

Elements of Literature and Creative Communication
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Lecture - 49
Comedy: Drama and its Types

Hello friends, we have been discussing drama. In the last class, we discussed different types of drama, and when it comes to types, I said depending on how you create the taxonomy, the types vary. If it is a structural taxonomy, then of course, you find different types of drama. If it is a thematic taxonomy, then, of course, you find different types of drama and all that.

And as part of that, we also discussed two broad types of drama, comedy, and tragedy. And we discussed the tragedy in a bit more detail right different types of tragedy and reasons behind the tragedy, and how the very concept of tragedy evolved over time. And when we say the concept of the tragedy is not just a part of dramaturgy, remember, drama is a precept of life at the end of the day.

So, therefore, our outlook towards life has evolved; when we say there is a change in the very concept of tragedy, there is a change in the very outlook towards life. That is the reason why we have tragedy and its different varieties and how tragedy has evolved over time we discussed it. In this class,, we will pick up comedy and its different types.

And this is a very important development in the growth of drama. Please remember when we say the growth of drama, we talk of western drama and we talk of,, and let us say ,Greek drama in particular. And maybe in the subsequent classes when we pick up when we begin discussing the growth and origin and origin and growth of drama.

We can pick up some interesting tales surrounding the birth of comedy, the birth of comedy,, etc. But for our understanding, generally speaking, Aristophanes in the Greek tradition is considered one of the first comedy playwrights, he is the first dramatist to have brought out this element of comedy into the play; that is something that we can keep in mind.

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COMEDY

- Dramatic work in which the setting and intrigue is established primarily in order to interest and amuse us: the characters and their discomfitures engage our pleasurable attention rather than our profound concern, we are made to feel confident that no great disaster will occur, and usually the action turns out happily for the chief characters. (M H Abrams)
- In Poetics, Aristotle distinguishes Comedy from tragedy by saying it deals in an amusing way with ordinary characters in rather everyday situations (not heroes, kings, or generals)

Now, let us move ahead and discuss what actually comedy is. M H Abrams in his now important *Glossary of Literary Terms*, defines comedy as a work of drama in which settings and intrigue, plot, characters; everything is established in such a way as to amuse the audience; in other words, the purpose of comedy is to entertain the audience.

Therefore, you find characters and their discomfiture and the twists in the plot, twists in the tales all of them are rearranged, are arranged and rearranged in such a way so as to cause humor so, as to cause laughter among the audience. That is how he defines comedy. And in *Poetics* we have already identified Aristotle's *Poetics* as the first major work, critical work that throws a lot of light on drama: tragedy, and comedy.

He distinguishes comedy from tragedy by saying that it deals in an amusing way with ordinary characters, in rather everyday situations. Now, we know you can understand it, when you look at it vis a vis tragedy. When it comes to tragedy, the protagonist must always be of high birth, of great lineage, either a king or a noble hero or a general or something like that.

Now, whereas, comedy generally, deals with ordinary characters and everyday situations, that is how Aristotle comes to define comedy.

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TYPES OF COMEDY

- Sentimental Comedy
- Comedy of Humors
- Comedy of Manners
- Romantic Comedy
- Farce, Burlesque and Parody
- Commedia dell'arte
- Theatre of Absurd

Remember, that these 'types' are not exclusive, and various dramatists have freely experimented across these divisions

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Now, let us take a quick look at different types of comedy, and of course, later, we can go on discussing them. Now, in sentimental comedy, you have comedy of humor, comedy of manners, romantic comedy, Theatre of Absurd, and commedia dell'arte.

Then you have farce, burlesque, and parody with slight variations there. And when we identify these types of comedy, please remember, they are not very exclusive, there may be a playwright or a dramatist who can do a lot of mix and match. Therefore, a lot of permutations and combinations are possible within these varieties.

But these are generally speaking, some broad varieties or flavors of comedy you can say.

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Origins of Comedy

- The earliest extant works of comedy were located in Ancient Greece where its performance was associated with fertility rites and the worship of *Dionysus*
- Aristophanes used introduced Comedy as a type of drama for the first time and wrote a wide variety of comedies which combine fine lyric verse, dance, satire, buffoonery social comment, fantastic plots and remarkable characters
- His extant works are: *Acharnians*, *Knights*, *Peace*, *Wasps*, *Birds*, *Frogs*, *Plutus*, *Lysistrata*
- Aristophanes belonged to the school of Old Comedy, and his successor Menander belonged to 'New Comedy'

Now, let us go ahead and discuss each of them in a little more detailed manner. As I said, comedy has a very interesting origin, we have already identified Aristophanes as the first playwright or a dramatist to have introduced the flavor of comedy because until then, in the western tradition, all that you had was tragedies.

Interestingly, it so happens that there is a play called *Frogs*, there is a play called *Frogs*, and please remember Athens, Ancient Athens was obsessed with the performing Gods. Especially they had some remarkable playwrights by the time Aristophanes began writing you had Aeschylus, you had Sophocles, and you had Euripides. These are like the triumvirate of the Greek tragedy and afterward Aristophanes comes.

So, now, by the time he began writing plays, you have already seen the Greeks had already seen the best days or the glorious days of the tragedy, through the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Now, by Aristophanes there is a play called *Frogs*, it is a very interesting play. Now, what happens here, Dionysus, he is you can call him the God of Drama.

In fact, the origins of drama again have got to do with Dionysus, and we will discuss it more in detail in subsequent classes. So, invoking Dionysus, Aristophanes now wants to find out who of the three is the best playwright. Who is the best dramatist, Whether it is Aeschylus or Sophocles, or Euripides.

So, now by the time he began writing this play, all of them are dead. Now, remember, and Euripides was the last of the three, and maybe he must have seen a lot of pomp and glory. So, Aristophanes picks up some kind of bone with Euripides. Now, may be there was a kind of a dividing opinion among the Greeks between Euripides and Aeschylus as one of the greatest playwrights. So, they are unable to decide.

Now, in order to decide it, now Aristophanes using Dionysus sends the god of drama to the Netherworld Hades, where, of course, all of them are there, they are dead; they there now hades the netherworld. So, a kind of competition takes place in the netherworld, and now each of them Aeschylus and Euripides, they start participating in this competition.

Now, Aeschylus in order to support that he is the best playwright, starts quoting from his plays and then Euripides starts doing it, and there is some kind of weighing of their lines; of course, it is a comedy. Now remember; so they are very humorous ,the entire thing is in a very humorous way. Of course, you also have Dionysus's servant, who also goes to hades with him; he is not allowed to enter there, then he improvises comedy.

So, the entire thing is a very beautiful set of comedy there, and then they come to weigh the lines, how much each of these lines weigh,s and finally, of course, Aristophanes makes Aeschylus win the show. And as a result of that, Dionysus brings Aeschylus back from the world of dead into the living and Athens comes to celebrate it; that is the crux of the play.

So, now that is probably the first comedy that we have and this is the story of the birth of comedy. So, this is something that we can keep in mind, Aristophanes the originator of comedy, or with him begins the flavor of comedy for us.

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SENTIMENTAL COMEDY

- It emerged as a reaction to a particular kind of Restoration Comedy which satirically showed immorality and licentiousness in its characters
- Oliver Goldsmith: "the virtues of private life are exhibited rather than the vices exposed, and the distresses rather than the faults of mankind make our interest in the piece"
- Involves benevolent middle-class characters, with extremely elevated moral sentiments and lofty ideals
- Examples of this type of play include Richard Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1722), Richard Cumberland's *The West Indian* (1771), Oliver Goldsmith's *The Good-Natured Man*



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Now, yeah, we said different types of comedy. So, let us begin with sentimental comedy.

Sentimental comedy emerges as a kind of reaction towards restoration comedy, because during restoration comedy meant slapstick comedy or not a very vulgar comedy, it meant vulgar comedy and all that. So, as a reaction to that, we receive sentimental comedy. So, Oliver Goldsmith, defines sentimental comedy as the virtues of private life.

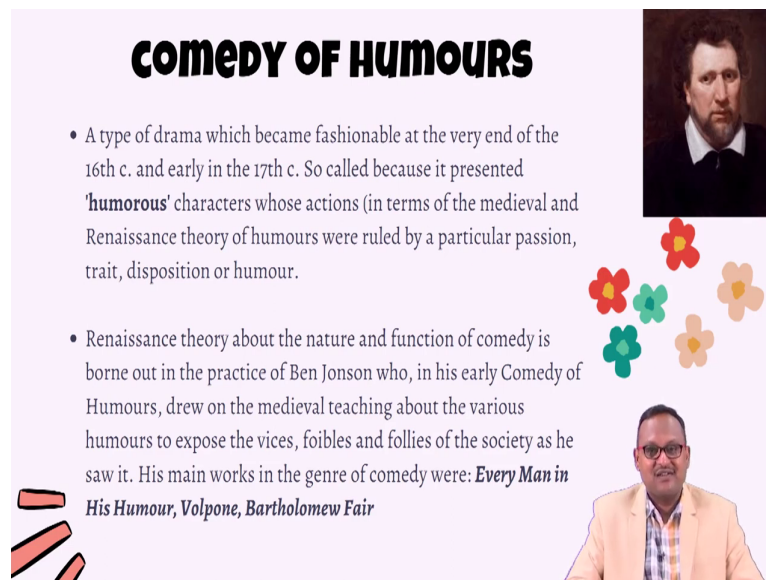
Here in sentimental comedy, the virtues of private life are exhibited and more than exposing the vices, which was the norm during the restoration period, the private the virtues of them are exposed or exhibited as the distress caused to them and that becomes that forms the crux of sentimental comedy.

Therefore, here keeping with its benevolent ensemble or benevolent theme, you have characters from the middle class who are extremely elevated when it comes to their understanding of life, and their moral sentiments, and they have lofty ideals and problems they undergo because of these virtues, right.

Now, they undergo problems not because they have some vices in them, but because of some virtues they have and how the virtues they have they, it is at crossroads with a norm, where the vice rules the vice, the bad things rule,s, and how the virtues feel the problems. So, that becomes a part of sentimental comedy.

So, you have Richard Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* written in the early 18th century, Cumberland's *The West Indian*, and Oliver Goldsmith's *The Good-natured Man*, these are some well-known examples you can recall in support of sentimental comedy, you can quote these particular works.

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COMEDY OF HUMOURS

- A type of drama which became fashionable at the very end of the 16th c. and early in the 17th c. So called because it presented 'humorous' characters whose actions (in terms of the medieval and Renaissance theory of humours) were ruled by a particular passion, trait, disposition or humour.
- Renaissance theory about the nature and function of comedy is borne out in the practice of Ben Jonson who, in his early Comedy of Humours, drew on the medieval teaching about the various humours to expose the vices, foibles and follies of the society as he saw it. His main works in the genre of comedy were: *Every Man in His Humour*, *Volpone*, *Bartholomew Fair*

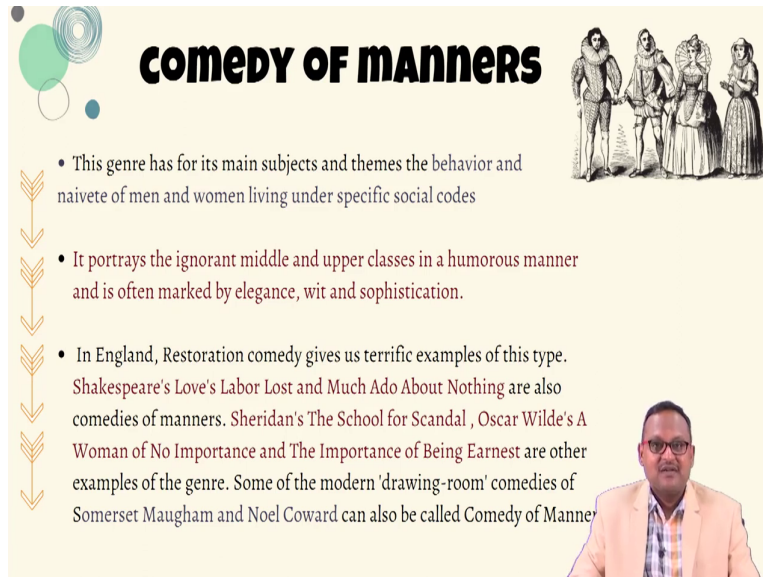
From sentimental comedy, let us go to discuss comedy of humour. Again, this particular type of comedy originated towards the end of the 16th century; you have Ben Jonson, of course; he is a later contemporary of Shakespeare. In fact, he was also influenced a lot by Shakespeare, Ben Jonson. So, maybe you can trace or attribute comedy of humour to Ben Jonson predominantly speaking.

So, here renaissance theory about the nature and function of comedy is borne out of Ben Jonson, that we have already identified here Comedy of Humour is in order to expose the vices of the individuals. Of course, maybe you can even say that the sentimental comedy is a reaction to the comedy of humour. So, it is they are reacting against the comedy of humour.

In Comedy of Humour what happens, how the societal vices, the I mean the follies and the foibles of society and how Ben Jonson looks at it and how he satirizes it. So, this forms the crux of comedy of humours. So, you have his own plays, *Every Man in His Humour*, *Volpone*, and *Bartholomew Fair*, these are some well-known works of comedy of humours.

Sixth, I mean late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century and where a lot of lampooning takes place, where a lot of buffoonery takes place, and of course, where a lot of, as I said a lot of obscenities are also made use of. And in order to create the humorous effect and I mean against these kinds of comedy of humours we see the birth of sentimental comedy, so that can be kept in mind.

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COMEDY OF MANNERS

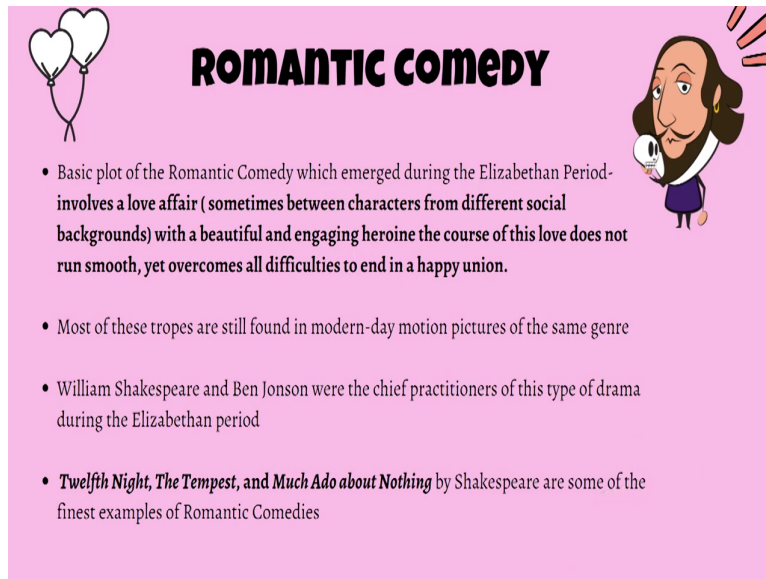
- This genre has for its main subjects and themes the behavior and naivete of men and women living under specific social codes
- It portrays the ignorant middle and upper classes in a humorous manner and is often marked by elegance, wit and sophistication.
- In England, Restoration comedy gives us terrific examples of this type. Shakespeare's *Love's Labor Lost* and *Much Ado About Nothing* are also comedies of manners. Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*, Oscar Wilde's *A Woman of No Importance* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* are other examples of the genre. Some of the modern 'drawing-room' comedies of Somerset Maugham and Noel Coward can also be called Comedy of Manners.

So, from Comedy of Humours we have Comedy of Manners. In Comedy of Manners, again see these are subtle distinctions that is the reason why I said these are not exclusive categories; please remember. So, here in Comedy of Manners, as the title suggests its humour is created out of certain mannerisms of individuals, not so much by actions but by mannerisms.

Therefore, here everything is stretched to an extreme, then mannerisms are lampooned, and now they are analyzed from a different perspective. So, you have Sheridan's *The School of Scandal*, or when it comes to modern times you have Oscar Wilde's *A Woman of No Importance* or even *The Importance of Being Earnest*; these are some well-known examples of this particular genre of comedy, Comedy of Manners.

So, generally speaking here manners of the upper middle-class people and their ignorance and their lack, I mean their lack of manners, they do not know how to proceed well in this world. Therefore, mean, comedy gets created out of these kinds of ignorance and their upper-class standards and all that.

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ROMANTIC COMEDY



- Basic plot of the Romantic Comedy which emerged during the Elizabethan Period- involves a love affair (sometimes between characters from different social backgrounds) with a beautiful and engaging heroine the course of this love does not run smooth, yet overcomes all difficulties to end in a happy union.
- Most of these tropes are still found in modern-day motion pictures of the same genre
- William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson were the chief practitioners of this type of drama during the Elizabethan period
- *Twelfth Night*, *The Tempest*, and *Much Ado about Nothing* by Shakespeare are some of the finest examples of Romantic Comedies

So, from comedy of manners, we go-to romantic comedy again Shakespeare himself is a very well-known proponent of romantic comedy. Of course, here, added to the elements of comedy, you have all the ingredients of comedy plus an element of love. So, here it is in fact, this particular type of comedy was predominant, especially during the Elizabethan period.


It involves a kind of love affair between characters of different social backgrounds or different social backgrounds and then how the kind of troubles that they have to undergo. And finally, of course, because remember, comedy is where everything has to end in a smooth way . So, a love affair comes to wonderful fruition in a happy union.

But the kind of problems they undergo becomes the crux of romantic comedy. So, you have some well-known examples here, *Twelfth Night*, *The Tempest*, *Much Ado about Nothing*. *Taming of the Shrew*, too is a well-known romantic comedy. So, these are some things that we can keep in mind when it comes to discussing romantic comedies.

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ELEMENTS OF ELIZABETHAN ROMANTIC COMEDY



- **Mistaken Identity and/or Misconceptions** - Impersonations, gendered mix-ups, deception are all comic conventions popularized by the Elizabethan Romantic Comedy
- **Reason versus Emotion** - Intellectual battles between Apollonian values (such as reason) versus Dionysian values (like desire).
- **Separation and Reconciliation** - Love is central to the narratives as lovers separate and reunite, but the journey is arduous and fraught with uncertainty
- **Happy Endings** - one of the most notable elements of a romantic comedy is that it typically ends in a celebratory manner, often with love and marriage as the biggest focal points.

So, from during Elizabethan time again as we discussed, roughly speaking you have comedy of humours, you have almost romantic comedy. So, what are some of the elements of romantic comedy? In other words what causes comedy during the Elizabethan period. So, now, look at this there is a mistaken identity or misconception.

Supposing a character A thinks character B is actually character C and assuming character C as B, how character a goes on interpreting or interacting with them. And how the character B also goes on ensuring that kind of misconception and later it reveals something like this, and you have reason versus emotion in Elizabethan romantic comedy.

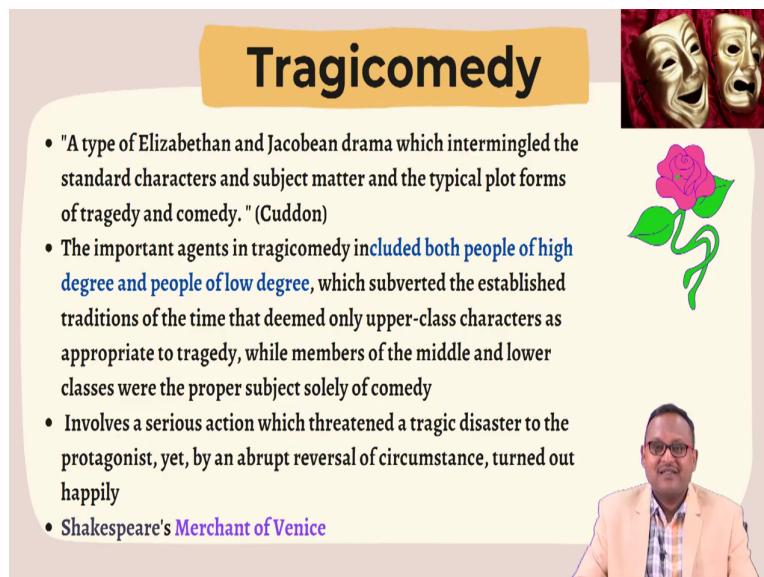
Here of course, this kind of distinction is there, reason versus emotion where they underline the importance of emotion over reason. I mean when it comes to the neoclassical period, this particular emphasis is slightly reversed you have a reason over emotion. So, it is a kind of neoclassical period, this is reversed. So, their reason attains primacy over emotion.

And in romantic comedy especially Elizabethan romantic comedy, you have comedy is created because of some separation. So, when there is a separation between two loved individuals, what kind of troubles they undergo, the journey that they undertake, and the troubles that they undergo. And finally, before reconciling and coming together, what kind of troubles they undergo, becomes a part of. It is presented in a very humorous way.

It is presented in a very humorous way and then you have happy endings; well that is true for almost all the types of comedy, remember. Comedy is where it presents the pleasant aspect of life; remember we have Aristotle already defining the objective of comedy. In comedy, unlike tragedy, it presents the sanguine aspect of life, the positive dimensions of life, and, of course, to create laughter, to create humor, and all that.

Therefore, despite the troubles, I mean the plot entwines, despite the twists in the plot despite the cliffhanger moments in the plot, finally, everything ends happily, the two, I mean the protagonist achieves success, and the lovers get united. And finally, one happy story, something like this, these are some things that we can keep in mind for romantic comedy.

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Tragicomedy

- "A type of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama which intermingled the standard characters and subject matter and the typical plot forms of tragedy and comedy." (Cuddon)
- The important agents in tragicomedy included both people of high degree and people of low degree, which subverted the established traditions of the time that deemed only upper-class characters as appropriate to tragedy, while members of the middle and lower classes were the proper subject solely of comedy
- Involves a serious action which threatened a tragic disaster to the protagonist, yet, by an abrupt reversal of circumstance, turned out happily
- Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*

From romantic comedy, let us go to another distinct genre of drama. So, I already said you have at the two ends of the spectrum, comedy and tragedy. So, tragicomedy is, or you can locate it somewhere in between the two ends of the spectrum. So, again tragedy and tragicomedy can as well be found in the Elizabethan period, Jacobean period, and more or less even the modern plays.


Modern plays also make use of tragedy comedies here, of course, tragedy is there, but ultimately all this tragedy does not end in a very negative way. So, probably tragic tragicomedy reflects this phenomena called life in a very beautiful way. Because in tragedy, you have to you are bound to go by the principles of tragedy, and in comedy, you are bound to go by the principles of comedy.

However improbable the plot is, however improbable the situation is, you have to end it in a happy way. Whereas in tragic comedy, it does not happen, of course; our life is filled with tragicomedy, filled with moments of tragedy and, of course, moments of laughter, moments of humor. So therefore, tragedy tragicomedy better reflects our state of life, the modern state of life, in a better way.

So therefore, accordingly, we have in tragicomedy members of the middle class or the lower classes and their troubles and follies and foibles and finally, how they achieve a happy ending. So, this is it, and one of the examples even during the Shakespearean time that we can take off is *Merchant of Venice*; remember why this is a particular tragicomedy. Of course, it's tragedy for Shylock and, of course, comedy for the other characters.



And again, *The Merchant of Venice* is an extraordinary play, it is an extraordinary play, and probably a perfect play that can be a perfect play that can be called a tragicomedy. So, you could read it when time permits.

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MASQUE/MASK DRAMA

- A fairly elaborate form of courtly entertainment which was particularly popular in the Tudor reigns of Elizabeth I, James I and Charles I, as it was in Italy (where the masque first acquired a distinctive form), and in France.
- Combined poetic drama, song, dance and music, with extravagant costumes. It was more of an elegant, private pageant for the elites and royals, it was usually conducted on festive occasions
- The plot consisted of mythological and allegorical elements. Sometimes there might be a sort of 'debate'. At the end there was a dance of masked figures in which the audience joined.
- Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones produced many spectacular Masques under the patronage of James I



From tragicomedy,, this is mask drama. So, it is spelt in either of the ways mask drama or masque, so mask drama.

Again, in this mask drama, you find its origins in the sixteenth century, I mean late 16th century and all that. And even now you find it, we find mask drama. One of the defining

features of mask drama is where the character enacts using masks; masks play a very important role here, generally a comedy mask drama is a comedy.

Here you make use of various elements of drama, such as poetry, songs, dance, and music, and there are very rich and extravagant costumes, as I said. So, all the emotions that the, so, therefore, because of the use of masks here generally the characters are stereotypes. Supposing the character wears the mask of a tragic mask, that means, that character portrays that throughout.

It is a caricature things like that and generally mask drama is arranged in private parties, especially in the parties of the royals and the elites where they make use of rich costumes, extravagant designs, and things like that. And it's a beautiful ensemble of song, dance, music, and other things. So, Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones are some well-known dramatists who produced mask drama earlier.

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CHRONICLE PLAYS

- Chronicle Plays, also known as '**History Plays**', emerged in Britain during the Late Medieval era. These plays are based on historical materials and figures, and English Chronicles
- **Raphael Holinshed's English Chronicles** is the primary source for these plays, as the early adaptations presented a loosely depicted series of events during the reign of an English king and portrayed a variety of stage battles, pageantry, and military spectacles which was aimed at patriotic and nationalist sentiments of the audience
- Christopher Marlowe and Shakespeare both wrote History plays to remarkable success. Marlowe's *Edward II* and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* are a few examples. Modern History/Chronicle plays include Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*

We have chronicle plays; again here are thematic divisions. Please remember, we have already discussed structural divisions in the previous class. So, here chronicle plays which are also called history plays here; the theme is royalty, the theme is some point in history. So therefore, the comedy that is created, the setting plays an important role in the elements of drama, we discussed setting. So, here this particular play is set in the historical context and again, the comedy that is produced out of it is something that we can keep in mind, I mean

for chronicle plays. So, some well-known examples are Marlowe's *Edward II* and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, of course.

And then you have Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. So, these are some well-known examples of chronicle plays. So, these are some different types of comedy and tragedy that we discussed, and again, an active understanding of these, I mean these types help the reader in very many ways.

Of course, especially when you are analyzing a play, you need to keep these types in mind; because depending on the type, you have character, depending the type of setting, depending the type of plots and twists in the plot, and all that.

Therefore, once you can identify the type of the play, then definitely it increases our overall grasp of the play in a particular way. So, I hope you enjoyed our discussion of types of drama. In the next class, we come up with something more interesting.

Of course, remember we have already discussed poetry, fiction, and short fiction, and we are going to occupy ourselves with the discussion of drama even in the subsequent classes,. Until then, take care, we will meet you with something more interesting in the next class.