified for any profession. To make matters worse, he steals himself out of every opportunity he has for employment. Yet, his father refuses to acknowledge these facts and flatters and encourages him to aspire to greater heights when it is clear that he is not qualified for those higher positions.

Linda, Loman's wife, knows that her husband is living a false life but refuses to confront him in order not to deflate his ego which is very important to him as a man. She tries to manage whatever her husband provides for her without complaint. She mends her old stockings always. So when Biff meets a woman with new stockings given to her by his father, he hated his father and carries this hatred throughout the play.

Willy Loman works in a company as a salesman for thirty years. Unfortunately, he is sacked when the company feels that he is no longer productive due to old age. He is not compensated adequately so he could not take care of himself in retirement and old age. His children are loafers so they cannot take care of him. He still does not realize that he cannot sell the way he used to sell and that he is not well-liked. He goes to his old customers but tragically nobody notices him. He goes back to the company but his new boss, (the son of his old boss) prefers to listen to machine instead of to Loman.

Loman does not show good example to his children. He refuses to tell his wife that he lost his job and continues borrowing money to keep his family and could leave any positive legacy for them. They grow up as failures while he gets frustrated. He breaks down physically, emotionally and psychologically. He talks to himself more often. Suicide becomes inevitable. He attempts to take his life in the house but Linda unobtrusively prevents it. Later, he dies in an accident in his car. It is believed that he killed himself deliberately and made it look like an accident. His funeral is very solemn and only members of his family and one of his friends and son are present.

3.2 Theme

The theme of the play is misplaced priorities. The play makes a crucial statement on the economic situation in the then American society where the social security was grossly inadequate. It was a society that had no retirement provision for the working class. The play highlights the situation in society where industries use and dump their employees and leave them with nothing to fall back on when they

retire. This play is said to have influenced the industrial revolution in America. In fact, it is believed that the entire American industrial sector was reorganized after the production of the play. Loman spends the greater part of his life working as a salesman in a company and he is discarded like an orange peel when he is no longer active. Miller, in this play suggests that establishments should make provisions for their staff to be comfortable in their later years.

A man should, as much as possible, be realistic with himself and the world around him. Willy Loman looks forward to his funeral which will be attended by many people because according to him he is well- liked. Ironically, only members of his family plus his steadfast friend Charley with his son, Bernard, attended the funeral.

The play shows that there is no short-cut to survival especially in the case of dignity. Willy Loman lives a life of falsehood and believes in the lies he tells his children and himself. Consequently, he fails as a professional, as a father, and as a husband. He refuses to heed Charley's advice. Loman spends his life fighting for dignity, recognition, self- worth and against being reduced to the level of an imbecile in his capitalist society and ends up committing suicide.

3.3 Plot

This play has a peculiar plot structure. Although the present events in the play run chronologically and sequentially from the beginning to the end, there are interruptions from thoughts in Loman's head.

The action of the play covers Loman's experiences one late evening through to the next day. However, these events are interwoven with the events in the past which sometimes overlap with the present. In some cases, he talks to a character in the present in one line and in the next line he talks to another character from the past.

Miller uses the expressionistic technique to achieve this in such a way that the illusion of reality is not destroyed. He uses this technique to superimpose Willy's consciousness in the play. He realizes the difficulties inherent in this type of technique which is easily realizable in the novel where the novelist has the time and space to describe clearly what goes on in a character's head. Miller overcomes this handicap through detailed stage directions throughout the play. One of the important ones is that at the beginning of the play, where there is a dual setting. The elevations and their specifications are given in details in the stage direction. He also mentions specifically that the apron should serve as the locale for Willy's imaginings and of the city scenes involving Loman.

You will observe that these events in his head are not presented chronologically as in flashbacks but as the need for each recollection arises in relation to the action of the play.

3.4 Characterization

Miller utilizes realistic characters. You can feel Willy Loman's frustrations and fears as he struggles through life. The playwright has been able to create the right characters to dramatize his story. He creates Charley as a foil to Willy. Charley is more realistic and cool headed. He realizes the need for industry and inculcates same in his son, Bernard. Consequently, while Bernard succeeds in life, Loman's sons fail because they got the wrong values from their father. Willy deceives himself, tells lies to himself, his wife, his friend and his wife. His children continue with the same self-deceit and lies. They know that they are deceiving themselves but seem incapacitated in confronting themselves with the truth or in making an effort to change their wrong attitudes. However, Biff who is more rational realizes it and faces himself after his encounter with Oliver:

Biff: [*breathlessly*] I did a terrible thing today, Hap. It's been the strangest day I ever went through. I'm all numb, I swear.

Happy: You mean he wouldn't see you?

Biff: Well, I waited six hours for him, see? All day. Kept sending my name in. Even tried to date his secretary so she'd get me to him, but no soap.

Happy: Because you're not showin' the old confidence, Biff. He remembered you?

Biff: [*stopping Happy with a gesture*]: Finally, about five o' clock, he comes out. Didn't remember who I was or anything. I felt like such an idiot, Hap.

Happy: Did you tell him about my Florida idea?

Biff: He walked away. I saw him for one minute. I got so mad I could have torn the walls down! How the hell did I get the idea I was a salesman there? I even believed myself that I've been a salesman for him! And then he gave me one look and – I realized what a ridiculous lie my whole life has been. We've been living in a dream for fifteen years. I was a shipping clerk.

(82)

Eventually, he confronts his father with the truth as he insists that he never got anywhere because his father made him to be so arrogant that he could not stand take orders from anybody (104). His brother Happy continues with his life of illusion.

Linda is presented as an understanding wife. She supports her husband and makes him feel wanted. She encourages her children in vain to do the same. She loves her husband so much that he does not want their children to hurt him. She knows that her husband is living in a dream world but does not confront him with the truth so as not to deflate his ego even when she finds out that he attempted suicide. The creation of Linda as a devoted wife is deliberate because it will not be proper for everybody in the family to abandon him.

The playwright's dramatic incursions into the mind of Willy Loman give us an insight into his mental state at any given time. Miller presents these images from his mind and superimposes them on the present action. In spite of this montage, Miller is able to structure the play in such a way that Willy comes out as a realistic sane man and not as a lunatic who talks to himself.

3.5 Language

There is no effort by the playwright to use an elevated poetic language characteristic of classical tragedy. He uses the everyday language of the contemporary man. It seems to have commonized the message the author wants to pass across to the audience. Consequently, slang and other forms of language are used freely as can be seen in this conversation between Willy and Howard.

Howard: Yeah, but Willy, see I...

Willy: I tell ya why, Howard. The kids are all grown up, y'know. I dn't need much money any more. If I could take home -well, sixty-five dollars a week, I could swing it....

Howard: I appreciate that, Willy, but there just isn't a spot here for you. If I had a spot, I'd slam you right in, but I just don't have a single solitary spot... it's business, kid, and everybody's gotta pull his own weight. (62)

Music is used to enhance the mood and define locale sometimes. For instance the music from the flute helps to highlight Loman's solitary funeral and the solemnity of the occasion at the end of the play.

3.6 Tragic Hero and Tragic Flaw

Usually, a hero is associated with noble deeds but Loman is an unsuccessful salesman; what then qualifies him as a hero? In the portrayal of this character, the playwright calls for a redefinition of tragedy and tragic hero in modern times. According to him, since kings and princes are no longer available, tragedy should be based on the heart and spirit of the common man. He therefore created Loman in his daily struggles to earn a living as every other man in the society. He is not a character of high social status but he struggles to maintain his family. Despite the obstacles, he tries to secure his rightful position in the society, at least to maintain his conceived image of himself. In this struggle, he is willing to throw in all that he has into the contest and this makes him a hero. He pursues his set goal to its logical conclusion even to the extent of losing his life.

Tragedy is the consequence of a man's compulsion to evaluate himself justly and the action reveals a tragic flaw in the tragic hero. This failing, according to Miller, is not peculiar to noble characters alone. This flaw is usually as a result of inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, to the image of his rightful status. So, a common man who is ready to lay down his life to secure his sense of personal dignity is also a tragic hero.

Loman is neither too vicious nor too virtuous. He is a hero because of his brave attempt to confront negative forces entrenched in the capitalist society. This society discards him like an orange peel once he is no longer strong and useful to the society. The society at this point no longer regards him as a man. However, he does not relent but fights on till the end.

We do not blame society entirely for his failure. He has his own fault which is his tragic flaw. He is a dreamer, so optimistic. He refuses to face reality and keeps on believing that he is well-liked by everybody. Unfortunately, he dies and is buried as Mr. Nobody.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Discuss the unique nature of the plot of the play.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Arthur Miller's major contribution to modern drama is his elevation of the common man to the status of a tragic hero. This is a deviation from the earlier conventions of drawing the hero from the noble class. The hero's fate is no longer determined by his personality.

5.0 SUMMARY

This play shows clearly in practical terms that drama is not for entertainment alone but it is used also as a tool for social change in the society. To achieve this aim, the playwright uses everyday language to make it accessible to a wider audience.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

What is the tragedy of the common man?

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MODULE 5 TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Unit 1	Song of a Goat by J. P. Clark
Unit 2	Arms and the Man by George Bernard Shaw
Unit 3	<i>The Marriage of Anansewa</i> by Efua Sutherland
Unit 4	The Lion and the Jewel by Wole Soyinka

UNIT 1 *SONG OF A GOAT BY J.P CLARK***CONTENTS**

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5.0	Summary
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7.0	References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we introduce you to a Nigerian play with a familiar background. You should get a copy of the play, read it before studying this unit. At the end of this unit, you should be able to compare and contrast King Oedipus and Zifa as tragic heroes.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify why *song of a goat* could be regarded as a classical tragedy.
- discuss the major themes of *song of a goat*
- draw character sketches of the main characters in the play.
- discuss the language used in the play.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Summary of the Play

In the play, Zifa, the major character in the play is sexually impotent. In addition to that, he bears the burden of a family curse. His aunt, Orukorere, has the gift of prophecy and foretells the tragic consequences of Zifa's burden of impotence and the family curse. Zifa's wife, Ebiere, goes to the Masseur for help and he tells her that an empty house (her womb) is dangerous because if men will not use it, bats or grass will. The encounter with the Masseur establishes Zifa's impotence by indirection. This perhaps, leads her to take a lover.

Ebiere, takes as her lover Zifa's younger brother, Tonye. She becomes pregnant. Unfortunately, Zifa discovers her infidelity. In a proud rage, he ritually slaughters a goat and asks Tonye to put the head of the goat into a pot that is too small for it. When the pot breaks, the symbolism of Tonye's adultery is complete which indicts his brother and his wife and their illicit relationship.

Tonye could not bear the shame and the consequences of his action so he hangs himself instead of waiting for Zifa to kill him. Ebiere collapses. Zifa walks down to the sea, apparently to drown himself. The play does not state specifically what happens to Ebiere, Dode and Orukorere. Ebiere suffers a miscarriage. The important issue is that the people of Deinogbo survive the loss. The catharsis in the play is highlighted. The people learn to bear their lives, maybe more stoically after the example of the fall of Zifa's household as a messenger describes his suicidal walk into the sea.

3.2 Theme

1. Impotence

The reason for most marriages in all the countries of the world is for child-bearing. In this part of the world, child-bearing is the major thing that identifies one as a fully-fledged man or woman. Society casts aspersions on such a man who cannot pregnant a woman or a woman who cannot carry a foetus in her womb. Children are therefore of a great importance in marriage. A family is not considered complete without a child. This is more so in African societies where a marriage is basically for bearing children and bringing them up.

In Deinogbo, where the play is set, impotence has great social significance because children are major proofs of a man's substance, wealth, and prestige. Economically, children form part of the labour force in the family. So, the increase in potential labour carries with it social rewards. Children help to ensure the survival of the family and its perpetuation from one generation to another. They also promise

the ancestors future sacrifice and thus enhance the spiritual life of the community. It means, therefore, that failure to have children robs the living and the dead of their increase and honour.

In this community, children are so necessary that the impotent man will usually find a surrogate to father his children, since the children of his wives are part of his own household. He can choose a trusted friend or a brother.

However, in the case of a younger brother, a ceremonial propitiation is required of them because it might be unacceptable to the ancestors. Among other things needed for this ceremony is the blood of a goat.

It is believed that male impotence upsets the social order and lies outside the presumed natural order. Zifa refuses to accept the reality and seeks solution to his problem and this contributes to the catastrophe that ends the play.

2. Infertility

Infertility, like impotence is seen as an anathema. Infertile wives are treated with contempt. They are usually not happy. This explains why Ebriere has “grown very queer of late”. She seeks a solution to end her supposed infertility. In desperation to prove that she has an affair with her brother-in-law without the recommended ceremonial appeasement of the ancestors. Her actions depict the extent infertility can take one in this African continent.

3. Curse

Zifa inherits a family curse but the playwright is vague about its antecedents. The curse affected Orukorere and Zifa’s father. The former became the bride of the sea while the latter dies of leprosy and apparently, Zifa buried him instead of depositing the corpse in the evil grove. Thus, he commits a crime against the gods and the land. The gods do not forgive without compensation and Zifa is not willing to carry out the propitiation ceremony that involves a goat. It appears, therefore, that the curse is the cause of Zifa’s impotence.

3.3 Setting

The play is set in Deinogbo, an Ijaw town in the Niger-Delta area of Nigeria. It is a town located by the sea-side in the colonial period.

3.4 Language

The language of the play is poetic. However, Clark has been able to capture the nuances of the Ijaw language. The dramatic dialogue is constant in its allusion to the circumstances of mode of life in the Delta communities of southern Nigeria.

He uses proverbs and riddles freely in the play. The riddle is a verbal entertainment in Ijawland. Clark has been able to use riddle not for mere entertainment but as a vehicle of communication of ideas that are too sensitive for direct speech. The images used in both the riddles and other aspects of the dialogue are drawn from the playwright's background – the Ijaw world. The effectiveness of the device derives from the fact that the playwright is consistent in his use of imagery. A very good example is the imagery of 'house' used for Ebiere's womb and love-making.

MASSEUR: An empty house my daughter is a thing/of danger...

EBIERE: It is not my fault. I keep my house/Open by night and day!

But my lord will not come in ...why? Who bars him?...

My house has its door open I said ... Masseur ...

MASSEUR: Has he a house elsewhere?

3.4 Chorus

The neighbours are used as chorus. They make comments on the events of the play and make some philosophical statements about life and living. Clarks borrows this trend from some classical plays like Oedipus Rex by Sophocles.

3.4 Characterization

Zifa

Zifa is the tragic hero of the play. He conforms to the standard of the classical tragic hero. He is a notable man in the community. He has a tragic flaw, pride, which causes him to commit an error of judgment that leads to catastrophe.

He is impotent and also bears a family curse. He arrogantly refuses to acknowledge his impotence. Consequently, he refuses to carry out the ritual that will help to solve his problem. He rejects the Masseur's suggestion that he allows another man to assume the role of husband to Ebiere. In his pride, he defies the tradition in respect of his father's second burial and on the ceremony of the goat. In this process, he insults the gods.

Zifa has for years neglected the gods. Orukorere has been urging him to perform the propitiation ritual, but he does not pay any attention to her. However, as soon as he discovers that Tonye impregnated Ebiere, he performs the sacrifice. Unfortunately, it is not done in a proper manner despite the warnings from Orukorere.

He performs the sacrifice without ritual cleansing. He slaughters the goat, splashes the blood and insists that it should cleanse the compound immediately.

He is rash in taking decisions. He resolves to kill his brother as soon as he discovers that he was having an affair with his wife. However, he does not carry out this threat because Tonye courageously hangs himself instead of waiting for his brother to kill him.

Ebiere

Ebiere is a beautiful woman. She is a dutiful wife and a loving mother. She is considered infertile so she goes to find out the cause and seek solution to it. The Masseur assures her of her good state of health and suggests an affair between her and another man. She accepts the suggestion and becomes pregnant for her brother-in-law. Unfortunately, her husband discovers and threatens to kill his brother. She faints at the end of the play.

Orukorere

Orukorere is Zifa's aunt. She has the gift of prophecy but she fluctuates between madness and sanity. She is said to be chosen by the sea-god, so would not get married. Her words are, in most cases, philosophical. Her role, apart from being Zifa's aunt is confusing. Dode calls her mother and calls Ebiere by her given name. It is not clear, therefore, if Dode is really (biologically) her son.

Masseur

Masseur is a very important character in the play. He plays the role of choral leader. However, in this play, he also plays his role as a healer. Women who fail to bear children consult him. He massages the women to correct any default in their reproductive organs. His successes or failures are manifested by whether a massaged woman gets pregnant or not.

He also acts as a confidant. He knows the secrets of many members of the community but does not divulge them.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

- i. Discuss Zifa's tragic flaw?
- ii. What is his error of judgment?

4.0 CONCLUSION

J.P Clark is one of Nigeria's foremost playwrights. In *Song of a Goat* he constructs a classical tragic play. He presents characters that are life-like who operate naturally in their traditional environment. He captures the Ijaw speech pattern perfectly and still presents them in correct English expressions. The play is accessible and contemporary.

5.0 SUMMARY

Clark presents in this play the story of a man who is so obsessed by pride that he destroys himself and his entire household. From this you have learnt to heed positive and progressive advice.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the theme of impotence in the play.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 2 ARMS AND THE MAN BY GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This work brings us to the study of comedy in a text. We have decided to use George Bernard Shaw's play because he is one of the greatest playwrights of the modern period. His themes have timeless relevance. This play is considered unique because of the way the playwright trivialized war which is a very serious issue.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

Appreciate Shaw's *Arms and the Man* as a literary work. Discuss the thematic interests and the techniques of the play.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Plot

The play has a straight forward and simple plot that starts from the beginning and moves swiftly to the end. It follows rigidly, the conventions of Aristotelian plot structure. It has no flashback or sub- plots. The plot is simply divided into three acts. The events of the play span about five months; it begins in November 1885 and ends in March 1886. Shaw uses dates and known towns and countries to establish the historical mode of the play.

As we know, the structuring of events in sequence is a plot. The play begins with Raina's reveries, of how Sergius, led a victorious cavalry charge against the enemy. Meanwhile, the Serbian forces who were defeated are on the run chased by the Bulgarians. One of the fugitives, Captain Bluntschli, runs into Raina's bedroom and she protects him when the search party came in. Bluntschli prefers chocolate to bullets when he is at the war front. He tells Raina that Sergius and his cavalry charge succeeded because someone forgot to supply ammunition to the Serbs at the appropriate time. The captain's life is saved as he leaves in disguise, wearing Major Petkoff's coat. (This revelation was made towards the end of the play, when Bluntschli returns the coat to Raina and her mother).

The war ends, Raina's father, Major Petkoff, returns home with Sergius, the hero, to recount the story of a certain Swiss officer who impeded them at the exchange of prisoners. This officer, according to them, escaped death by chance as a certain girl and her mother protected him. Meanwhile, contrary to expectations, Sergius is attracted to Raina's maid, Louka. Unexpectedly, Captain Bluntschli arrives to return the coat which Raina and her mother lent him.

He is the Swiss Officer talked about. So the men give him a rousing welcome while the women pretend that they do not know him. However, he is persuaded to stay for lunch. After the lunch, he helps Serguis and Petkoff in their arrangement to demoblise the military formation with ease. Raina who, right from the first day she met Bluntschli, had romantic ideas about him to the extent of sending her a picture and calls him her chocolate cream soldiers, develops stronger feelings towards him. However, she still feels obliged to go on with Sergius. On the other hand, Louka who has fallen in love with Serguis, informs him that Raina is in love with Bluntschli. Sergius accuses Raina of making love to Bluntschli while Raina accuses him of doing same to Louka. The crisis is resolved as Bluntschli proposes to marry Raina. Her parents are happy. Sergius accepts to marry Louka.

3.2 Themes of the Play

The Futility of War

The play is a satire on war. It is a deflation of military glory and a brazen onslaught on falsehood, and pretence. It is an exposition of all military authentic claims of bravery and heroism. In short, Shaw is saying in the play that warfare is criminal and bad and should not be seen as a mark of progress, achievement or of national greatness. This explains why a soldier who should be trigger - happy, is content with and settles for his chocolate in a serious life-and-death situation which the war represents.

Love and Marriage

The second theme of the play is marriage. Shaw is of the view that marriage is a union between a man and a woman which should be built on concrete traits of their character and not on illusions and fantasies. He feels that marriage is good and should be encouraged. The primary decision of Raina to marry Sergius is based on the illusion that Sergius is a war hero whom she could be proud of anytime, and anywhere. Raina declares that her fiancé Sergius, is “just as splendid and noble as he looks, that the world is really a glorious world for women who can see its glory and men who can act its romance”. The same fantasy leads her to take Sergius’ portrait and address it while on her bed in the night and say, “My hero, my hero”. The same emotion governs her parent’s choice of partner in marriage for her. This is simply because they discovered that Bluntschli inherited a lot of wealth from his late father.

3.3 Setting

The play has both physical and historical settings. It is set in Bulgaria of 1885 when Prince Alexander I of Bulgaria revolted against the Serbs and refused to pay compensation. The Serbs declared war against them but were defeated in the Battle of Slivinitza. Austrian officers fought with the Serbs while Russian officers led the Bulgarian army. Swiss mercenaries (professional soldiers who are hired during wars) fought on both sides. Captain Bluntschli fought on the Serbian side but when he met Raina, he wished he “had joined the Bulgarian army instead of the other one”.

Captain Bluntschli exemplified the Swiss mercenaries in the play. All the actions of the play take place in Major Petkoff’s house - Raina’s bedroom, their library and their garden.

3.4 Language

The language of the play is simple, straightforward and direct. It is devoid of flamboyant imagery and symbolism. The dialogue is true to life and appropriate. All these enhance an easy understanding of the play. However, Shaw made extensive use of humour and ironies in the play.

In the play there is an extensive use of imagery. The imagery help to create a mental picture of all the wars fought and won (real war and romance) to the reader. The language is simple, this makes it easy for the reader to read and understand it.

3.5 Humour and Ridicule

The play presents an extravagant exhibition of humour. It is ridiculous that a soldier

should prefer chocolates to his gun to the extent that he is nicknamed “chocolate cream soldier”. See also, the way Captain Bluntschli attacks the chocolate box and licks his fingers.

And that the Petkoffs should conclude among themselves that they are superior to their neighbours simply because of the mere possession of a library and an electric bell. The scene when the Captain returns and Raina and Catherine pretend not to know him and the eventual discovery of the truth are some of the scenes that provoke humor.

The accepted views of heroism and nobility are also ridiculed in the play. Raina and Sergius are the main targets here.

3.6 Dramatic Irony

It is ironic that a soldier, Sergius, who has learnt the horrors of war and becomes so worn out that he declares that “soldiering...is the coward’s art of attacking mercilessly when you are strong and keeping out of harm’s way when you are weak,” is treated and regarded as a hero by Raina. It is also an irony of situation that “Raina’s chocolate cream soldier” whom she sheltered from the ravages and wreckage of war, eventually marries her, regardless of her avowed expectations to marry her fiancé, Sergius, and her day-dreams of striking a lasting companionship with her childhood hero.

3.7 Stage Direction

The playwright uses elaborate and detailed stage directions. These help to enhance the mental picture of the reader, as plays “are meant to be performed not read”. Thus, those who do not have the opportunity to watch the real performance can watch it with their minds’ eyes. These stage directions also help to give insights into the characters hence he describes Catherine Petkoff as “...imperiously energetic...a very splendid specimen of the wife of a mountain farmer, but determined to be a Viennese lady...”(16).

3.8 Characterisation

Shaw presents well-developed characters who are consistent and properly motivated. Each character acts consistently from the beginning to the end; for instance, Raina and Sergius remain romantic throughout, Bluntschli maintains his unperturbed and unpretentious pose throughout. Shaw also uses characters to foster his theme. For example, Louka maintains her derogatory attitude towards Raina and even the entire household. Her attitude questions the issue of social status in the society.

Raina Petkoff

Raina is a beautiful young lady. She is twenty three years old but behaves like a school girl of seventeen, perhaps because as an only child of her parents, they pampered and spoilt her. To her mother she is still a child and her father calls her 'little one'. (p. 78). Her parents are rich, so she is accustomed to very comfortable establishments like going to Bucharest every year for the opera session and spending a whole month in Vienna.

She is very romantic, and appreciates beauty as she is seen in the opening scene; intensely conscious of the romantic beauty of the night, she has heroic ideas about love and marriage. Though she does not really love Sergius, she wants to marry him because of his heroic qualities. However, the marriage does not work out and she agrees to marry her chocolate cream soldier, another hero. Raina is generous, hospitable, compassionate and impulsive. These aspects of her character come out clearly in her relationship with Bluntschli. It is on impulse that she decides to hide him from the Bulgarian soldiers; she takes pity on him and calls in her mother to help save his life. As Bluntschli notes later, she had accepted him as a fugitive, a beggar and starving man, her hand to kiss, her bed to sleep on, her roof to shelter him (83). Above all she offered him chocolate.

Despite the above sterling attributes, Raina tells lies and pretends a lot. Her pretentious character is made manifest especially in her relationship with Sergius. Both of them played roles expected of people who are in love while in the real sense, neither cared deeply for the other. Her pretence is found out by Bluntschli who is a practical man. Her mother also is aware of this aspect of her character for she once acclaimed "Oh Raina! Raina! Will anything ever make you straightforward"(511). She, however, shows that she could be natural and sincere when she is in a congenial company. She told her mother the truth about how she felt about Sergius and declared that she did not "care whether he finds out her chocolate cream soldier or not" (51).

Catherine Petkoff

Catherine is Raina's mother and is very fond of her only child. She is well "over forty, imperiously energetic, with magnificent black eyes" (16). She makes effort to live like a wealthy woman by "wearing fashionable tea gown on all occasions" (16). She is determined to live like a modern aristocrat everyday despite the fact that it gives her sore throats.

Her husband observes that she goes "... too far with these modern customs ... Carrying the things to a ridiculous extent" (39). She also likes showing off her modern acquisitions and social status as is clearly shown in her pride at owning a library and an electric bell.

She is domineering and rules the Petkoff household. Her husband takes instruction from her even in official state matters. She is fully involved in the political affairs of the country and is respected and feared more than her husband. Her husband confirms this as he prepares to go and give orders on the demobilization exercise when he said "...Catherine, you may as well come too. They'll be far more frightened of you than of me"(60). She is ostentatious and materialistic. She encourages her daughter to marry Sergius who she believes is a hero and also rich but changes her mind as soon as she realizes that Bluntschli is richer than Sergius.

Major Petkoff

Major Petkoff is an amiable easy-going man. Though he is a major he is not knowledgeable in military strategy and organization, so one can easily conclude that he does not merit his rank but earned it because of his social status in the town.

That he is not even interested in politics is evident from one of the important questions he asked his wife as soon as he came back from the war: "You haven't been campaigning". For him the best thing in the world is for them to sit down in their house "after a good lunch, with nothing to do but enjoy ourselves" (58).

He is complacent and is ruled by his wife. In fact, he is afraid of his wife and takes instruction from her most of the time. He is content to have others do his work for him.

He loves his only daughter and pets her. He is gullible as he is deceived by his wife and daughter when Bluntschli arrives in the house. He is also materialistic and wanted his daughter to marry a rich man because according to him, she is "accustomed to very comfortable establishments" (83).

In conclusion, he is, as the playwright puts it, "a cheerful, excitable, insignificant, unpolished man of about 80, naturally unambitious" (37). He is not interested in modern way of life. His wife describes him as a "barbarian at heart" (39), but he is not bothered, and prefers to shout to call his servant instead of using the electric bell.

Major Sergius Saranoff

Sergius is a tall handsome man. He is rich in their local estimation, as he owns twenty horses. He is Raina's romantic hero. Like major Petkoff, he is not well versed in military strategy and organization. He allows Bluntschli to map out their disengagement strategies and proudly appends his signature. This is why he led a suicide squad in the name of a cavalry charge. He escaped with his life because the enemies had the wrong ammunition. He does not admit his error instead he is cynical about their Russian officers who he said have been promoted while he is "...still a simple major" (41).

This shows that he is arrogant and selfish. He wants to be promoted to a higher rank despite the blunder he committed at the war front. He resigns because he was not promoted. He claims that he never apologises when he offends anyone. He does not consider anybody's feelings as long as he gets what he wants.

He is crafty and dishonest as seen in her relationship with Raina. He pretends to love her while in actual sense he does not, but flirts with her maid, Louka. He honors his words in the end by proposing to marry Louka.

He is boastful, impulsive and proud. He challenges Bluntschli to a duel when he learnt that Raina had an affair with Sergius, according to him "I brook no rival". However, he is a coward and the fight did not take place eventually.

Louka

Louka is a maid in the Petkoff's household. She is not contented with being a maid and hopes to get out of that situation. She is ambitious and realizes this ambition of not remaining a maid for the rest of her life when she accepts the proposal to marry Sergius. Nicolas describes her as having "a soul above her station" (80)

She is proud, self-righteous and contemptuous of her employers. She feels that there is really nothing spectacular about nobility. Her contempt for them is as a result of the fact that she had seen or known some of their illicit affairs. She also feels that she could use what she knew about them to blackmail them into not harming her. Hear her "I know some family secrets they wouldn't care to have told me as young as I am. Let them dare quarrel with me" (36).

She is fearless, strong willed, impudent and vicious. She believes that the end justifies the means. She goes to any length to get what she wants even if it means to malign another person just like she did to Raina. She blackmailed Sergius into the marriage proposal he made to her. She is a gossip. It is true that Raina and Sergius do not really love each other, Louka's gossip facilitated the break up and Sergius settled for her instead of Raina. When she was caught eavesdropping on Bluntschli, Sergius and Raina, she stood her ground and declared unabashedly, "My love was at stake. I am not ashamed" (77). She is very courageous and is the only person who deflates Sergius arrogance by forcing him to apologise to her publicly.

Nicola

Nicola is a good servant who is obedient and loyal. He is ambitious in his own way, he hopes to open shop at Sofia and would still need his employer's patronage. He therefore, does not want to lose that patronage by being disobedient. He is complacent and is contented to be used to avoid trouble in the household. For instance, he accepted spoiling the cake pudding in order to cover his mistress' secret.

He is respectful, principled and faithful. He respects his superiors and does not interfere or intrude in their affairs or conversation like Louka does. Despite Louka's insults, he remains faithful to her and tries to educate her on the realities of life. He does not talk about the family secrets of the Petkoffs. He is more experienced than Louka and realizes that if he fell out with the Petkoffs, they could make life miserable for him in the end. This explains his words to Louka: "You don't know the power such high people have over you and me when we try to rise out of our poverty against them" (36).

He has served the Petkoffs faithfully for ten years and is not prepared to jeopardize his benefits for any reason. He is a noble gentleman despite the fact that he is a servant. Bluntschli describes him as "the ablest man I've met in Bulgaria" (80).

Bluntschli

Bluntschli is a Swiss mercenary who fought on the side of the Serbs during the Serbian- Bulgarian war. He abandoned a comfortable life in his father's business to become a mercenary. Though he claims that he carries chocolates instead of ammunition, he is a fine and competent soldier to the core.

He is very smart and practical. He makes the best use of every opportunity he gets; when he entered Raina's bedroom, he used her cloak to prevent her from opening the door to call for help. However, on a second thought he gave it up, and made her believe that he will not surrender easily to the Bulgarian soldiers as he will not to allow them burst into"... this pretty room of yours and slaughter me here like a pig, for I'll fight like a demon... are you prepared to receive that sort of company in your present undress" (21).

He is an intelligent soldier who knows all the tactics, strategies and organisation of the army, soldering and war. He informs Raina of the military blunder which Sergius committed and maintained that in an ideal situation "he (Sergius) ought to be court-martialled".

He also realizes the futility of war. This explains why he fights it dispassionately. As a mercenary, he is not patriotic but is just concerned with his fees. No wonder, he carries chocolates instead of bullets. He is humble, modest and adjusts easily to any situation. Those attributes are obvious during his second visit to the Petkoffs. He sensed the ladies' confusion on seeing him and decides to play along with them. However, at the moment of decision when the picture was found, the practical and natural aspect of him took over, He shows his military efficiency and organizational skills in the way he handles the demobilization exercise for Major Petkoff and Sergius. As a humble and modest man, he does not brag about it, instead, he allows Sergius to append his signature and Petkoff to go and give the orders. So both of them take the glory for the work he actually did.

He is not a man of many words but believes that action speaks more. When Sergius challenges him to a duel, he does not ask for the reason for the fight but simply assures him that there "...shall be no mistake about the cartridges this time" (72). Also, when he realizes that Raina was free to marry him, he proposes immediately. Finally, he is truthful and asks Raina to be truthful and natural with him. He is also a good businessman for he does not allow marriage plans to disrupt the business he had at hand.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

- i. List and discuss the themes in *Arms and the Man*.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Arms and the Man presents to us the pretensions and weakness of the upper and noble class. It also shows that nobility does not guarantee intelligence. Shaw highlights this by making Louka, the maid more intelligent than her master and mistress. She uplifts her life as she outwits and makes fun of them.

5.0 SUMMARY

You have seen in this unit, in practical terms, how comedy is used to ridicule men in society. It shows that while we laugh at the follies of characters like Catherine, Sergius and Raina, we try to realize and avoid such weaknesses in our lives.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Write a short note on the futility of war.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 3 THE MARRIAGE OF ANANSEWA BY EFUA T. SUTHERLAND

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to another text in comedy. We have decided to use an African text written by a woman. You may have noticed that we have been using the male instances throughout the book wherever we refer to scholars, critics, or a playwright just for convenience and not because we do not have female scholars and playwrights.

In *Marriage of Anansewa*, Efua Sutherland develops the Akan art of story-telling called Anansesem (Ananse stories). The play is a folklore based on the exploits of Ananse (spider). In different countries, people have their own legendary animal around which so many tales (exploits) are woven. These animals like tortoise, ram, and fox and so on get involved in very difficult and intricate situations but escape unhurt or triumph in the end through a cunning way. Many of these stories/fables are didactic while some of them are just for mere entertainment.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- Appreciate another African play; and
- Identify more dramatic techniques that are used because of the Background of the playwright.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Plot

The play tells a story of how Ananse, a wretched poor man gets rich through cunning and fraudulent means. Ananse has an only daughter called Anansewa who is a student of E. P. Secretarial School. He is so poor that he cannot pay her school fees. She was driven from school and has stayed at home for about two weeks.

He devices means of paying his daughter's school fees and feeding himself. He gets completely out of poverty. In his plan, he visits four Chiefs and promises to give each of them his only daughter Anansewa in marriage. He returns from the trip and dictates letters to the Chiefs, assuring them that their discussion on the 'object of their interest' is still as planned. Anansewa types the letters, oblivious of the fact that she is the object being referred to in the letter.

However, when she realizes that the letters are for choosing a husband for her, she protests. She feels that her father wants to "sell her like some parcel to a customer"(11). However, her father convinces her of the necessity of such plan. He arouses her interest in one of the Chiefs, Chief Who-is-Chief, whom he describes as "finely built, glowing black, large eyed, handsome as anything, courageous and famous"(12). In addition, the Chief has already given Ananse some money with which to pay Anansewa's school fees. Consequently, Anansewa becomes interested and actually falls in love with this Chief. Ananse receives gifts from all the Chiefs, he improves his lifestyle considerably, renovates his house and buys new clothes. They are all interested in marrying Anansewa. Ananse is in a fix. He decides that Anansewa should "die". He invites his mother (Aya) his aunt (Ekuwa) and Christie to outdoor ceremony for Anansewa.

This ceremony is cut short to enable him carry out his next plan successfully. He bundles his mother and aunt home on the pretext that "... enemies have set fire to our hope, our cocoa farm at their home town Nanka. He then connives with Christie and Anansewa to announce that Anansewa is "dead". The news gets to the Chiefs and they send their condolences with gifts and inadvertently reveal the intention/motive for deciding to marry Anansewa. The last messengers to come are

from Chief-Who-is-Chief. It is revealed that he wanted to marry Anansewa for true love and devotion. Ananse then goes into a trance and invokes Anansewa to resurrect.

*Ancestors, I am pleading with you
If it is your desire
As it is ours
That Chief-Who-Is-Chief
Should marry Anansewa
See to it that she returns to life!
Wake her.
See to it that Anansewa awakes
And returns to become a bride!*

At that invocation, Anansewa awakes and claims that she could hear Chief-Who-Is-Chief calling her. The play ends on a happy note as the power of love ostensibly triumphs.

3.2 Style

I have taken time to treat the dramatic techniques in detail. I have tried to explore all the devices used by the playwright to create this beautiful comedy.

3.3 Language

The language is simple, direct and humorous. The playwright uses ludicrous exaggeration and flattery, especially while Ananse addresses or talks about the chiefs. He uses praise-songs and titles to address the chiefs. This also brings into focus the love of flattery by our chiefs and leaders.

3.3.1. Suspense

Suspense is a very good technique in playwriting and Efua Sutherland uses it very well in this play. The audience is kept in suspense from the beginning to the end. The question in everyone's mind is, how would Ananse wriggle himself out of this mess? The answer is not got until the end of the play. Ananse's plans are not disclosed even to Christie. The Storyteller who comments on the progress of the play does not disclose it.

3.3.2 The Story Teller

The Storyteller relates to the actors on stage, the players and the audience. So, he is both a commentator and an actor. His story could be interrupted and he complies as in the traditional way of story-telling in many African countries.

Songleader: “ Hold your story for a while”.

Storyteller: “It is held for you brother”

3.3.3 The Players

All the actors, except the key actors, appear on stage from one side and do not wear costume as specific actors. They enter at the appropriate time to play their roles. They are used as actors when the time comes and go back to join the players. For instance, they play the role of the messengers from the chiefs.

3.3.4 Property man

The playwright defies dramatic convention here and brings her Property man (popularly known as prop master in modern theatre) on stage, usually, he is hidden backstage with the prop hands and he appears during scene changes when the lights are out. Contrary to this usual practice, Sutherland brings him on stage to give the props to the actors in the full glare of the audience. There is no illusion of reality. In fact, he plays the role of a stage manager for he sees to it that all is well.

3.3.5 Musical Interlude (Mboguo)

The musical interlude is used to make comments on Ananse’s plans. It emphasizes the action of the play at a particular point or illustrates the importance of custom. In each case, it is used to advance the story of the play. In some cases, the key actors start the song to emphasize their point and the players join in the song.

3.3.6 Mime

Mime is used extensively in the play by the players. They mime the songs. For instance, Storyteller and two women among the players mime the song on Odum’s Child. (21-22). The mime helps to highlight stories which the songs tell. They also mime certain actions of the play like the Post Office Staff, when Ananse goes to open his letters in the opening scene. The postman also mimes checking the address on the letter against the address on the streets (p. 19).

3.3.7 Humour

This is expected as the play is a comedy. Humour is created mainly through language, (Postman: “Are you house No. AW/6615”) We also see humour in the recurrent visual jokes of the property man as he hands the props to the actors; and in the exaggerated crafty energy with which Ananse presents his actions.

3.3.8 Play-within-the-play

The play-within-the-play device is used in the play to emphasize the importance of custom. The Akwani and Akosua episode is used to emphasize the fact that until the head-drink is placed by a suitor for his bride-to-be, he has no claim over her.

3.3.9 Symbolism/Allegory

- (a) Some schools of thought believe that the play depicts Ghana after her independence. It is an allegorical representation of Ghana’s policy of non-alignment in her relations to other nations following her independence. Ananewa is Ghana, Ananse is the leader (more specifically, Kwame Nkrumah while the chiefs represent the international community. The fact that he deceives the chiefs, extorts money and gifts from them while at the same time, does not antagonize them, shows that it is legal to get aid from other nations by holding out promises of trade alliances but not making the commitments until the donor nation’s motives have been tested and known.
- (b). The web used in the play is used to link Ananse’s cleverness in its spinning out of his tricks with the spider’s clever spinning of its web.

3.3.10 Audience Participation

Though the audience is not involved in the dialogue or any obvious action, the actors do not pretend that it is not there. In the beginning of the play, Ananse throws some rhetorical questions to the audience. Also, the Storyteller’s comments are directed mainly to the audience. Like Sutherland said, he is “capable of inducing the audience to believe that they are there with him and similarly involved”. This helps to draw them closer to the actors on stage.

3.4 Setting

There is no definite mention of any locale in the play. However, since the playwright is a Ghanaian and as she explains in her foreword, the play is an adaptation of one of the Ananse (spider) stories. The Ananse story is popular among the Akan people of Ghana. Her claim that Ananse is a kind of Everyman shows that the society presented in the story could be any contemporary society which is

expected to criticize itself through the play.

Notwithstanding the above claim, one can rightly say that the setting of the play is the contemporary Ghanaian society. It is a society that is both materialistic and ostentatious, only interested in getting rich quick.

3.5 Themes

1. The main theme of the play is love – the triumph of love. In the playwright’s own words, it is love for a rosy future for his daughter that makes him, Ananse set out to negotiate the possibility of each of them marrying his daughter in the first place, though he also wants to acquire wealth. This is made clear at the end, when he considers the intention of each chief who had wanted to marry his daughter. He ensures that she is given to the chief who loves her most.

On the part of Anansewa, she agrees to be part of her father’s plan because she wants to marry Chief-Who-Is-Chief. Her love for him, which though began as mere attraction (his virility and handsomeness), is sufficient justification for her to agree to ‘die’ in order to win this chief.

Love triumphs at the end of the play, as Ananse’s deception allows the young ones to marry each other for true love. This is apparent when Ananse pretends to be in a trance and ritualistically pours libation of head drink sent by Chief-Who-Is-Chief and calls on his ancestors to ‘resurrect’ his daughter. Hear him:

*If it is your desire
And it is ours
That Chief-Who-Is-Chief
Should marry Anansewa
See to it that she returns to life. (79)*

He then invokes his daughter to wake:

Anansewa, ... love, is calling you, return... Chief-Who-Is-Chief loves you true. (80)

On that note, Anansewa stirs, springs out of the bed and claims that she “could hear Chief-Who-Is-Chief” calling her.

Efua Sutherland however does not only emphasize individual love but love on a wider social scale. She also believes that a true lover is both a giver and a helper. This is seen in the closing song of the play which emphasizes the need for them to relate in love.

2. The play shows man’s capacity in using his intellect and cunning to overcome

life's difficulties. Ananse uses his intellectual power to attain a higher social status without antagonizing anybody. He outwits the chiefs.

3.5.1 The Sub Themes

The sub themes of the play are seen when the play is analyzed as a satire and not just as a Ghanaian folklore adapted for the stage.

1. It is a satirical reflection of the hopes, and aspirations of the ordinary people to become rich. They are the common people who hope to survive in their contemporary world by owning the luxurious things of life like cars, refrigerators, electric fans, soft bouncy Dunlop pillow and other things. Ananse wants his daughter to marry into wealth that is why his trips are to wealthy chiefs.
2. It is a satire of the contemporary ostentatious and materialistic society where you are not respected unless you are rich. Note the postmen's attitude to Ananse before and after his acquisition of his wealth. Also only the rich are invited to state social functions, so everybody aspires to be rich.
3. It satirizes contemporary Christianity where people go to church only to show off their clothes and wealth. At the beginning of the play, when he is still indigent and poverty-stricken Ananse asks his daughter... "Tell me, how many times have I missed going to church because there is nothing in my pocket to deposit in full view of the public?" (p4). And after acquiring wealth, he declares (sings), "Yes tomorrow, go to church. To deposit with the best of the spenders" (p. 24).
4. Casual tradesmen and labourers are not spared in the satire. Ananse gives them contract to renovate his house and they would be paid on a daily basis (wages). They decide to spend five weeks on the job so that they would be paid more. However, this is because work is scarce, as the Mason asked the Carpenter who suggested three weeks. "... If you have found another place where they want to give you job after you've finished here... finish your share quick and go" (25).

This is later doubled to ten weeks when they discover that they have got Ananse in their 'pocket' (p. 26).

3.6 Characterization

Ananse

Ananse is the comic hero in the play. He is intelligent, shrewd and crafty. One can even describe him as a rogue. He has the talents for not only surviving by using his wits, but also to be prosperous. He is able to eradicate his poverty and improve

himself. He is pretentious and condemns wealth. Anansewa, asks “So you desire all those things? Haven’t you condemned them often. “He is clever, and resourceful but cunning. He suffers mental torture, while trying to get wealth, but due to his cleverness and intelligence, he turns an established custom to his advantage (i.e), he is not obliged to give his daughter’s hand in marriage until the head drink is placed for Anansewa. He knew this very well and continues to not only accept presents from the chiefs but encourage them to bring more.

The secret of his success lies in his knowledge of the society and of human nature. He is very optimistic and secretive. He has no doubt in his mind that his plan will succeed and he does not disclose his intentions to anyone until he needs the person. He gets her daughter to type letters for him but does not reveal the purpose of the letter to her and towards the end of the play, when he tells her that she should ‘die’ and why. He informed Christie of the “death” plan only at the point of Anansewa’s death because he wants her to help him attend to the visitors.

Anansewa

Anansewa is a beautiful young lady who is a student of E.P. Secretarial School. She is intelligent. This is apparent from the speed with which she typed the letters for her father at the opening scene, despite the fact that she had not graduated.

She is very inquisitive, and not as materialistic as her father, so is somewhat contented with what they have. This does not mean that she does not like wealth. She is obedient. This is manifested when she accepts to stay and type her father’s letters despite the fact that she is about to go out when her father comes in. Initially, she is impatient with her father and does not accept his idea on how she should get married. Again, once her father convinces her of his plans, she gets along with him.

Anansewa is proud and noble and tries to maintain her self-dignity and integrity. Inasmuch as she wants to get married, she refuses to be sold to the highest bidder. She protested to her father in the following words. **“I will not let you sell me like a parcel to a customer. Not ever!”** (p. 11)

Aya

Aya is Ananse’s mother. From her first appearance in the play, she cuts the figure of a Patrician. She is not materialistic and as such, she is not moved by his son’s newly acquired wealth and its consequent display. Thus, she prays for Anansewa to marry a good man and does not like Christie who she feels is working tirelessly to get to Ananse through Anansewa. She describes Christie as being “senselessly extravagant.” She is also a loving mother who loves her son and grand daughter dearly. She is gullible, for Ananse deceives her easily that his cocoa

farm had been set on fire. She does not pause to ask questions but believes immediately and starts wailing. However, she is brave and courageous, as she leaves for home promising to: “**sweep up these off- springs of vipers and punish them**” (54). It may be said that she does not like his son’s and Christie’s cunning ways of getting what they want. She is contented with the much she has as can be seen from her gift to her grandchild at outdooing ceremony. She has no money but prayers.

Christie

Miss Christina Yamoah is described in the play as a fashionable woman. From all indications, she is friendly with Ananse hence, she sent for her from the Institute for Prospective Brides in his moment of need. She is described by Ananse as an experienced worldly-wise woman. She is very humane and is always eager to find out what Ananse’s personal problems are and tries to solve them. She tells Ananse, “Once I know what kind of trouble it is I can help.” Christie is very charitable. This is evident in the way she presents her precious “sovereign” to Anansewa on her outdooing ceremony. She is with Ananse throughout his travails and ordeal. No wonder Ananse describes her as a helper and a supporter.

It could also be said that Christie is an overzealous person or at best is being over enthusiastic in her a bid to win Ananse’s hand in marriage. From all indications, she may have succeeded, for Ananse notes in the end: “Rare helper! Supporter, your thanks await you.”

The Other Characters

The other characters in the play are mainly animators and agents used to enhance the theme and action of the play. **Ekuya** is sensible and understanding. Though she belongs to the older generation, she tolerates and accommodates the younger generation. She is therefore moderate in her assessment of characters and situations.

The **Story teller** who is a commentator is convivial. In the words of the playwright, the “Storyteller has the right to know everything and to be personally involved in the action.” All the messengers who are part of the players are just there to deliver their messages. There is no effort by the playwright to develop their characters. The **Labourers** and the **Postman** are used to show the priorities of the society in which emphasis is placed on wealth.

Also, the **Chiefs** are not seen in the play but heard through their messengers. They are all rich, generous and love flattery. The Property man is simply the state manager and not necessarily a character in the play. In a more conventional play, he should not have been seen on stage.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

- i. Discuss the themes in *The Marriage of Anansewa*.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Marriage of Anansewa is an interesting play. As we laugh at Ananse and his antics, we identify such people in our societies. Some of us also laugh at ourselves and try not to fall into such pitfalls. The play is seen as a satire. That is, it ridicules society and shows the ills in it.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have read another play, a comedy. You should try to read all the plays we have treated in this course. In the play, you are in a familiar terrain, Africa, so you must have appreciated it more than others. In the next unit, we will come home to a Nigeria play.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- 1 List and explain four dramatic techniques used in the play

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Sutherland, Efua. (1975). *The Marriage of Anansewa*. London: Longman.

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UNIT 4 *THE LION AND THE JEWEL* BY WOLE SOYINKA

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Plot
 - 3.2 Theme
 - 3.3 Language
 - 3.4 Setting
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 - 3.6 Flashback/Play-within-the-play
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to another comedy. The play is written by a Nigerian and it has a Nigerian background.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Increase your knowledge in textual analysis of plays.
- Appreciate Yoruba culture as reflected in the play.
- Learn more about the role of Nigerian traditional rulers in the development of the nation.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Plot

The play has a chronological or causal plot. The action starts in the morning and ends at night. By this, Soyinka obeys the Aristotelian principle of the unity of time. In the play, the playwright draws a parallel between the modern ways of life and traditional values and institutions as well as depicts the impact and ineffectual assault of modern values on traditional values.

The play shows how the village teacher, Lakunle who represents the modern era, loses out against Baroka, the Bale of Ilujinle, in their separate bid to win the love of Sidi, the village belle.

The morning scene takes place at the outskirts of the market square, outside the school building. Sidi, dressed in her traditional apparel, exposing her shoulder and carrying a pail of water on her head, appears first. Lakunle dressed in an old English suit and white tennis shoes comes along and ridicules Sidi by saying that only spiders carry loads the way she does. He rebukes Sidi for exposing her body for people.

According to Lakunle, the custom will be replaced by modern machines to take over most of the work women do. Sidi sees his views on their tradition and custom as madness. Lakunle proposes to marry Sidi but insists that the customary bride price will not be paid. On the contrary, Sidi insists that she will only marry him if he is ready to settle the full bride price so that she will not make herself “A cheap bowl for the village spit”(7). Lakunle considers this custom as being not only “barbaric” and “out-dated” but “savage” and “ignoble”. Sidi sees Lakunle’s modern project as a dream.

The scene in which a photographer (the man from the outside world) visited Ilujinle in the past to snap photographs of Sidi is recreated here. The pictures snapped feature extensively in a magazine which is a sort of toast to the whole world. Baroka also features in the magazine but little attention is given to him as he is seen therein near the village latrine. Bale does not like the unimportant attention given to him. Sidi is full of herself because of her prominent appearance in the magazine. She becomes the talk of the town and the village beauty who has brought fame to the village.

Sidi is seen engrossed in the admiration of her pictures in the magazine. Sadiku, the old woman, sends effusive greetings to Sidi and intimates her of the Bale’s intention to marry her. Sidi discountenances an offer of marriage to a man as old as Baroka whose main intention is to subdue her and stall her rise to stardom. Lakunle dissuades Sidi from accepting such an offer.

But Sadiku convinces Sidi to marry Baroka just as Sidi continues to praise herself even as her ‘fame has spread to Lagos/and beyond the seas.’ Sadiku tells her that being the Bale’s last wife is an honour because when the present Bale dies, she would be married to the new Bale with the privilege of ‘living in the outhouse’. Conversely, Sidi argues further that every woman who has supped with Baroka one night ‘becomes his wife or concubine the next’. And to strengthen Sidi’s position, Lakunle adds that Baroka is ‘a die hard rogue’ who ‘Foiled the public works attempt/To build the railway through Ilujinle’(24).

Sadiku unveils Baroka’s carved figure as Sidi stands by the school room window admiring her own pictures. Sadiku praises herself on her past exploits and what women can do to their men. Sidi is carried away by the melodious music and as she dances to it with Sadiku, they do not notice Lakunle who appears on the scene. Sidi volunteers to visit Baroka at his palace for the supper he promised her, to ensure

that the devil is mocked and to seek forgiveness on her part for refusing Baroka in the first place. Sadiku welcomes the idea while Lakunle tells Sidi not to go. Sidi visits Baroka in his bedroom to mock him on his impotence. Unfortunately she discovers that it was a trick. She has no option than to marry Baroka, since she is no longer a virgin.

3.2 Theme

a) The Triumph of African Tradition over Western Culture

Lakunle represents modernity in the play. He has acquired a bit of western education and wants to impose the western culture on his people. Naturally the old ways of doing things cannot change so easily. The custodians of the custom will always find a way of thwarting the modern trend no matter how logical, beautiful and trendy it may be. Lakunle thinks that he could change the cultural values of a traditional Yoruba society. Is it possible for one to stop the people from getting involved in traditional marriage ceremonies, wrestling, invocation of ancestral spirits, elders or parental blessings of marriage, intermediaries in marriage, festivals, traditional dancing and merry-making that are part of traditional marriage ceremonies.

Baroka thwarts the efforts of the colonialists to build a road in Ilujinle. The implication is that he prevented the spread of western civilization in the town. He also destroys Sidi's opportunity to an exposure to modern ways of life and fame by subduing her through his marriage to her.

b) The Negative Influence of Traditional Practices on the Female Folk.

The playwright implicitly suggests that women are over laboured in the society: they carry loads and do all sorts of manual jobs. It is not also proper that an old man should trick a teenager into marriage just to boost his ego.

3.3 Language

This is a witty, light – hearted and humorous play which explores the conflicts between two cultures, the traditional African culture and the Western culture, and between the modern and the traditional ways of life. It presents the life of Sidi, a simple, innocent and naive village girl who helps to uphold the traditional value system of her community. She therefore speaks simple English that in some cases are transliterations of the Yoruba language. Other characters in the play speak in the same manner and in some cases certain words are presented in the local dialect. Some of the songs are presented in Yoruba language. In accordance with the comic mode of the play, the language is designed to ridicule some of the characters and to evoke laughter in the audience. For instance, Baroka mimics Lakunle thus: 'Guru morin guru morin ngh – hn! That is all we get from "alakowe" You call at his house hoping he sends for beer, but all you get is guru morin. Will guru morin wet my throat? (16)

The play is a one-act play that is divided into morning, afternoon, and night. The language is replete with proverbs, witticism, and traditional Yoruba greetings (like Baba Kabayesi). Music, songs and dances are used extensively in the play and they are integrated to advance the theme and propel the plot.

Mo te' ni. Mo te' ni.
 Mo te' ni. Mo te' ni.
 Sun mo mi, we mo mi
 Sun mo mi, fa mo mi
 Yarabilo m'eyi t' le d' omo (64)

This is a song sang by Sidi at the end of the play. The song is an invitation for a closer relationship and an embrace. It states that it is only God that can determine the mating that will result in pregnancy. Although she was not prepared for a marriage to Baorka, she accepts her fate and decides to make the best out of it.

3.4. Setting

The play, *The Lion and The Jewel* has a rural setting. This explains the use of some Yoruba rituals and local songs, customs and traditions in the play. The physical setting is in the village of Ilujinle. The play compares the old and the new cultural imperatives. It, accordingly, makes use of some modern phenomena like magazine, school, photographer, pictures, English suit, etc. The historical setting is therefore the post-independence period in Nigeria, between 1960 and 1963.

3.5 Characterization

Sidi

Sidi is the heroine of the play. She is looked upon as a source of inspiration and one capable of launching the village into limelight. Her picture in the international magazine is a source of wonder and reference even to the Bale. The teacher, Lakunle, himself is amazed at the sensation that these pictures create in the village. She occupies such a prominent position in the village that even the Bale promises to insert her image in the postal stamps.

She is conservative and detests Lakunle's new romantic ideals and kisses. Lakunle's radical trend and insistence to avoid payment of bride-price is unacceptable to her. She cannot demean her personality just for the sake of marriage. Sidi does not appreciate western education but prefers traditional education. Sidi is a flirt. She flirts with the photographer and Lakunle before the play began and Baroka towards the end of the play. She pays for it as Baroka seduces her.

She is beautiful but is a boastful type and very pompous. Hear her: “my name is Sidi, and I am beautiful. The stranger took my beauty. And placed it in my hands”(20).

She is, nonetheless, a custodian of custom, for she believes that it is only what the custom says that will apply in her marriage. And that is that payment of the bride price is a pre-condition for any validly concluded marriage.

Baroka

Baroka is the Bale, the village head of Ilujinle. He is a polygamist and at sixty-two, he is still not only very sexually active but ticky. He is described as a ‘wiry, goated, tougher than his sixty two years’. He has to have sex with Sidi by trickery and through same means, he marries her eventually. He prevents the whiteman from building a road in the town. He is not a progressive king. He is very selfish and wants to own every good thing. He does not want any other person to be famous. This explains why he married Sidi at all costs to subdue her. Baroka is described as crafty rouge and a fox. As if to nail him finally, Lakunle concludes: “Baroka is a creature of the wilds, untutored, mannerless, devoid of grace”(58).

Lakunle

Lakunle is a semi-literate reformist and a teacher of Geography who would like to introduce some radical and revolutionary reforms into the political and social lives of Ilujinle. He loves Sidi and would compromise a lot to marry her. For instance, he promises Sidi that regardless of Baroka’s tricky and subsequent carnal knowledge of her, he could still go on to marry her. Notwithstanding his level of education, Sidi acknowledges that she learnt a lot of things from him.

Sidi never gives him the opportunity to demonstrate his love for her. She agrees to return his love but only as a wife whose bride price has been paid. Lakunle hates Baroka’s way of life and siezes every opportunity to criticize him. He hates him also because Baroka is equally interested in marrying Sidi.

Despite his reformist tendencies, Lakunle still enjoys some traditional dance of the village, as exemplified in his dance of the lost traveler. At the end of the play, Lakunle is not left forlorn as he is consoled by another young lady. He does not succeed in his reforms because he appears not to be reasonable.

Sadiku

She is the eldest wife and favourite wife of Baroka. She is the last wife of the last Bale and was inherited, as a matter of custom by Baroka. She has been in this position for forty-one years, no wonder Lakunle refers to her as a ‘withered face’. She is a good dancer; “Sadiku of the duiker’s feet.... That’s what the men used to call me. I could twist and untwist my waist with the smoothness of a water snake....”

Sadiku is wily and does not keep secrets. This is why Baroka, her husband, capitalizes on this weak point to clip Sidi's wings. She is described by Lakunle as "The goddess of malicious gossip". She believes and earnestly undertakes the duty her husband assigns to her diligently.

At the end of the play, when Sidi has settled with Baroka, he blesses her. Sadiku is a good planner and a strategist. She never permits Lakunle to convince Sidi but rather puts up a convincing argument on behalf of Baroka to Sidi. And at the end, her machination plays out. Lakunle is not a match for her; he accepts defeat but threatens to take her to school. Sadiku is tricky too. She, for instance, dips hands in Lakunle's pocket, brings out a piece of coin and presses it on the foreheads of drummers.

3.6 Flashback/Play-within-the-play

In the play this technique is used to recreate the scene where Baroka presents the construction of a rail line across the village. Mime as a veritable literary technique, is also used considerably in the play.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Between Sidi and Baroka, who is superior?

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this play, Soyinka ridicules the educated Africans who look down on their culture. Baroka uses his traditional wisdom to get everything he wants. Lakunle who apes the whites is neither here nor there. He is a man torn between two worlds. The play does not condemn Western education but insists that the good traditional values of the Africans should be encouraged.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have seen that comedy teaches through entertainment and laughter. The playwright satirizes the foolish educated Africans through Lakunle's antics. The play observes the classical "principle of unity of time". The action of the play starts and ends in one day.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss the main theme of the play.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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