The Role of the Drama

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Introduction
Origin
Greek
Aeschylus
Sophocles
Euripides
Aristophanes

Roman
Livius
Adriaticus
Plautus
Terence

Indian
Kalidasa

Chinese

Japanese

Italian
Maturacio
Goldoni

Spanish
J. de la Engrina
Lope de Vega

French
Moliere
Racine

English
Development, Early Forms
Shakespeare
Aristotle says drama is imitation of action.

A common means of imitation by all peoples is by gesture and voice. The first step toward a drama is to assume a real or fictitious character, but the true drama is not reached until imitation extends to action. The drama gratifies the wish of all men to see their life portrayed in the life of others. A requisite of the drama is unity of action; that is, every thing in it should be grouped in the service of a single end or purpose.

Almost all nations had a drama of some kind, though it did not always reach a permanent form in literature. The Hebrew writings partook of the dramatic feature, and of their work we have today the Book of Job and the Book of Ruth.

It is due to the Greeks that the drama first attained its literary form. Aristotle says Homer prepared the way for the drama by display of power in both gods and heroes, which suggested plots and devices for dramatic subjects.

The Greek drama is of a religious origin, growing out of the songs and dances...
gift is in honor of the god of wine, Dionysus. This religious form it never lost. The drama presented two main features, the chorus and the dialogue. The chorus was an important part, and was sung between the acts. Its purpose was to reflect on the action that was going on, and to represent in verse the emotions of the poet as spokesman. Later on, the dialogue formed the more important feature of the dramatic entertainment.

The first plays were acted on a temporary stage, but as the art was perfected, the theatre was built. The most noted was the Theatre of Dionysus at Athens. It was surrounded by a semicircular form and built on a sloping hillside. The theatre was in three divisions: the stage, the orchestra, and the place for spectators. The scenery was usually nature, or painted representations that were turned on a pivot. The actors were required to represent their characters in every way, using masks and padding to accomplish the purpose.

The Marmion Chronicle records this as the first actor of Unwritten tragedy.
He is said to have introduced the dialogue, and his works were of a satirical nature.

Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides belong to the classical age, and are the three best representatives of Greek tragedy.

Aeschylus was an honored warrior, having fought in the Persian wars. He wrote in a tragic style, was the creator of written tragedy, and the originator of the trilogy. He expanded the dialogue, his characters were bold and strong, and his plots simple. Of ancient poets, his genius closely resembles that of Shakespeare. The obscurity of some of his plays is due to overstrained epithets and harsh compounds.

Among his few works that have reached us is a complete trilogy, *Agamemnon*. The three parts are *Agamemnon*, *Electra*, and *Tiresia*. The subject of the first is the murder of Agamemnon by his wife Clytemnestra. In the second, Orestes avenges his father’s death by killing his mother. The last deals with the torture ofCreon by the fury and his refuge in the temple of Delfi.
Agamemnon is classed the master piece of Aeschylus.

Under Sophocles, Greek tragedy was perfected. He introduced more character, subordinated the chorus, and gave the dialogue a prominent part. He excelled Aeschylus in moral truths of finish, and beauty of style.

His greatest works are the three plays on the fate of the house, "Oedipus." Oedipus-Colon is a most wonderful work, written in the poet's ninetieth year. Sophocles sings to us of this birthplace, so much grace and beauty, and more fully expresses his feelings and sentiments. The ancients called him the "Attic S.C."

Euripides had much talent, but lacked the wisdom and rigour of Aeschylus and Sophocles. His aim was to please the people. Some of his works have attained the high standard of excellence. He is considered the most humane and pathetic ancient poet. He did not observe the ideals of tragedy laid down by Aeschylus and Sophocles, and under him tragedy declined.

The foremost of all comedy writers was
Aristophanes. His comedies are of a mixed nature. Some are full of brilliance, and by a grand polished style, while others are severely criticized for their many deficiencies. This comedy introduces us to the common life of Athenian society. His best works are said to be "The Clouds," "The Wasps," "The Birds," and "The Knights."

In "The Clouds," he ridicules the rising school of philosophers and teachers of Athens. "The Wasps" is a satire against the Athenian law courts. "The Birds" is a satirical allegory, aimed at Kleobides, for hisScheme and schemes. The subject of "The Knight" is the punishment of Cleon, a contest between a demagogue and Athens.

The Romans were translators and afterwards imitators of the Greeks. The most noted Roman dramatists were Livius Andronicus, Plautus, and Terence. Nearly all their plays were translations and adaptations from Greek masterpieces. They borrowed their plan of theatre from the Greek, but the amphitheatre was entirely original with them. The largest and most wonderful amphitheatre
in the world, as the Colosseum of Rome, built during the reign of Tiberius. It has a seating capacity for over eighty thousand spectators. The only Roman works handed down to us are those of Plautus and Terence.

The Indian drama was a purely native character, a drama of a literary class, exhibiting some of the noblest and most refined characteristics of the Hindu religion.

Kalidasa's 'Sabaratna' is a purely dramatic poem. It contains passages of great beauty, and is one of the masterpieces of poetic literature. The character of the Indian drama is a lofty one, and some parts are of incomparable loveliness.

The Chinese possessed a national drama of an elevating character, which was largely due to the code, that writers of immoral plays would suffer death in purgatory as long as the plays were acted. The Chinese had a wide range of characters, taking in every phase of society. Some of their passages have a humorous vein, while others are full of grace and beauty.

The Chinese were not aware of the
Distinction between comedy and tragedy, and some of their religious allusions are more سوفري،. The drama has four periods. In the third period, it rose to its highest plane of excellence.

The writings of this period are called the "Green Rain" plays, and from them we have largely obtained our literary knowledge of the Chinese. "Pi Pa Kî" or the "Story of the Lute" is considered the master piece of Chinese drama. It has many meritorious qualities, and is as high moral character.

The Japanese plays were simply reproductions of the Chinese drama. The subjects are of a historical and realistic nature. The actors are held in great contempt.

The Italians possessed no natural drama, but imitated other nations. They wrote comedy and tragedy, which was largely borrowed from the Spanish and French.

One of their best writers is Metastasio, a follower of Spanish models. His merits are due to the finiteness, clearness, elegance and correctness of his language and correct style. His writings have little variation. Some of his plays are still retained for the stage.
Goldoni reformed the Italian comedy. He wrote marked comedies, his writing though popular at the time have not much depth of character or novelty of invention.

Spain possessed a national drama of much wealth. It was of a religious origin.

Jofre Engravia is called the father of Spanish drama. The national drama was established by Lope de Vega, one of the greatest geniuses of the world. In the number of his dramatic writings, he has had no rival. Fifty hundred plays are attributed to him. It is from his authors' works, that we can best obtain an insight into the manners, religion, and sentiments of his countrymen.

The French were imitators of the ancients, mainly of the Greek and Spanish works.

Molière is the best representative of Greek comedy. He is witty, humorous, and satirical, but his breadth of view and pathetic vein is much narrower than that of Aristophanes. Molière's masterpiece of verse comedy is "Tartuffe," a religious hypocrisy. He originated the character of the play, and introduced new dramatic poetry. His best
comedies are "Le Misanthrope," and "Femmes Savantes."

"Le Misanthrope" is excellence generally placed next to "Tartuffe." All the characters of "Misanthrope" are excellently conceived, and the play is of a high uniform style. The comedy is a satire against the higher society of Paris.

"Femmes Savantes" is also a satirical shaft, directed at the Parisian literary circles. Molière fascinates his audience by his form of gravity and variety of manners. He rivalled Shakespeare in directing his force with greater skill and energy.

Racine is classed as the best French tragedian, and he was better acquainted with the ancients than Molière. Some critics place Racine second to Virgil. His works have a natural expression, and he has a grace and delicacy of style that has not been excelled. He enriched the language with many new turns and phrases.

Racine's success began in 1667, with his "Andromaque," a tragedy full of much grace and beauty, but containing many insipid lines. Britannicus published in 1669.
is an admirable play. In a passage of this play, he has excelled an expression used by Shakespeare in "Antony and Cleopatra." Both obtained their idea from Plutarch.

"Athalia" is Racine's masterpiece. This play is more free of affectation than any of his other tragedies. Its grandeur and simplicity of style; its dramatic effect; its clear and careful management places it above his other works.

The English drama, like the Greek, was of a religious origin. The early plays were first acted in the church, by the priests. The object was to educate the people in Scriptural History, and to extend church authority.

These plays were called Mysteries. The subjects were usually pathetic scenes taken from the Bible, such as the "Crucifixion," and the "Tarry Mass." The Miracle plays were representations of mysterious subjects taken from the New Testament.

The Morals were of an ethical nature. Abstract qualities were personified to represent characters of the Bible.
existence, instead of using the names of Moses, Adam, and the Holy Spirit, the abstract qualities, Mercy, Justice, and Tremendousness were used. These plays were taken from the church to the churchyard, from thence to town, and finally passed into the hands of the crowds.

The Morality merged into the Interludes, which were used between intervals of sermons and ceremonial entertainments. They were usually of a light character, sometimes exhibiting wit and humor. John Heywood was a writer of Interludes during the reign of Henry VIII. He often entertained the court with his plays.

The public taste had been raised by the moral development of the drama, and the people demanded something better. This opened the road for the comedy and tragedy. The first comedy was "Ralph Roan Doite," by Nicholas Udall. It was an imitation of the tragic comedy, "Ragged Soldier."

In 1563, the first tragedy, "Tereus and Pallas" by Sackville and Norton, has its plot carefully drawn from the mythical history of Britain.
The drama now rapidly rose. Thus the work of Shakespeare’s predecessors. The most important were Lyly, Peele, Greene, Davenant and Marlowe. Marlowe, the more important, did much to change the cast of the drama, raising it to a higher standard. By his fine touch and unflagging and grand style. "Faustus," and "The Jew of Malta" are classed as his masterpieces.

The predecessors of Shakespeare were 3 a free imagination, and wrote in a powerful style. They had no models, and used language that today would not be tolerated. Their originality established rules by which the drama was placed on a firm basis.

Plays became so popular that it was necessary to have larger and more permanent accommodations. This led to the building of the first theatre, "The Black Friar." The theatres were of two kinds, public and private. The first were very large, uncovered, and therefore very uncomfortable. The last were smaller, but under cover.

Shakespeare found the drama in a progressive condition, and under him, was brought to perfection.
This noted dramatist was born at Warwickshire, in 1564. His mother came from wealthy parents, and his father was a tailor and butcher. At the age of fourteen, young Shakespeare, due to the pecuniary circumstances of his father, was removed from school. In 1582, he was married to Ann Hathaway. He went to London in 1583 to seek his fortune. Three years, we have no further account of him. It was here, that he began his dramatic career, by touching up old plays. He rapidly rose to prominence. His popularity aroused the jealousy of other writers. Greene calls him "upstart crow" beautified by his feathers.

Though Shakespeare knew "small Latin and less Greek," he read much and was a close observer of the peculiarities of nature. His knowledge of mankind is so great, that he has been called the ''supposter of the human heart. He has summed up all that has gone before, and given to the world his works, which are the most complete and constructive of their kind.

Shakespeare has been criticized for play of words, and it is said that some of hi
works tend to mere buffoonery. Other critics say that he simply wrote of the age in which he lived. He represented life as it was conceb-

Shakespeare has largely employed the use of blank verse in all his works. He recog-
nized its value in lowering and elevating the style. Plays issued in "Midsummer Night's Dream," and "The Tempest," to give them a higher musical tone. Almost all the subjects of his comedies are romantic love tales, taken from novels.

Comparing Shakespeare with Molière, Shakespeare has a wider range of character, but Molière has written the best comedies. The only pure comedy of Shakespeare is "Much Ado About Nothing." The "Merchant of Venice" in one of Shakespeare's most perfect works. He has excellently conceived all the characters in "Romeo and Juliet."

Of all his characters, Shakespeare has portrayed "Hamlet" with the richest wit and humor. Macbeth" is spoken of as one of the grandest works written since the "Eumenides" of Aeschylus. "Symbiota," a
some of Shakespeare's historical works have reached perfection. Julius Caesar is called his masterpiece in this line of work. In his historical dramas he has clearly and accurately portrayed the principal events and circumstances, that from these, we obtain a true knowledge of the history of his times.

Shakespeare's fame has been sung by many poets. He is called the genius of the British Isles. Ben Jonson says he was not of an age, but for all time. While Milton proclaims him as,

"Our sweetest Shakespeare, fancy child,
Warbled his native wood notes wild.
Shakespeare's prosperity continued to the time of his death, April 23rd, 1616. He had been proprietor of the Globe Theatre, and owned much wealth.

His works still stand as a model and he is ranked as the greatest of the world's poets and dramatists."