

1. Comedy.

Aristotle's *Poetics* makes only some incidental comments on comedy. According to Aristotle, comedy originated in crude rustic entertainment. The broad distinction that Aristotle draws between Tragedy and Comedy is that Tragedy represents noble actions of noble personages and Comedy holds up to ridicule ignoble actions of ignoble people. The point that is stressed in the *Poetics* is that the comic springs from a sense of inferiority. The Ridiculous is defined "as a mistake or deformity not productive of pain or harm to others; the mask, for instance, that excites laughter, is something ugly and distorted without causing pain." In the *Ethica Nicomachea* Aristotle speaks of exaggerated traits in human character—of boastfulness, buffoonery, even of deficiency, as in the boor. These traits were exploited by the comic poets. Some critics find in the Aristotelian analysis of the *alazon*, the *iron*, and the buffoon an anticipation of the comedy of humours, but what needs to be emphasised here is that excess as well as deficiency is mark of inferiority, indicating a departure from the norm. This idea of comedy has been accepted by most critics from Ben Jonson and Bacon to Bergson and Freud, though they differ from one another in defining the nature of comic inferiority or in the way comic genius operates. Hobbes enunciates the formula of 'a sudden glory, arising from a sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison of the inferiority of others or with our own formerly.'

This is, however, a superficial estimate of comedy. Don Quixote commits blunder—it brings us a sudden glory. But Don Quixote is not a buffoon. Our impression is not one of unmixed superiority. We laugh at him and at the same time love him for his simplicity and idealism. Snodgrass, Tupman and Winkle excite laughter by arousing in us a sense of superiority. But Pickwick's adventures have the sense of the ridiculous. But the comic impression produced by him is a mixture of our superiority to him and his superiority to us. Falstaff and Micawber create a world of their own with their freedom from the norms of conduct of our world and with their self-complacency about themselves.

Comedy at first was a 'dramatic invective', possibly a personal abuse in the form of dialogue. But gradually it became depersonalised into a picture

of the Ridiculous. Thus there are two types—comedy of character (personal invectives) and comedy of fables or plots. Aristophanes is the most famous artist in the first type which is known as the old comedy. The New Comedy, of which the initiators, according to Aristotle, were Epicharmus, Phormis and Crates abandoned personal satire for non-person stories. Aristophane's comedies are not, however, 'dramatic invectives'; they are "dramatic pictures of the Ridiculous." Aristotle defines the Ridiculous as 'a mistake or deformity not productive of pain or harm to others', and mistakes or deformities are not productive of pain or harm to others; that is to say, he must universalise them into them proper dramatic shape; that is to say, he must universalise them into pictures that will shed all unpleasant associations. This is 'dramatising the ludicrous' in place of indulging in personal abuse. The New Comedy, which is represented by what survives of Menander and by the plays of the Latin dramatists—Plautus and Terence has been likened to the later comedy of humours and the comedy of manners. Here the theme, is the difficulties confronting young love, and many of the stock types of character are the opponents of the lovers—the wealthy rival, the slave merchant, and the old parents.

Thus comedy excites laughter by exposing the offenders against decorum and norm to ridicule. From Aristotle's few extant remarks on the nature of comedy to the writings of Freud and Bergson, valuable insights have illuminated the subject from diverse points of view. There are generally two theories of comedy—one pointing out our satisfaction in feelings of superiority and the other our perceptions of contrast or sense of sudden disappointment. The theory of superiority developed by Hobbes, Bergson, Meredith and others emphasises our delight in seeing ourselves less unfortunate than some human beings. The theory of contrast emphasises our delight in any form of incongruity, any difference between our ideas of things and things themselves. The individual's variation from the norm of thought of behaviour is the source for much of the dramatic tension in both tragedy and comedy. In comedy this variation is without serious or fatal consequences. We are delighted to see persons acting stupidly, oddly or recklessly with relative impunity.

Henry Bergson in his essay, *Laughter* propounds a theory of the comic which takes inelasticity of mind or body as the starting point of the laughable. A comic character, according to this theory, is one who fails to adapt himself to a situation. Continued failure in adaptation leads to a permanent lack of adjustment. Dickens' characters reflect the tendency to behave like automatons. Micawber goes his own way simply unaware of his absurdity in the eyes of

others. Falstaff behaves in complete indifference to the reactions of others. He makes us happy and at ease because he is happy and at ease. Humour enables us to escape for a time from the strain of living. Meredith's assertion that the test of true comedy is that it shall awaken thoughtful laughter places a restriction upon comedy.

There are thus various theories of comic laughter. Meredith stresses folly and sentimentalism as the source of comic laughter. Kant traces comic laughter to a "strained expectation being suddenly reduced to nothing." Bergson contends that the starting point of comedy "is something mechanical encrusted upon the living". Freud notes that there is a good deal of similarity between dreams and the comic. But no theories of comedy are all-embracing. A comedian may write his plays for a variety of reasons. He may find human life or a part of it amusing or absurd; he may wish to satirise, mock or ridicule the spectacle; he may seek to correct or reform it. As readers, we laugh when we perceive that the relationship of any one to himself, to society and its conventions is very different from our own, or from what we pretend is true for ourselves. We laugh when established mores or patterns are altered, and someone behaves like a god, animal, an inanimate object. We may laugh at a comic character, in detachment or scorn, or we may feel somehow allied with him, and laugh with him, recognising common human feelings. A fusion of sympathy and laughter is possibly the most pervasive kind in comedy in which there is a union between the mocker and the mocked, and in which art holds the mirror, however exaggerated, up to our natures.

2. Comedy of Humours.

The comedy of humours was an outgrowth of the Renaissance stress on decorum in life which required a well-balanced personality unmarked by any grave eccentricities. The concept of humours was derived from a traditional theory of physiology in which the state of health—and by extension the state of mind, of character depended on a balance among the four elemental fluids—black and yellow bile, blood and phlegm. Though perhaps first applied to drama by Chapman, the notion was seized and fully developed into a theory of comedy by Ben Jonson, whose bent toward a satiric drama is clearly shown in his first play, *Everyman in His Humour* (1598).

Ben Jonson revolted against the crudities of Elizabethan romantic drama. He was a classicist, a moralist and a reformer of the drama. He turned his back upon romance and presented the London of his own day with strenuous effort towards realism and an attempt to confine the action of the drama within the unities of time, place and theme. His characters conformed to a theory based

on the ancient concept of 'humours.' The method was partly Latin and partly medieval, for the characters of Latin comedy, as those of Plautus and Terence were static types like the jealous husband, the stern father, the cunning servant and the obsequious parasite, and those of the English Moralities were allegorical figures—both types bearing a resemblance to Jonson's creations. Jonson adapted this conception of character to suit his dramatic purpose and reinforced it by the ancient physiological theory of 'humours'. It was believed that the human body was composed of four basic humours or fluids which determine the character of the individuals. Preponderance of any particular humour in the system throws the character off the balance and makes a man 'humorous'. Thus a man having too much of choler becomes choleric in temperament. Thus humours provided Jonson with the tools of his satire.

The very title of Jonson's first play, *Everyman in his Humour* shows Jonson's aim in characterisation. He selects one of the humours in a character and by exaggerating these eccentricities, he produces the comic effect. Thus like Terence he deals with a type, not with a personality. Jonson's best comic characters are thus specimens of humours. Kiteley whose entire nature is warped by jealousy and who acts accordingly is a real humour. Old Knowwell is guided by the humour of over-zealous solicitude for his son. Bobadill is the braggart soldier. Jonson concentrates his most fiery and effective satire on these humour characters. He ridicules the vices of men, puts folly in a foolish shape before the audience and so makes the audience laugh in good humour. The follies of a braggart, of a tyrannical father, of a jealous husband—all are put before us and thus the prevailing eccentricities of the age are mocked out of court. Jonson's characters are, however, two dimensional; they are static. Jonson's first aim is satire, and for this humour affords an admirable weapon. The inner reality of characters may be overlooked, but all that appears outwardly, the tricks and oddities of behaviour is minutely observed and presented with a vivid force which drives the ridicule home.

Jonson's 'humour comedy' is closely related both to comedy of character, since he deals with peculiarity of character as a root of action, and to comedy of manners, since he goes to contemporary society for his norm. Though he had ardent followers in later generations—Shadwell, even Congreve, and Sheridan in the drama, Smollett and Dickens in the novel—this type of comedy is usually associated in literary history with Jonson and his times. Obviously Jonson used the term *humour* in a far more restricted sense than we do today when it can mean a great many things.

3. Romantic Comedy.

Romantic comedy was essayed principally by Shakespeare. He drew his influence certainly from Lyly, Greene and Peele. Lyly's *Endymion*, Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* and Peele's *The Arraignment of Paris* are graceful court comedies which unite romance and comedy. With Lyly the romantic fancy soars on an idealistic plane. His plays move in a rarefied atmosphere. Peele and Greene evolve a dramatic form in which realism and romanticism blend. Romantic love is treated in a realistic manner in pastoral and romantic setting.

Romantic comedy is, however, given a distinct form and character by Shakespeare in his early comedies like *Love's Labour's Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like it* and *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Shakespeare's comic plays are essentially different from traditional classical comedy. The main interest of classical comedy is the exposure of offenders against common practice and against unquestioned propriety in the established fitness of things. The purpose of classical comedy is to correct manners and morals and its weapon is ridicule. Its manner is satire and its standpoint is public commonsense. Shakespearean comedy is a more venturesome and a more imaginative undertaking. As Charlton has pointed out that Shakespearean comedies inspire us to be happy with them. Shakespearean comedy is not finally satiric, it is poetic. It is not conservative, it is creative. The way of it is that of the imagination rather than of pure reason. It is an artist's vision, not a critic's exposition.

Shakespeare in his comedies creates a climate of romance. Love—romantic love is the principal theme of Shakespeare's comedies. It is almost the rule that all the lovers should love at once and love absolutely. But true love alone can never make a comedy. True love is serious, and comedy must amuse. Gordon comments: "Comedy is a plump figure and hold its sides; love is lean and hold a hand upon its heart." Shakespeare makes a compromise between romance and comedy. In romantic comedy, the laughter and the sinner live side by side on one condition that neither shall commit excess or compete for attention at the expense of the other. The solemnity of love is relieved by the generosity of laughter, and the irresponsibility of laughter by the seriousness of love. Thus comedy is raised to a higher realm.

Love is the central theme of *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. The Duke who is enraptured by music loves Olivia. The proud Olivia is entangled by the modest and insinuating messenger of the Duke. The Duke's love for Orsino is deep and true. Her love which is quiet and deep

offers a striking contrast to the inconstant but eloquent fancy of Orsino and to the impetuous passion of Olivia. Shakespeare makes love-making highly entertaining by the use of disguise. Shakespeare employs a mechanical trick for the purpose of romance and comedy. In *As You Like It*, the wooing of Orlando by Rosalind in disguise is highly entertaining as comedy. It, at the same time, reveals the seriousness of love of Rosalind for Orlando. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which is an early comedy of Shakespeare, irrationalities of love are shown in a humorous manner. But the dramatist exalts true love which is consummated in marriage. Romance and realism blend in harmony. There is an atmosphere of enchantment on all characters and situations, but the troubles of the lovers are real. But looked at from the vantage point of detachment, troubles become comical. The artisans led by Bottom represent the realistic and comical aspect of the play.

Dramatisation of love-making has a tendency to be ludicrous. But in *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, Shakespeare provides entertainment to the audience with a dramatised story of courtship. In asking Orlando to woo her in masquerade, Rosalind hits upon the novel method of love-marking. This camouflaged wooing is a great experience for both the lovers. This appeals to the comic instinct of every spectator for the comicality of the situation and at the same time to the romantic scene. The realistic and satiric elements in the comedy are supplied by the gulling of Malvolio, the salt humour of Touchstone, sentimental exaggeration of Silvius and Phebe and the humour of Dogberry.

In the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher and in the later plays of Shakespeare, the romantic comedy became what is known as Tragi-Comedy. These plays (*Philaster* by Beaumont and Fletcher and *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest* by Shakespeare) are characterised by an atmosphere of improbability, stock types, irresponsibility of hero and artificiality.

4. Comedy of Manners.

The Comedy of Manners is a type of comedy which was successfully practised in the Restoration period. This type of drama had risen with Ben Jonson who made the presentation of 'humours' the mode of satirical and sometimes ludicrous portraiture in his comedies. It was revived with extraordinary brilliance and cynical witticism by the dramatists of the Restoration. It is called the comedy of manners because it presented the superficial habits and manners of only a section of the society—the elegant aristocracy with their fashionable vices, intrigues and outward glamour of polished behaviour. The Comedy of manners is almost wholly intellectual and

aristocratic. The manners displayed were the affectations and cultured veneer of fine society. These manners were the social qualities acquired by the men from social intercourse. The Restoration comedy of manners mirrored the dilettante society of the day. It shows mainly men and women in their relationship particularly as husband and wife or as lovers. Amorous intrigue played a very important part in the action of the drama. Verbal repartees constituted the predominant interest in the play. Plot was subordinated to dialogue. Female characters were more important and made interesting.

It has been said that Restoration comedies of Manners as practised by George Etherege, William Wycherley, William Congreve, Sir John Vanbrugh and George Farquhar are artificial and obscene. These comedies are called artificial partly because of the tricks and devices which are often cleverly contrived to give the plot the turn invented by the dramatists, but more so because such comedy "shows us a state of manners, the field of which, narrow in itself, requires defining—the court, the fashionable circles of the capital—but the example of which radiates to the farther-most parts of the provinces, and there creates, as it were, superficial contagians." It was limited in scope and artificial in its choice of theme. The life depicted was an endless series of pleasures and amusements, intrigues and social appointments. These comedies of manners are thus artificial both in plot-construction and in the limited section of the society of the time.

Many critics condemn the Restoration comedies as immoral and indecent. In 1698, Jeremy Collier wrote: "A short view of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage". This had an immense effect on the literary critics. But if we condemn the society of the Restoration Court we need not thereby condemn the dramatists of that period. Comedy is "the mocking image of a carefree life". Restoration comedy of manners represents, its dilettante society, and this society was lewd and cavalier. At the same time Restoration comedies had to be studied not in the light of present day beliefs in the spirit of the age in which they were produced.

Macaulay attacked Charles Lamb for his essay "On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century". According to Lamb, "Restoration comedies are a world of themselves almost as much as fairy land". Macaulay had not properly understood Lamb's point. Lamb meant to say that he would laugh at the utopia of gallantry without having his morals corrupted or undermined. Dobree argued that the distinguishing characteristic of the Restoration comedy down to Congreve is that it is concerned with the attempt to rationalise sexual relationship. L. C. Knights, however, condemns the comedy of manners

because in the matter of sexual relations, Restoration comedy is entirely dominated by a narrow set of conventions.

In spite of these criticisms and condemnations it has to be admitted that the dramatists of the Restoration period reflected the manners and modes of society as well as sought to alter them. Congreve's comedies are rich in subtle comments on love and marriage. Wit and Dialogue are the sparkling features of his comedies. The comedy of manners was revived by Sheridan and Goldsmith in their comedies—*The Rivals*, *The School for Scandal*; *The Good Natured Man* and *She Stoops to Conquer*. However, Sheridan's *The Rivals* and Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* are happy mixtures of the comedy of manners and Romantic comedy. They are satiric of the ways of the society, but they are at the same time attempts at the revival of romantic comedy of *Shakespeare* in their love theme and in the depiction of the growth and development and conclusion of romantic love. These plays give the image of the times with wit and humour. Oscar Wilde and Somerset Maugham practise this type in the latter periods. Wilde's *The Importance of being Earnest* and Maugham's *The Circle* are examples of comedy of Manners.

5. Sentimental Comedy.

The beginning of the 18th century saw the birth of a sort of comedy which is usually called "Sentimental". It owes its origin to a reaction to the Restoration drama of manners which was cynical and witty portraiture of the courtly or aristocratic society of the later seventeenth century. The gay, immoral life of the licentious court gave the lead to manners, while the puritanic middle class with its traditions of morality and austerity looked upon the court and the courtly manners with bitter contempt. On the reopening of the theatre at the Restoration after its closure by the Puritans in 1642, the comedians of the age, Etherege, Wycherley, Vanbrugh, Farquhar and Congreve gave to the theatre dramas which were witty, full of intrigues and rivalries in love-making, sparkling with fun and frivolity and at times grossly immoral.

Towards the close of the century, great social and economic changes were at work which ultimately affected the fortune of the comedy. With the departure of the Stuarts on the Revolution of 1688, there followed a great decay in the powers and privileges of the aristocratic society and the rise of the middle class. Wealth brought into the country by trade and commerce gave to the industrious middle class a social position which they never enjoyed before. On the other hand, the age-long puritanic hostility to the theatre, in fact, to all sorts of amusements, wore of yielding place to a rational desire for innocent amusement. All these factors combined with daring criticism of the licences

of the theatre by the sober section of the literary talents brought about a change in the character of the comedy. The most outspoken criticism came from a priest, Jeremy Collier, who in 1698 in his *A Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage* voiced the middle class uneasiness at the grossness of the Restoration comedy. Although it had no immediate effect on the tone of the current drama, it was certainly a symptom of the coming change. This change gradually manifested itself in the advent of sensibility to replace wit and immorality in the comedy.

The comedies of Colley Cibber and then of Steele may be taken as inaugurating the dawn of sensibility. In their comedies there was conventional morality and sentimentality in place of grossness of the Restoration comedy. These dramatists dealt with the problems of conduct, family and marriage in a tone that will no longer shock decorum, and by virtue of tears they cause to flow, they contributed to the edification of souls. In many dramatists, sensibility degenerated into sentimentalism, that is excess of pathos and tearful situations. These dramatist aimed at preaching some moral lessons by restoring suffering innocent virtue to happiness and converting rogues into good characters. Thus these comedies lost the true spirit of comedy. They indulged in mock sentiments, and admitted the tension of emotional situations. There are no gaiety and innocent mirth created by wit and fun. Thus sentimental comedy sprang from a mistaken view of drama. In place of laughter, there were tears; in place of intrigue, there were melodramatic and distressing situations, in place of gallants and witty damsels, there were pathetic heroines and serious lovers and honest servants. These plays served the false morality of the middle class. The sentimental comedy held the stage for more than half a century at the beginning of the 18th century.

Some of the exponents of this type are Colley Cibber, Richard Steele, Hugh Kelly and Richard Cumberland. Some of the notable plays of this kind are *Love's Last Shaft* (1696) by Cibber, *The Conscious Lovers* (1722) by Steele *False Delicacy* (1768) by Kelly and *West Indian* (1771) by Cumberland.

Against these sentimental comedies with their false conventions, Goldsmith and Sheridan made a strong reaction. Of course, they were preceded in their task by others like Samuel Foote, George Colman who in their farces and comedies gave the counterblast to the 'weeping sentimental comedy' and brought back the spirit of the Restoration comedy with its realism, wit and humour, laughter and racy brilliant dialogues. In the Prologue to *She Stoops to Conquer* Goldsmith denounces sentimental comedy as "the mawkish drab of spurious breed, which deals in sentimentals". He wrote two comedies—*The*

Good-Natured Man and *She Stoops to Conquer* in pursuance of his plan of 'delineating character which was his principal aim'. In these comedies he not only brought back the wit and dialogue of the Restoration comedies, but went beyond them to the spirit of Shakespearean comedies. Thus he evolves a comedy, which "expresses a return to nature along with a reaction from sentimentality."

Sheridan in his *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal* tried to revive the true spirit of comedy by replacing sentimentality and false morality by wit and fun. In the Prologue to *The Rivals*, Sheridan criticises "The goddess of the woeful countenance—the Sentimental Muse". The characters, in Sheridan's words are "too chaste to look like flesh and blood—primly portrayed on emblematic wood." *The Rivals* is a joyous comedy of manners full of fun and gaiety and sparkles with wit and humour. Sheridan's comedy is modelled on the Restoration drama but it is free from its cynicism and immorality. He presents characters in their respective eccentricities and draws from their interaction materials for fun and mirth. As in the Restoration comedy of manners, the most effective appeal of *The Rivals* lies in its dialogue—witty, humorous, sparkling with intellectual vivacity. Yet Sheridan introduces the sentimental episode of Faulkland and Julia partly for satisfying the appetite of the audience in the sentimentality and partly for satirising the sentimentality of the sentimental comedy. In *The School for Scandal*, wit and dialogue are as sparkling as those of Congreve's *The Way of the World*. The play is funny because of the scandal element in it. The scandal gives rise to complications which heighten the comic possibilities. But nothing disturbs the constant glitter of its wit and the situations are never exaggerated. The satire of the sentimental strain in the person of Joseph Surface is subordinated to the expression of free wit which irradiates all the characters. The subtle delicacy of Goldsmith's comedies is however missing in the plays of Sheridan.

6. Comedy of Ideas.

Bernard Shaw calls his plays *Sui-generis*. They are written in a light-hearted manner full of wit and humour, but they deal with serious ideas. His plays are realistic and they deal with the pressing problems of the society in relation to the individuals. It was Bernard Shaw's aim to focus the public attention on the social problems and expose the sham and follies that lie beneath them.

Bernard Shaw popularised a new type of comedy. Robertson's *Society* heralded this type. He was followed by A. W. Pinero and H. A. Jones who made the drama a vehicle of social criticism. But the most powerful influence

on Shaw was that of the Norwegian dramatist Ibsen whose plays in English translation by William Archer, the dramatic critic and a friend of Shaw, appeared on the London stage in quick succession. Ibsen in his plays had depicted the middle class life with relentless realism and exposed the sentimentality and make-believe of middle class morality. He raised perplexing questions of social relevance in relation to the individuals. *A Doll's House* raised the question of woman's position; *The Ghosts* discussed the problem of heredity; *Peerygnt*, *Pillars of Society*, *An Enemy of the People*, *Hedda Gabler* discussed ideas challenging moral and social conventions. Shaw at once recognised the master in Ibsen and took the Ibsenite problem play as his own medium. The essence of the Ibsenian drama is discussion rather than action. It is not concerned with the telling of a story or the creation of characters. The conflict in his plays is transferred from the emotional to the intellectual plane. It is the clash of ideas rather than of passions that constituted the chief interest of the play. The plays offer intellectual criticism of some of the burning topics and the ideas are presented in an objective manner. Shaw found all these materials readymade in Ibsen and utilised them to the fullest extent in his plays.

But Shaw is different from Ibsen in temperament and outlook. The Ibsenian drama is filled with the chilling atmosphere of Scandinavian gloom. He is in the language of Chesterton, "a very depressing person". His plays have a tragic undertone. It is due to his earnest preoccupation with social and moral evils. *A Doll's House* has a depressing end; *the Ghosts* is a tragedy. But Shaw brings to the drama a radiant cheerfulness. His plays are aglow with wit and humour. Laughter is the weapon with which he castigates the contemporary society. He makes us laugh all through, but behind laughter lurks his serious mind dissecting the evils of the society and drawing the people's mind to the pressing problems. His plays are genial comedies, but they shake the audience out of their complacency and make them think of the problems that plague them in the society. His dramas thus do not offer recreation for idle moments; they provide food for thought in serious moments. He has said: "I write plays with the deliberate object of converting the nation to my opinions on sexual and social matters." His plays stimulate thinking on and reevaluation of the old, conventional traditions and faiths. But his plays are not mere propaganda or tracts; they are full of humour and wit which are their enduring charms.

Shaw deals with social problems like prostitution and slums in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and *Widower's Houses*. These plays are satires on capitalistic society. He deals with the questions of marriage in *Getting Married*

and *Candida*. *The Devil's Disciple*, *The Doctor's Dilemma*, *Major Barbara*, *Captain Brassbrow's Conversion* throw up some important social and moral questions. *Arms and the Man*, *The Man of Destiny* and *You Never Can Tell* are pleasant plays shattering romantic illusions about love and war, marriage and heroism. In *Man and Superman* and *Back to Methusaleh*, Shaw trenches on philosophical idea of creative Evolution. Thus Shaw deals with social and philosophical ideas and raises fundamental questions about the basis of individual and social ideas. Shaw always draws portraits of instinctive conduct, of the contradictions between the profession of reason and the dictates of the Inner Will. It is in this sense that the majority of the dramas are comedies of humour. The best illustration is found in the pleasant play, *Your Never Can Tell*.

Shaw's method is always comic and sometimes farcical. He often mingles comedy with farce. In *Arms and the Man* he makes us laugh at Bluntschli's fear of death in the first Act. Sheer horse-play is seen in the distinguished barrister's taking part in a carnival dance (*You Never Can Tell*) or in the lion dancing with Androcles (*Androcles and the Lion*).

Shaw's dramas are propaganda plays, but they are relieved by sparkling wit and humour. He has made propaganda art by mingling seriousness with mirth, philosophy with fun. His discussions are witty. He develops his theme through the clash of ideas carried on through stimulating and witty dialogues. Granville Barker in his *The Marrying of Ann Leete* tried the Shavian method. The most characteristic Shavian quality is the ability to make people think by compelling them to laugh. He has shattered the illusions and cherished ideas in a light-hearted comedy scintillating with witty conversations. He has discussed the propound philosophical ideas of creative Evolution in the manner of hilarious fantasy.

7. Prose as the medium of drama.

Verse was the medium of drama in Greece and Elizabethan period. The dramas in the classical period of Greece and in the romantic period of Elizabethan England were of Greece and in the Elizabethans forged the supple instrument of Blank verse which was eminently useful as a medium in the plays. In the hands of Shakespeare, it was made flexible and pliant enough to express all the moods and moments in the life of the characters. The switch-over from verse to prose was very natural in Shakespeare's plays.

Poetry is the language of emotion or passion, the expression of heightened and elevated moods and feelings. Prose is the language of ordinary work-a-day life. No man in real life ever talks in verse or performs the duties

purposes and business of life in poetry. Hence modern drama, being a faithful rendering of real life uses prose as the medium of expression. Comedy is more realistic than tragedy as it deals directly with life, with manners and morals of the time in lighter vein. Hence the language of comedy is the language of real life i. e., prose.

On this point it is instructive to consider Shakespeare's alternate use of prose and verse in his play. It is the practice of the great dramatist that he puts verse in the mouth of his noble and elevated characters particularly when the emotional pitch of the scene is very high. And when the characters are ordinary or low or comic and the scene is in a lower key and the characters are engaged in familiar conversation or exchange of wit, prose comes in as the natural language. In the same scene he uses verse and prose in accordance with the demands of the moment. When the emotional pitch is low and where conversational effect is aimed at, Shakespeare invariably uses prose. His clowns and comic characters speak prose without any exception. While the romantic love-making of Orlando and Rosalind in *As You Like It* is carried on in verse, the witty exchanges of love between Benedick and Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing* are done in prose.

This gives the clue to the exclusive use of prose in modern dramas. The realistic drama of the modern age uses prose as its natural medium. Both in tragedy and comedy prose is the medium of modern drama. Bernard Shaw who is the pioneer of modern realistic drama in England advocated prose as the suitable medium of drama. Modern dramas are mostly discussional. Discussion has replaced action in them. A clear, direct, conversational pose is considered as the most natural medium of expression by both comedians and tragedians. Shaw, James Barrie, Somerset Maugham, John Priestley handle prose in their plays with consummate ease and flexibility. They are mostly comic writers. John Galsworthy who wrote mainly tragedies like *Justice*, *Strife* etc. also uses prose with superb dexterity. Their main argument is that prose is the natural medium of conversation between individuals and through the use of prose, one can come close to reality.

T. S. Eliot revived verse drama as a reaction against modern realistic prose drama. Eliot says in defence of verse drama : "The tendency at any rate of prose drama is to emphasise the ephemeral and superficial ; if we want to get at the permanent and universal we tend to express ourselves in verse." Eliot further says : "Poetry is a natural and complete medium for drama, that the prose play is a kind of abstraction giving you only a part of what the theatre can give." T. S. Eliot revived verse in drama in his tragedy like *The Murder*

in the Cathedral and in his comedy *The Cocktail Party* and *The Confidential Clerk*. *The Cocktail Party*, deceptively comic in general handling completely avoids poetic effects in favour of a precise, lucid verse artfully intended to stir poetic awareness without making the audience painfully conscious that it hears poetry. After Eliot, Christopher Fry uses verse, but his dramas (*Phoenix too Frequent*, *The Lady's not for Burning*, *Thor* etc.) are mood pieces rather than structured drama. Thus it is apparent that the modern revival of poetic drama has not been successful. The prose drama has come to stay and appeals to the modern theatre-goers. The verse dramas in the Romantic period and the essays of W. B. Yeats in this genre have failed to establish themselves. The verse dramatists have not been able to evolve a verse form that is flexible and adaptable enough to serve the purpose of conversations in modern realistic dramas. Verse creates a sort of distancing and is suitable for the dramas dealing with myths, religion or high life. Prose which is the conversational language of common people is therefore the suitable medium for modern realistic plays.

8. Experimental Drama in the Modern Age.

It is no longer possible to keep the old distinction between tragedy and comedy—a distinction which had always been an unreal one. The Elizabethans could not maintain the distinction in their dramatic practices. They wrote mingled drama and tragic-comedy. Shakespeare wrote dark comedies like *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus and Cressida* in which there is happy ending but the atmosphere of these plays is dark and gloomy.

The drama of the twentieth century is engaged in many experiments. Dramatists like John Osborne, John Arden, Harold Pinter, Henry Livings, N. F. Simpson, Arnold Wesker and Tom Stoppard cannot be classified as 'tragic' or 'comic' writers in the old sense. It is probable that the tragedy of the Shakespearean or Schillerian type belongs to the past. It is, however, true that Greek tragedies and Shakespearean tragedies still appeal to the modern theatre-goers. The comedies of Aristophanes, Moliere, Congreve, Sheridan and Oscar Wilde still retain their appeal to the imagination of the audience of the twentieth century. But the modern writers of drama have different inheritances and write in different social milieu. The ethos of modern age is one of boredom and cynicism. So bright romantic comedies with an optimistic and happy note are seldom written, Bernard Shaw wrote serious comedies; Galsworthy, Ibsen, Checkov showed the utter helplessness of modern tragic heroes. The tragedy that exalts human personality even in his death and discomfiture is a thing of the past. There is hardly any redeeming note in the stark tragedy of human predicament in modern tragic drama.

John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* marked the beginning of a new age in the history of English drama. It introduced a new kind of drama to the English stage. It is a comedy, but it is unlike the comedies of Sheridan and Wilde. In this play, Osborne depicts a savagely naturalistic picture of mal-adjusted contemporaries. The subject of the play is the hidden class-war between those who have grown up in comfortable bourgeois homes and those who have fought their way up the social stairs by their own intelligence. It exposes the injustice and inequality which still seemed to exist in Britain in spite of the 'Victory for democracy'. The play is the first significant protest from England's "Angry Young Man". It underlines the conflict between young man and his wife—a girl of higher social class—who is unable to understand his anger and frustration. It is a comedy with a strain of anger and protest. Arnold Wesker's play, *The Kitchen* showed the relations, both tragic and comic, between the people working there. His trilogy—*Chicken Soup with Barley*; *Roots* and *I'm talking about Jerusalem*—underscore the hard life of a group of people who try to improve the world and better their life. The plays are an unusual mixture of tragedy and comedy. The plays deal with the basic need of human beings for satisfactory living. *Chicken Soup with Barley* ends in wretchedness. Yet in the play's last words, Sarah urges on her son Ronnie the need to care about what happens, to himself and to others, the need not only to face disillusion but to see it as irrelevant if one is to go on as a human being. Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker* shows life as a comic absurdity. Its setting is a room in an otherwise empty house—a room filled with an accumulation of rubbish amassed over the years, whose ceiling leaks, whose ownership is claimed by each of two brothers—a room where we find love and pity, cruelty and forlorn solitude. We are often puzzled by the things that happen there, but we have a sense that they correspond to things that do happen in our world. Ionesco's plays also produce mingled effects of tragedy and comedy. The clinical study of depression and despair is set off by comedy. He calls his plays 'a comic drama', 'a tragic force'.

Samuel Beckett is a leading exponent of the "theatre of the absurd". His *Waiting for Godot* concentrates on portraying the hopeless condition of mankind by means of absurd happenings. The scene is a wasteland with the remnant of a tree. At the beginning of the play Didi says, "And I resume the struggle": and at the end Didi and Gogo do not hang themselves. The tree has leaves on it; the rope is not used. The two tramps wait in the wasteland for an unidentified person, Godot who may or may not exist: "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful". It is grotesquely comic, yet it has a tragic undertone as it depicts the absurd condition of man.

The plays like *Look Back in Anger* by Osborne, *The Best People* by David Grey and Avery Hopwood, *The Fugitive* by Galsworthy have happy ending, but the atmosphere is dark. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is a tragi-comic allegory of what the existentialists call *de'laissement*. N. F. Simpson (A *Resounding Tinkle*), the American dramatist Edward Albee (*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf!*) and Tom Stoppard (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead*) are important writers who used the ideas of the theatre of the absurd. Their plays are examples of modern dark comedy. Checkov's dramas are essentially tragic but they have comic and ironic overtones. In *Cherry Orchard*, he shows his awareness of the ludicrous and tragic aspects of man's folly. Humour and irony are strangely intermixed with his tragic reading of human ineffectuality.

Thus modern plays are experimental. They cannot be described in the time-honoured categories of tragedy and comedy. They depict the basic predicament of modern men with the comic and tragic aspects of the life in the modern age. Bernard Shaw's comic plays are essentially serious. He evolved a new type of comedy in which serious ideas are presented in a comic manner. We laugh and at the same time we think.

9. Farce and Comedy.

Farce comes from Latin *farciare* "to stuff". Originally it was any insertion in the church liturgy. Later, farces were the comic scenes interpolated in the early liturgical plays.

The word now refers to any play which evokes laughter by such devices as crude comic scenes, physical buffoonery, rough wit and the creation of ridiculous situations or characters. Farce is intended to provoke laughter, not the reflective kind, but the uncomplicated response of simple enjoyment. It employs highly exaggerated and ludicrous situations and makes free use of broad verbal humour and physical horse play. A farce depends on exaggeration of characters and situations. In a farce, a situation is created for the sake of laughter and sometimes characters are exaggerated in order to create hilarious effect.

Comedy is rooted in farce as tragedy is rooted in melodrama. But a comedy has farce, and is not a farce just as tragedy has melodrama and is not a melodrama. Brandon Thomas's *Charley's Aunt* is a farce, but Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* or Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* have farcial elements but they are comedies. The gulling of Malvolio in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* or the knock-about scenes in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* are farcial, but the plays have the logical sequence of incidents and evolution of the plot through the interaction of characters and situations.

Tony's trick to deceive his mother into going round and round the house is farcial, but the incident issues inevitably from the character and the plot. It does not jar on realism. The gulling of Malvolio is integrated to the plot structure, not extraneous to it. Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* is a pure farce. It is built on farcial situation of mistaken identity. In comedy, exaggeration is a necessary element. Situations and characters are exaggerated to draw fun out of them. But this exaggeration must be restricted to the limit of realism. It must maintain verisimilitude. There are crude jokes and buffoonery in many plays. In the *Second Shepherd's Play* there is a cunning scamp named Mak who steals a sheep and conceals it in the bed of his wife and passes it off as a baby in the cradle. This is a farcial element introduced simply for amusement. It has no relation to the main plot. In many farces, a buffoon appears to delight the audience by physical actions, gross gestures and sometimes vulgar talks. He is an autonomous character introduced simply for causing 'belly laughs'. In Jonson's *Comedy of Humours*, characters often indulge in buffoonery as for example Stephen or Matthew in *Everyman in his Humour* or subtle in *The Alchemist*. Aristotle's analysis of the *alaron*, the *iron* and the buffoon is an anticipation of the comedy of Humours.

Comedy is meant for laughter and laughter is produced by the ridicule of oddities and eccentricities. Thus farce is an indispensable part of a comedy. But comedy is a drama and in a good drama, there will be the coherence of plot and character. Anything that comes suddenly and without previous preparation for the same is bound to disturb the probability and realism. Malvolio behaves in a way that is convincing ; Tony is true to his character. Rosalind's mock courtship in the forest of Arden is justified by the situation and characters. Farce creates fun, but comedy aims at wit and humour. In a good comedy, dialogues are witty, and characters exhibit their oddities under the situations in which they are placed. There is 'thoughtful laughter' in the witty conversations of Benedick and Beatrice and the bargain scene between Mirabel and Millamant. A good comedy carries out rich suggestions and provides a criticism of life.

10. Dark Comedy and Tragi-Comedy.

The rigid division of drama into tragedy and comedy does not always hold good. Literature, and for that matter drama cannot always be bound in cast iron formula. The Greeks were strict in following rules in dramatic composition. For them, tragedy is a spectacle of suffering leading to the enlightenment through recognition, while comedy is meant for laughter, and sometimes intellectual laughter.

The romantic drama of Shakespeare and others extended the scope of both tragedy and comedy. Based on the native dramas—*Miracles and Moralities*, Elizabethan drama mingles comedy and tragedy, laughter and seriousness. Dr Johnson calls them 'mingled drama'. Shakespeare wrote *The Merchant of Venice* which is known as tragi-comedy. Here the action apparently leading to a catastrophe is reversed to bring about a happy ending. Some of the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, notably *Philaster* belongs to this group. It is a pastoral tragi-comedy developed in Italy. The typical tragi-comedy concerns noble characters involved in improbable situations. Shakespeare's last plays, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest* may be called tragi-comic romance. There are romantic qualities like ideal love, music, supernatural elements, improbable situations, elaborate plot in which hero and heroine are rescued from imminent disaster so that the play may conclude happily. In *The Tempest*, Prospero brings his enemies under his control, subjects them to sufferings. Ferdinand and Miranda suffer the torments of love. There are conspiracies, conflicts, pains and agonies. Ultimately Prospero by his magic power resolves all the complications into happy conclusion. Fletcher in defining the term tragi-comedy in his preface to *The Faithful Shepherdess* wrote: "A tragi-comedy is not so called in respect of mirth and killing, but in respect it wants deaths, which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet brings some near it which is enough to make it no comedy....."

Dark or sombre comedy is a peculiar product of Shakespeare's genius. Shakespeare's three plays—*All's well that ends well*, *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus and Cressida* are called dark comedies because they have nothing of the gay spirit of comedy and describe dark aspects of life and reveal a mood of cynicism. In *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus and Cressida*, we are introduced to a society rotten to the core in which even the most virtuous maiden cannot avoid acting as a procuress. Shakespeare underlines subhuman bestiality lurking behind the mark of superhuman greatness of Achilles and Ajax. In *Measure for Measure*, Angelo, the Duke demands sexual relationship with Isabella as a price for saving her brother's life, Claudio, the brother wants his sister to sacrifice her honour. Isabella saves her honour by substituting Marina for herself in Angelo's bed. Thus there is an atmosphere of darkness, sexuality, problems and predicaments. The darkness is redeemed by the punishment that overtakes the wrong-doers. In *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare portrays the virtues and vices of the characters, (Ulysses and Nestor). The comic is derived from the juxtaposition of different attitudes. Its tragic undertone and bitter satire distinguish it from comedy. Those plays

including *Hamlet* are known as problem plays. Shakespeare introduces us to an artificial rotten society and he suggests a problem. But Shakespeare keeps the audience in a state of unresolved mystery.

Modern plays are experimental dramas. There is a blend of darkness produced by the sense of uncertainty and gloom in modern existence and happy ending. John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* is a comedy, but is unlike the comedies of Sheridan and Wilde. It depicts the conflict between a youngman and his wife—a woman of higher social class—who is unable to understand his anger and frustration. The play is full of invectives, indictments of modern society where an educated young man belonging to the lower class cannot find desirable social adjustment. There is, however, a forced happy ending in the reunion of husband and wife. Arnold Wesker's play, *The Kitchen* shows the relations, both tragic and comic between the people working there. His Trilogy—*Chicken Soup with Barley*, *Roots* and *I'm talking about Jerusalem* underscore the hard life of a group of people who try to improve the world and better their life. The plays are an unusual mixture of tragedy and comedy. Chekov's *Cherry Orchard* underlines the mixture of tragedy and comedy. There is a dark atmosphere created by the felling of the trees in the orchard. There is agony in the destruction of the old order. But the rages of ages are cancelled by the acceptance of the new order. Ionesco's plays also produce mingled effects of tragedy and comedy. The clinical study of depression and despair is set off by comedy. He calls his plays 'a comic drama', a *tragic farce*. These plays pose dark problems of life and create an atmosphere of gloom and anxiety, but they end in acceptance and happiness.

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