(7) Drama I. Tragedy

**Drama**: literary work meant to be performed in the theatre; ‘the literary form designed for performance in the theatre, in which actors take the roles of characters, perform the indicated action, and utter the written dialogue’ (Abrams). Literature and theatre. Not static; rather a set of meanings. Dramas intended to be put on stage and dramas intended to be read only (closet dramas)

**Origins**: Greece, 6th century BC; connected with ritual – festivals for Dionysus. First: singing the myths of Dionysus, later other myths; dialogues – enacting the myth; chorus: commentary and interpretation

**Main types**: tragedy, comedy. Later categories: tragicomedy, mystery, miracle, morality, chronicle play, romance. **Aristotle**: *Poetics* – dealing with tragedy. **Tragedy**: noble action of noble characters; ‘the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself’, ‘with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions’

**Elements**: external – spectacular presentation, lyrical song, diction; internal – plot, character, thought. **Plot**: *simple* – ‘an action one and continuous, the change of fortune in the protagonist’s life takes place without reversal of the situation and without recognition’; *complex* – ‘the change is accompanied by reversal, or by recognition or by both.’ Unity of action – central idea; beginning, middle and end, all connected by logical necessity. **Reversal** (Peripeteia): ‘from good to bad; the result not of vice’ – *hamartia* /some great error of judgement/, *hubris* /shortcoming in the hero’s character which leads him to ignore the warnings of the gods; cf. Creon in *Antigone*/. **Recognition** (Anagnorisis): the moment when ignorance gives way to knowledge. **Catharsis** /purgation/: ‘a discharge of bad emotions’, ‘a kind of cosmic awe in the face of suffering.’

**Structure**: protasis (characters introduced, situation explained ≈ exposition), epitasis (the plot thickens, preceding the catastrophe), catastasis (major crisis = climax), catastrophe (tragic dénouement)

**Characters** /dramatis personae/: protagonist, antagonist

**Types**: Senecan tragedy, Revenge tragedy, tragedy of blood, heroic tragedy, bourgeois or domestic tragedy

**Comic relief**: comic episodes or interludes to relieve tension and heighten the tragic element by contrast; cf. *Hamlet*. Antique tragedy: pure, no comic elements

Later periods: not many connections with the Greek. Middle Ages: Christian tradition, liturgical drama. Renaissance: Classical influence, Roman tragedies. 20th century: difficulty of writing tragedy; fate located in the human psyche – successful attempts (Eugene O’Neill)
(8) Drama II. Comedy and other forms

**Comedy**: a work dealing in an amusing way with ordinary characters in rather everyday situations; usually happy ending for the main characters. Characters: less favourable types, ‘smaller than life’ figures. Comedy as a term is reserved for drama; comic form appears in poetry and prose fiction as well.

Theory of comedy: less treatment, Aristotle: remarks only, no full treatment (probably lost). First real theory: Renaissance – comedy teaches good behaviour (by negative examples). Later: distinction made between low comedy (little or no intellectual appeal) and high comedy (George Meredith: ‘intellectual laughter’).

Types: farce (comedy intended to produce roars of laughter and concerned with humour rather than wit), comedy of manners (examining the ‘behaviour of men and women living under specific social codes’; Oscar Wilde: *The Importance of Being Earnest*), comedy of humours (presenting characters whose actions are ‘ruled by a particular passion, trait or disposition or humour’; Ben Jonson), comedy of ideas (‘plays which tend to debate, in a witty and humorous fashion, ideas and theories’; Shaw: *Man and Superman*), comedy of intrigue (‘a form of comedy which depends on an intricate plot full of surprises and tends to subordinate character to plot’; Beaumarchais), comedy of menace (‘one or more characters feel that they are (or actually are) threatened by some obscure and frightening force, power, personality, etc. The fear and menace become a source of comedy, albeit laconic, grim or black’; Pinter: *The Birthday Party*), comedy of morals (‘satirical comedy designed to ridicule and correct vices like hypocrisy, pride, avarice, social pretensions, simony and nepotism’; Molière), satirical comedy (a comedy which intends to ‘expose, censure and ridicule the follies, vices and shortcomings of society, and of individuals who represent that society’; Jonson: *Volpone*); ((definitions taken from Cuddon))

**Tragi-comedy**: also called dark comedy or black comedy; characteristic of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. It mingles the subject matters and the forms of comedy and tragedy; a rather problematic category.

**Medieval drama**: developing independently from the drama of antiquity. Christian tradition – parts of the liturgy were elaborated as chanting between priest and choir, later this developed into performance. Moving out of the church into the marketplace – secularisation. **Mystery plays**: based on the Bible, concerned with the stories of the Creation, the Fall and Redemption. **Miracle plays**: later development from mystery plays; dramatising saints’ lives and divine miracles, legends of miraculous interventions by the Virgin. **Morality plays**: not dealing with biblical stories but with personified abstractions of virtues and vices struggling for man’s soul. **Interlude** – a type of morality play, general moral problems treated in an allegorical way with more pronounced realistic and comic elements – secular morality play; marking the transition from medieval religious drama to Renaissance drama. Renaissance: drama of classical antiquity rediscovered, influencing the native tradition.

**The Theatre of the Absurd**: 20th century, rejection of traditional concepts of plot, character, different language and stage. Underlying idea: the absurdity of life and of the human condition;
life with no apparent purpose, out of harmony with its surroundings; meaningless life in a meaningless universe. Roots in expressionism and surrealism; current movement emerged after WW2. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942): ‘In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile. … This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity.’ Samuel Beckett’s definition of life

(9) Fiction

**Fiction:** ‘a vague and general term for an imaginative work, usually in prose’ /Cudon/. Common meaning: ‘an invented story’= not fact. (Though: may have been taken for fact in the past; *euhemerism*: myth is a story based on actual reality; Euhemerus, 4th-3rd century BC). Most general sense: any form of prose narrative – novel, romance, novella/novelette, short story.

**Elements of fiction:** story, plot, character, experience, time, point of view

**Story:** mere sequence of events. **Plot:** causal link between the events that make up the story. **Beginning** or **exposition**, **middle** or **the body**, **end** or **conclusion**. The body: the major action, containing **conflict** and **complication**, characterised by unity and coherence. **Suspense** (‘concerned uncertainty about what is going to happen’ /Abrams/), **surprise** (what happens violates our expectations). **Dénouement** – the sorting out of conflicts. **Organic plot**: events move towards resolution of conflict; favourable to main characters, unifying factors in the subject matter. **Inorganic plot**: perception of life as an endless series of crises, no apparent faith in divine dispensation. Open- or broad-ended novels; story/plot rejected as distortion of life. Henry James: *The Portrait of a Lady*; ‘the whole of anything is never told.’ The structure of the plot: gradual development, revelation (no change; we get to know more); rising action - climax - falling action - conclusion

**Character**: character and plot are interdependent in criticism: ‘What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?’ (Henry James). **Function**: protagonist, antagonist. **Types**: E. M. Forster’s division (*Aspects of the Novel*): flat and round characters. **Flat** characters (types): ‘built around a single idea or quality’, no change in the course of a story or play (may be adequately described in one single sentence); **round** characters: complexity, represented with subtlety, showing development (‘capable of surprising us in a convincing way’). ‘Intermediate’ category: flat character appearing to be round (surprising but not convincing). Caricatures, stereotypes. **Methods of characterisation**: showing (merely presenting the character talking and acting) or telling (describing and evaluating the motives and dispositions of the character).

**Experience**: **external** (adventure) and/or **internal**. Modernism: shift from external to internal. Walter Pater: experience – a group of impressions in the mind of the observer

**Time**: **external/objective** – the time of the clock. **Internal/subjective** – the time of the mind. External: dominant in older type of fiction (the time of external experience). Subjective and objective may be represented simultaneously /Joyce: *Ulysses*, Woolf: *The Waves*/. **Time-shift**: moving back and forth in the objective time of fiction; broken chronology /Conrad: *Lord Jim* or *Nostromo*/

Point of view: who talks to the reader, ‘the mode or perspective established by the author by means of which the reader is presented with the characters, actions, setting, and events which constitute the narrative in a work of fiction.’ (Abrams). 1st and 3rd person narrators. 1st person: the narrator is a character (a witness, a minor or a major character); the most limited. 3rd person: the author is simply a narrator; either limited (the story is told from within the confines of what is experienced by a single character) or omniscient (the narrator knows everything about the agents and events, having access to the thoughts, feelings and motives of characters). The limited point of view was developed into the technique of stream of consciousness (outer observations presented through their impression on the current of thought, memory, feelings and associations of the character). Other narrative tactics (cutting across diverse points of view): self-conscious narrator (revealing to the reader that the narration is a work of fiction), unreliable narrator (the perceptions and interpretations of the narrator do not coincide with the implicit opinions and norms manifested by the author)

Setting: the where and when of the story. Local colour (details characteristic of a region). Background – though a work of fiction, the character comes from a social milieu. Consistency and credibility: approaching a story with a ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ (Coleridge). Probability, universality and the illusion of reality

* *

Short story: difficult to define. Poe: can be read between 1/2 hour and 2 hours. Less complex than a novel, swift, one line of action, small number of characters, one or two well-drawn, the rest only sketches. Minimising the exposition and the details of the setting, focusing on the selected central incident which reveals as much as possible of the totality of the life and character of the protagonist, details carry maximum significance

* *

Novel: extended work of prose fiction; more complicated plot (or plots), greater variety of characters, subtle exploration of character, motive and circumstance. Problems of definition and theory – a relatively new genre

Theoretical considerations: developing without a comprehensive theory, laws not defined, aesthetic function not clarified; in its highest form seen as the modern descendant of the epic (Fielding described his Joseph Andrews as ‘a comic epic in prose’). The lack of theory has been an advantage at the same time: more flexible, ability to adapt itself to contemporary demands

History: relatively recent in its present form. Antique precedent: Petronius, Satyricon (1st century AD); Apuleius, The Golden Ass (2nd century AD); Heliodorus, Aethiopica (3rd century AD); all extremely popular in their own time. Middle Ages: the tradition of storytelling was still popular; romances – mainly in verse. Development of adequate prose style: towards the Renaissance. The modern European novel: 16th and 17th centuries. Rabelais, Gargantua and Pantagruel (1532-34), Cervantes, Don Quixote (1605-15). England: early 18th century; Daniel Defoe: Robinson Crusoe (1719), Moll Flanders (1722); Samuel Richardson: Pamela (1740). Victorian novel, the Modernist novel
Types: **picareseque** (orig. the life of a knave/picaroon; loose, episodic structure, adventures connected by the main character; Fielding: *Jonathan Wild*, Smollett); **Gothic** (tales of mystery and horror, stock elements; late 18th and early 19th centuries; Stoker: *Dracula*); **historical** (Sir Walter Scott; reconstructing and imaginatively recreating history); **psychological** (spiritual, emotional and mental lives of the characters); **Bildungsroman** (education novel; the development of the protagonist from childhood to maturity; Dickens: *David Copperfield*); **Künstlerroman** (development of an artist from childhood to maturity; Joyce: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*); **documentary** (based on documentary evidence; Dreiser: *An American Tragedy*); **anti-novel** (experimental, breaking with traditional story-telling methods, little attempt to create an illusion of realism; Beckett; Flann O’Brien: *At Swim-Two-Birds*); **epistolary** (written in the forms of letters; Richardson: *Pamela*); **social or thesis novel** (a social, political or religious problem treated with a didactic purpose; Dickens: *Hard Times*; Harriet Beecher Stowe: *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*).

Recent developments: **nouveau roman** – sequences of perceptions instead of traditional elements such as plot, character, a frame of reference to the outside world; France, Alain Robbe-Grillet; **magic realism** – interweaving realism with fantastic and dreamlike elements; Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez

*  

**Romance**: entertainment; elements of coincidence, fantasy; myth; medieval times: verse romances mainly, later giving way to prose works

********

**Appendix – (10) An Outline of the History of Literature in English**

English literature vs literature in English – the concepts of American, Australian and Canadian literature; Irish, Scottish and Welsh literatures – in English

**Britain:**
Beginnings: **Anglo-Saxon period** (ca. 449-1066); alliterative meter; heroic poetry (most well-known: *Beowulf*), religious poetry, prose (chronicles, translations of works of theology and philosophy)

1066 – end of the 15th century: **Middle English** period. 1066: Norman Conquest – important cultural consequences as well as historical ones. Aristocracy: French-speaking. Revival of interest in the English language: 14th century. Geoffrey **Chaucer** – the father of English poetry, the first significant poet to use metrical forms in English; *The Canterbury Tales*. Romances, dream allegories, lyric poetry; medieval drama
16th century – early 17th century: **Renaissance**. Humanism. Drama: tragedy and comedy,
chronicle plays. Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson – the
culmination in the history of English drama. Poetry: great period of the lyric, sonnets and sonnet
sequences. Sir Thomas Wyatt, Henry Howard (Earl of Surrey), Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund
Spenser. Early 17th century: Metaphysical poets and Cavaliers; John Donne, Ben Jonson. John
Milton

1660: **Restoration**; John Dryden. Restoration drama – another flourishing period for drama. 18th
century: **Neo-classicism** – strict principles of form and decorum; Alexander Pope, Samuel
Johnson. Satires, journalism, essays, pamphlets. Beginnings of the English novel – Daniel Defoe,
Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding. The Age of Reason (Enlightenment) – leaving little space
for lyric poetry

ca 1798-1832: the **Romantic period**, ‘Official beginning’: 1798: Lyrical Ballads (William
Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge). Interest in nature, in the self, in the Middle Ages; the
great potential of man. The revival of the lyric; William Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge; John
Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron

From the 1830s on: **Victorian era**. The flourishing of the novel – Charles Dickens, William
George Eliot, the Brontë sisters, Thomas Hardy. Belief in progress and development, the British
Empire – though not without problems. Charles Darwin and the ascent of science, spiritual
uncertainties

First part of the 20th century: breakdown of Victorian values, disintegration of the Victorian age
becomes complete, loss and disillusionment culminating during and after WW1. New ideas in
philosophy and psychology. **Modernism**, experimenting with the form to suggest a different kind
of experience. The novel – Henry James, Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Virginia
Woolf; poetry – William Butler Yeats, T. S. Eliot

Post-WW2 scene: return to traditional forms in the novel and in poetry, avoiding ‘bad principles’.
Experimentation also present – the postmodern (‘fabulation’ and ‘metafiction’)

**North America:**

Beginnings: colonisation, 17th century. 18th century: independence – the birth of a nation,
reflected in literature as well. The American Renaissance: the Transcendentalists – Ralph Waldo
Emerson, Henry David Thoreau; and others – Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Edgar
Allan Poe. The Civil War and the Gilded Age – Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Mark Twain
Modernism – significant experimentation; T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, the Imagists. The Lost
Generation – Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner. The 1930s – the
Depression, after the Jazz Age of the 1920s; John Steinbeck, the Fugitive poets. Post WW2:
experimentation, the Beat Generation, Confessional poets

20th century American drama: new direction for the tragedy. Eugene O’Neill, Tennessee
Williams, Arthur Miller. Black American writings – exploring a different experience

**Australia:**
18th century colonisation, imported models for literature. Romanticism and post-Romanticism dominant until the second half of the 20th century, bypassing modern masters then and catching up with later developments. Thomas Kenneally, Patrick White