The Origin and Influence of the Drama.

Anna Odette Summers.

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The principle of imitation is inherent in human nature. It is inseperable from the body; we find it in all classes of people, from the civilized to the barbarian. Painting, sculpture and the drama must be coeval with society, and have been practiced in some form by almost every nation. Among the South Sea Islanders, a rude kind of drama dates its origin to remote ages. The war dance of the Indian and the African intermingled with pantomimic descriptions of the preparation for battle, the stealthy advance upon the foe, the combat and the death of the enemy, greeted with applause from the excited spectators, is essentially a dramatic exhibition all the worldless.

A drama is the imitation of a complete action adapted to the sympathetic attention of man, developed in a succession of continuously interesting and continuously related incidents, acted and expressed by means of speech and the symbols, actualities and conditions of life. No definition, however comprehensive in terms, can more than indicate the limitations and proportions of the drama. Large education is necessary to bring out its hidden meaning. The drama in general is a reflex of life. The truth of this is to be found in the literature of any people, for in this form in proportion to its development at any given period, more than in any other form, are embodied sentiment and manners.

The playwright may treat his theme as he may, with idealism or realism, and there yet remains in his work something of his time. It is for this reason that dramas are so perishable. Change of taste and manner work this ruin. The drama deals with men. It requires spectators, and is addressed to the eye, the ear, and the moral nature. It is a form of literature and of entertainment into which all human emotions and experience may be translated under certain conditions. That idea only is dramatic, that can be put into shape of sustained action - an action that is complete and organic, with unity of theme and purpose, that invites our attention at the outset, arouses and interest as it proceeds and confirms itself in our sympathies at the last, coming to a conclusion in its disposition of the characters, that accords with our view of justice. Only a vital and logical action can do this. An action is complete - according to the first requirement - when every thing essential to its sympathetic appreciation is contained in it.

Aristotle said, a complete action is one that has a beginning, a middle and an end, or it may be put, it contains a premise, an agreement and a conclusion. Everything has a beginning and an ending, cause brings effect.

The drama is concrete. It is not only life but the essence of it, the selection and use of those things only

that lend to illusions. It holds all forms of literature and all things of life in solution, but on the condition of a drafted form and that they be integral with the action and the purpose. The drama is a powerful solvent, and can make many things "dramatic" that in themselves are not, but become so when vital and in place. The heart of the dramatic is emotion, and that action which springs from or leads to a clash of personal interests that by vicissitude of incident proceeds to a final result. The Divine Law social and political conditions, are the higher causes in this movement. The drama is a conflict always. The problem is always to remove an obstacle. Dramatic are the emotions that give shape to the will and deed. All emotions, all events that involve logical destiny to the person or persons concerned are dramatic. There is a drama in every throb of the human heart. It requires the clash of interests to make a complete action. It matters not what forces impels. Desire and demand, opposition, resistance, the thrust and the parry, and so their vicissitudes to joy or grief.

The drama may be divided into two classes, namely, Ancient and modern. In form, we have tragedy, comedy, romantic and reconciling drama. The ancient drama, or the oldest dramatic idea accepted and followed in Europe was divided

chiefly into tragedy and comedy, and was the creation of the Greeks about 700 B. C. The beginnings of the Greek are indicated in the rites and ceremonies that were performed in the worship of Dionysus, Bacchus, Iakchos and Demeter. The religious festivals were believed to have been introduced into Greece by Melampus. In the Bacchic ritual, an ode in honor of the god was sung, and to produce the best ode, the one which should be selected by the priests to be inserted into their ceremony became a favorite contest among the poets of the time. A goat was either the principal sacrifice at the altar, or the prize awarded to the successful competitor. In like manner, at the rustic festivals or harvest homes of the Greeks, semi-religious ceremonies, composed of odes and dances in honor of Bacchus were enacted. These odes being of a more genial and comic character consistent with the occasion of an agricultural triumph were called comedy from kōmē the song of the village. Some writers are of opinion that the word comedy signified drama, and had not the distinctive sense in which we apply it, but included tragedies and theatrical representations of every kind. The earliest known form of the drama is the dithyrambus, a hymn in honor of Bacchus, sung by a chorus of voices, accompanied by music, expressive gesture and dances. In 562 B. C. Susarion, a native of

Megara appeared at Athens, where he, as a single speaker recited an ode. In 536 B. C. Thespis a native of Icaria, recited an ode with responses, made to him by a dithyrambic chorus, in this we faintly perceive the first germ of dialogue. Such were the rude elements found by Aeschylus 499 B.C. And out of them he alone and unaided, created and perfected the drama as we now behold it. Nothing essential has since been added to its structure. He seems to have forestalled future ages of invention, and to have left nothing undone. He removed the chorus into the back ground and used them only as an auxillary. He brought a second actor upon the scene and introduced dialogue. Thus the drama became an action instead of a narrative. He invented scenery, costume and machinery of a grandeur unknown to our stage. Banishing the lewd and Bacchanalian character from the dythirambic hymn, he supplied its place with pure tragedy simple and grand in its form, noble and dignified in its object From his works were gathered those rules called the Unities refered to by Aristotle, indeed he may be truly said to have found the chaos and left it a world. These changes were wrought within the space of thirty years, and so rapidly were

they accomplished, that they were at the time regarded as the acme of inspiration. The expansion he gave to the drama caused the Athenians to build the great theatre of Bacchus, the Lenaian, the former theatre having broken down under the pressure of the people gathered in it, to witness a representation in which Aeschylus and Pratinas were rivals. Thirty years later, Sophocles introduced a third actor, and thus diffused the dialogue and fertilized the action. Fifteen years afterward, Euripides enabled Greece to behold as contemporaries the three greatest purely tragic poets the world has produced: Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides. We had no idea of tragedy. The tragedy of the Greeks was a fable or a series of events begotten of each other in a natural sequence. It began with a simple position so selected that the auditor required no explanation to understand the present conditions of matters or persons. The action should not stray from the one place beyond such a limit as the time employed in the performance might naturally permit. These unities of action, time and place were not strictly observed by the Greeks nor considered essential. The Greek tragedy was composed in trilogies. The early history of comedy is more obscure than that of tragedy. Aristophanes was the earliest

comic poet. Comedy was divided into three forms, the old, the middle, and the new. In the old the characters were real living personages who under their real names, were freely satirized. This license was soon so abused that a law was passed forbidding the name of real personages to be used in comedy. The outcome was the middle comedy, where the prohibition was evaded by giving fictitious names to real characters, and distinguishing the individual intended to be satirized by a mask or some unmistakable inference. This lasted about fifty years, when it was superseded by the new comedy.

As tragedy descended from the contemplation of divine matters to depict and sympathize with human woes, it gradually lost its grandeur and degenerated. So, also, as comedy divested itself of its direct influences upon men and things, and from a statesman became a philosopher, it lost its pith and power.

The modern drama like the ancient drama originated in the usages connected with religious worship, and its source may be traced to the liturgy of the Christian Church. Early in the history of the Church, there were various attempts to give distinctiveness and impressiveness to the service.

Appeals to the senses were made to impart true doctrine to the people and urge them to right conduct, narrative hymns and tableaux were introduced into the liturgy, and in the mass there was a "dramatic action in part pantomimically presented in part aided by both epical and lyrical elements." A change took place in the ritual, scenic features were added, notably, on the days of sacred festival. The descent of Gabriel at the Feast of the Annunciation, the Adoration of the Magi at Epiphany, the Birth of Christ at Christmas, the Resurrection at Easter were some of the most common of these dramatic representations.

The transition from the liturgical drama to the Miracle Play, was a natural one. On the day sacred to the memory of the saint to whom the church was dedicated, it was believed that miracles were especially worked. On this day, it was the honorable to attract worshippers from all parts to pay honor and bring offerings to the shrine. A chapter read from the "Acts of the Saints" would not impress the hearers, but the dramatic representation would impress the people deeply. Attempts were made to bring home to the people, through their senses, the essentials of Biblical stories especially those connected with the Passion, sufferings and death

of Christ.

The first cause of secularization grew out of the religious festivals. Along with the sincere worshippers who came to celebrate the mities of their patron saints thronged a mass of traders and sight seers. These religious gatherings afforded the worldly minded tempting opportunities for trade and pleasure. The religious festivals became a fair. The presence of this large and motley concourse of people led to these important changes. The play was brought out of the church, and performed on a platform just outside, or on the meadow near by, or in the public square and streets, in order that all might witness it; it was spoken in the vernacular, that all might understand it; its purpose was not solely to edify, but also to entertain. The attention of the people could not be held from all the hours of the long summer day, light and even comic elements were introduced.

The more dramatic the play became, the more comic and satiric matter introduced, the greater was the skill required for representation. Now not only the laity and the clergy were called to the act, but even the strolling "players of price." The celebration of the feast of Corpus Christi was strictly enjoined by the Council of Vienne (1311)

The societies for mutual protection or charity such as trade guilds, adopted Corpus Christi day in many places as their chief festival of the year. Each neighborhood that had produced its dramatist of its own, and wished to mount a series of mysteries, might choose a set from among those which it knew to be in use. When the trade guilds of any place undertook to celebrate a yearly festival with a complete series of Scripture mysteries, each guild had its allotted play or pageant, and having a few transfers and readjustments, spent its energies year after year exclusively upon the attractive presentation of that one pageant alone. The people of the middle ages took these plays seriously. We shrink from any impersonation of the Maker of Heaven and Earth, or of the Parliaments of Heaven and Hell. The mysteries of Creation, Resurrection and Judgement seem to us to forbid any reverent presentation. The attempts to drag the entire supernatural world into daily and continuous publicity appear incongruous and ludicrous. Little is now left in England of that earlier architectural magnificence, when the Cathedral or the Abbey Church was a poem without speech, perfected in every part with beauty of form of stationary music sounding from scriptural instruments, a storied illustration

of the spiritual life of Christendom, conveying them the medium of forms and colors what the mind has not yet learned to frame in rhythmic words. When a miracle play was given in such a building it completed and enhanced the whole scene. The Passion Plays of Oammergau enable us at the present time to understand the effect produced by miracles upon a mediæval audience.

In the course of social evolution, the Miracle Play was gradually outgrown. The first expression of dissatisfaction came from the church. Wycliffe and his followers were always opposed to the use of sacred subjects for stage representation. The performers had the sympathy and cooperation of many of the most serious minds in England. The transition from the miracle play to the moralities was gradual and natural.

The morality was necessarily a transitional form of dramatic representation. The change from moralities to actual lives of contemporary life, was therefore, an advance which may seem to have been of its nature inevitable. All classes of the population were familiar with the characters and events of religious history and legend; it was only necessary that a similar acquaintance should come to prevail with personages of profane history

and their deeds, and these could not fail to gain admission to the popular stage. This was influenced by the Renaissance and Reformation.

Tragedy was derived from the mysteries and Moralities through the transitional phase of the chronicle histories, and with the aid of the example of Seneca, and secondarily of his Italian imitators Italian Romance, but not this exclusively, suggested a wider variety of subjects of a cast dealing by preference with horrible and exciting events. These subjects were partly historical and historical, partly domestic, and both kinds were seized upon by our early tragic dramatists.

Comedy sprang more easily from the Moralities than the transitional phase of the interludes with the aid of the example of Plautus and Terence, and secondarily of the Italian comic dramatists. The mixture of tragic with comic motives led to tragic comedy, of which the Spanish as well as the Italian theatre furnished some contemporary examples; and the precedent of the Italian pastoral drama encouraged the introduction of figures and stories from classical mythology.

Classical drama is largely influenced by the laws and proceedings of the ancient drama. The latter is much freer both in method and

choice of subject. Reconciling drama mingles the tragic and the comic. It has the happy ending of comedy: but tragedy struggles thru out for mastery and it is not until the close of the action that the happy ending is assured. The drama reaches its object in a reconciling of the tragic and the comic into harmonious consistency. Great and revolutionary changes are being predicated for the drama of the century just opening. Here we find both ethical culture and amusement combined.

We have a stage that openly honors idle luxury and the emptiness of title and aristocracy, where aristocracy means not what the word expresses, "the best and noblest" but merely the richest, and often the most. We have a stage where the workers have no place, where the thinkers have no place, where noble ideals have very little part, but which is chiefly of the baser, the more sordid and artificial elements of modern life. This is not the fault of the General public which do not demand the low, the sensual, the horrible and the monstrous, "Is it not possible that the public take what they can get, and like what they are assured they will like? Is it difficult to believe the public taste to be so debased so prurient, as it is sometimes asserted to be, in the face of the instant success accorded any bright clean interesting

play that appeals with sufficient force to some one of the indradicable sentiments or emotions of the human heart or the enthusiastic homage rendered to any acter who with a certain or even an uncertain amount of genius unites simple beauty and purity of life. Before the stage of the day lies one of the grandest opportunities ever offered to humanity. The development, refinement and culture (that lies beneath the surface of the drama) gained is unquestionably great. Grant that it may once more resume its ancient office, become again the educater of the people. The drama in ancient times was the soul educater of the people, the basis of all moral acts. May it be the best friend of the proletariat remembering always that all hope for art, that does not rest on the liberation of the masses is as a house built on sand - is basically unsound.

The drama of the twentieth century must take up the mission that dropped from the dying hands of chivalry in the seventeenth century. The drama of the future will never preach, but it will be didactic in its essence as all good art must be. Thus it will exhibit religion as the art of living by law, the law of high thinking and right doing, and recognizing the fact that the effort of

employment is one half of character, builds the character, first of the individual, then of the nation, it will never allow the toiler despicable or ridiculous merely because he is a toiler and will point no aureole round the head of the idle incumbent of inherited dignities.

The ideal aspect, the inner heart of the science, its tragedies and comedies, the pathos and beauty that belong to the laboratory, the mine, the diggings, the ranch, the farm, the fishing boat — all await the man of genius who shall come with the courage of his convictions, ready to tell what he sees as he sees it, and win the whole world to stand by his side and see out of his eyes.

War and bloodshed will find no place in the twentieth century drama, as before long they will find none on the stage of the civilized world, and thus the histrionic art will assume its proper place and appear in the vanguard of progress, instead of being reluctantly dragged along in the rear. The wild flowers of national life - myth, legend, song and folk lore - will form a part of the flower of the new drama.

It is true that people cannot now be taught as were the people of the ages we are accustomed to call heroic, absolutely or principally through the

ear. Such a method would neither be desirable nor possible, since the invention of printing has accustomed the world to teaching conveyed in signs and object lessons. Where the ancient stage had no means of expression and influence, the modern will possess many. The early drama did influence to a great extent; the people of those days were lovers of the drama.

Holding fast to the principle that the drama is life, we insist that its uses be noble. Still variety of the drama that brings so much confusion into all talk of it. Its value is not to be seriously disputed for a moment. It is essential in many ways to civilization. In large cities, where the physical congregation is social congregation, it takes the place to a certain extent of the social and moral influences that are active in the every act life of smaller communities. Some think that the purpose of the drama is merely to entertain. So should a sermon entertain and have art after its kind, too. A drama must certainly entertain, or it fails; but it is a shallow assumption that proclaims that as its only function. A serious and entertaining drama cannot fully but instruct. It is a supplement to our life. Its potentialities are to be doubted. Its molding influence cannot be weighed, but it exists.

We know that it can effect the moral and political life of a nation. Many examples could be given without recurring to the time when in Greece the drama was national. It acts on individuals and results are hidden in the multitude of hearts. Of all the arts, the drama comes closest to man. It dwells with him. It embraces all the arts, and gives life and rich and form and functions to them all. No other art uses such a multiplicity of forces.

I indgine the cost of some single, great dramatic production, and what in the end it brings to author, actor and manager. Perhaps it earns a quarter of a million of dollars; and men everywhere that have beheld it carry with them memories for life, for they have seen something done by men, not marble, and have beheld pictures painted by passion and life, not by pigments. Their experiences have been enlarged, for man is made of dreams. Perspectives have been opened up that are new to some minds and to them otherwise impossible. It teaches wisdom to men that never open a book. It gives the essence of life, and in three hours it speakes volumes. It warns and counsels, teaches justice and keeps alive fidelity. It celebrates man's liberty and his struggles,

and all that is noble wanders into it. It enlists the sympathies to such an exlent that the listner is his own poet. It analyzes all motives pilfe holding nothing, lays bare everything. It is in fact the plainest, the most strict form of all teaching. It does not formulate morals in words, but in deeds: and if life, which is the drama, is not a constant mentor, imbedded also in its teachings what is it?