

**Contemporary Literature**  
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**Module No. # 01**  
**Lecture No. # 01**  
**Introduction to Drama**

Good afternoon. So, today's class is all about drama in the beginning and we are basically going to focus on theater in ancient Greece and ancient Rome. So, you might recall that we have already done a play by Sophocles - Oedipus - and this is an extension of that class, particularly the play the Greek tragedies and also the Romans tragedies.

So, drama in Greece as we have already seen in Oedipus, you remember that the very opening seen in Oedipus, it begins with group of people. Remember, they are sitting with a read. So, drama in Greece begun with the observation of religious ceremonies, so that was a theoretical convection that plays would begin by invoking gods **ok.**

So, there would be group of people and the technical term for that group on the stage was chorus. Chorus not in the way we know today but they were like we will see what chorus was all about. So, a chorus would act as worshipers at the altar of the Greek gods and they would begin the play by chanting religious songs and devotional songs, a **(( ))**.

So, the play, a traditional play, a traditionally structured play would begin in so the chorus would come on the stage and they would start singing the song, the devotional songs and then gradually one character, one person from that group would separate and he start addressing the remaining group, the remaining people, the rest of the group **ok.**

So, and then he would introduce the play in this way. So, one can they would come together and then one there would be a breakup. One person would come forward and he starts conversing with the rest of the group. So, once the single actor establishes the context, the dramatic situation, then it would be followed by the appearance of the other leading actors, not the chorus now, other actors who were actually the principle dramatis

personae. You know what are dramatis personae? The principle actors characters of the play. Then these actors would begin a formal dialogue and the attention of the spectators would be fixed on them and not on the chorus but plays would that a drama, a traditional drama would always begin with the introduction or with the appearance of a chorus and most of these dramas as we have been talking about, when we were discussing Oedipus another Greek play, they were of tragic nature. There were very few comedies and tragedies were associated were regarded as you have already seen Aristotle's definition. Do you remember, what is Aristotle's definition of tragedy? You get you anyway.

So, tragedy was supposed to be the highest form of poetry, highest form of any performance. So, comedy anyway was not taken into account at all. Although, the comedies which were written over there but they were extremely few and far between and tragedy emerged out of religious observance. Basically, it was considered like you know a kind of a devotional play as you have seen Oedipus. What is Oedipus all about?

I will keep coming back to Oedipus because that is the only Greek play we have done but if I said that the tragedy was an observance of you know religious practices of those times. Then how would you consider Oedipus as a religious play? What is it about? Does not it invoke gods through the pray? Do not you have that? **Yeah** you have the delphic oracle, you have **(( ))**, you have the temple of apollo and you also have the underline theme of the man versus destiny. What is the outcome? That human being can never overcome what he destined for **right**. So, that was the religious element of conventional Greek tragedy.

So, most of the time in these tragic plays, they were restricted to the legendary themes. So, it was not as if Oedipus was completely an original play. The legend of Oedipus was already there and most dramatists would base their plays on an already existing legend and they would build up on it.

Another feature of this play was that they would be held usually during the religious festivities in ancient Greece. So, that was also a chance for the common people of the Greek city state to come and attend the theater. So, it was also a kind of a ceremony, it was also a kind of communal gathering for people but as I was saying the basis of all these plays and drama and theater, they were deeply religious. Now, coming to chorus.

So, chorus what was chorus? Chorus as we were talking about was the group of people and they would invariably wear masks, all Greek actors, all Greek actors who were present on stage. They would invariably wear a mask. So, the chorus would wear a mask as well. They would begin the play by singing or chanting verses while performing dance like movements on the stage and these dance performances were extremely unrehearsed, quite spontaneous. It was not like a very rehearsed or extremely professional kind of dance that would take place. It would, they would dance very spontaneously because the focus was not on the dance. The group would make its entrance by coming through the sideways.

So, a typical Greek theater, I will give you the diagram also for typical Greek theater. So, they would come in the chorus, the group of actors they would come marching on the stage and they would gather or assemble on a place called the Orchestron on the stage. When all the members of the chorus had entered the orchestra, they arranged themselves in rectangular formation on stage and begin their choral song and their song and dance would always be to the accompaniment of a flute.

So, in the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles, the major activity or the major role of a chorus would be to comment on the proceedings of the play. So, if you remember, if you go back to that Oedipus you would remember that **they were** there was a leader of a choral, they were a chorus and by enlarge their function was to comment on the happening, on the proceedings of the play.

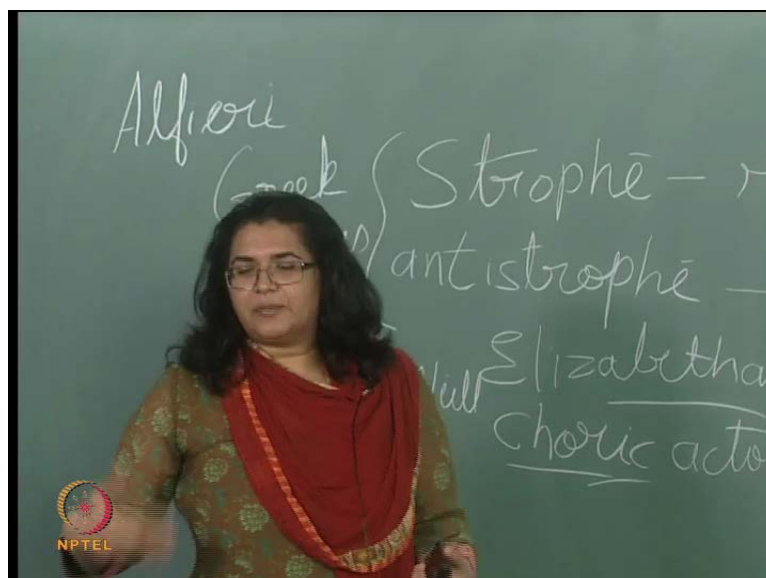
So, they did not have a role to enact. They did not have a major role to play. They were not the chorus did not act as a vehicle of the plot. The major performer, major actors in Oedipus, for example are Jocasta, you have Oedipus, you have Creon, you have Tiresias but chorus would comment on the proceedings of the play. That was the function of a chorus and another function was they also expressed that then contemporary traditions, values and attitudes.

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So, they would comment, for example in between two acts or two scenes, the chorus would come forward and they would start talking about that, then contemporary, then prevalent moral attitudes, religious, traditions and social beliefs of the Greek people. So, that was another function of the chorus. Greek, they are famous for having the chorus, for having or enacting two kinds of movements, perhaps we should know. Then one is a strophe and one is anti-strophe. Are you familiar with these terms?

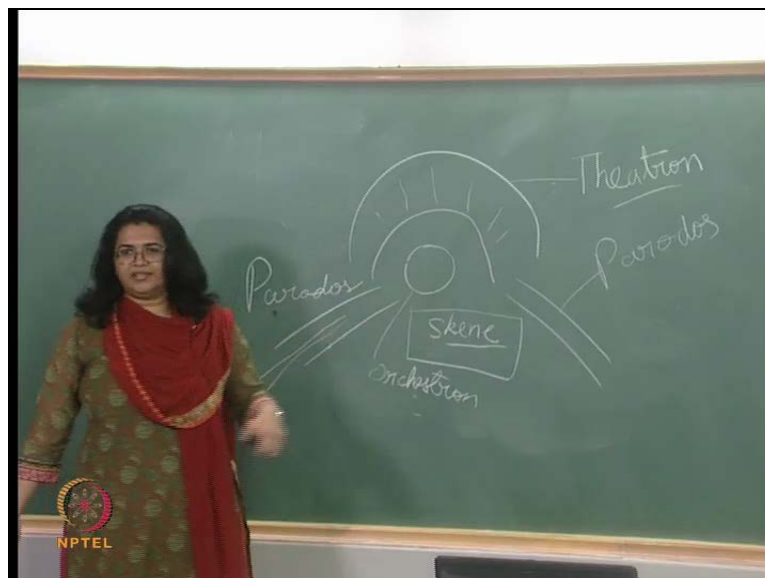
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**Yeah.** What happened? They are very much in Oedipus. What happens? It is a movement, good. So, Strophe movement was right to left and in this was vice versa, left to right. So, while commenting on the proceedings of the play, while discussing the moral, attitudes and traditions of the day, the chorus would make a movement is Strophe and antistrophe. So, this is the Greek move chorus.

Now, what happens in the Elizabethan play? I know I am just taking quite a bit of leap but if you remember Elizabethan chorus, what happens to the chorus in the Elizabethan time? Did we have the same kind of chorus, even in tragedies? So, we would have instead of having a group of actors acting as chorus, we would have one single choric actor whose job again was to comment on the proceedings of the play and this tradition has remained so.

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So, in modern contemporary drama, we do not find too many chorus take you know being present. What we find is a single choric character even in the modern contemporary drama. For example, in American drama, you have Eugene O'Neill. You are familiar with the name and he has written a play card Moaning becomes Electra and the character of Seth in Moaning becomes Electra is a choric character.

The character of Alfieri in Arthur Miller's which play. We have done that. Alfieri is a lawyer who comments on the happenings of the play. He is also a major important

character in the play. Which play was that? A view from the bridge, a view from the bridge, Alfieri the lawyer, he is a choric character who is the character, who is an actor as well if performs the function of a chorus. This is the traditional Greek chorus. You can say group of people and all wearing masks.

So, the Greek theater let us get back to the Greek theater and the physical structure. So, in the beginning the theater consisted of a sloping hill side where the audience, the members of the audience would be accommodated and it had a level tracked mark by a circle where the actors would perform the play. So, it was all on a sloping hill side. Then a later improvement included a semi circle of stone seats which became an auditorium

and also a space for the audience to sit. So, this is what it look like. See this area which was meant for the audience to sit, it was called the theatron.

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This theatron, where the audience would sit in semi-circular building and this area is called Parodos. Here, as you are talking about the actors and the chorus would march, is stately through the passage and come and take the places on stage. In between there was this place called Orchestron.

Orchestron was the space for the actors and the chorus to sit to enact the play. So, this was the acting space Orchestron and this was called Skene. From this word, we have our modern term called scene. The skene was nothing but a backdrop to the stage. This was this was, so imagine that you are the audiences sitting here and this is what you would see at the background whatever was happening on stage, so four important parts Theatron, Parodos, Orchestron and Skene. So, orchestron was the dancing place. Parodos as I was talking about it one of the gangways on which chorus and actors meet their entrances from either side of the Orchestron and skene, the word from which we get our modern word scene was originally a flat roof stage building and it was used as a scenic background.

Now, coming to the actors in a typical Greek theater, so actors would use exaggerated gestures. You know the term, the theatrical acting that is over the top kind of acting. **This** it originated from the Greek theater where the people, where the actors would speak

extremely loudly and acting style was all very exaggerated and they also wore large stylized facial masks.

These masks were may generally made of linen. Another feature of these masks was that they had a variety of masks resembling emotions of characters. So, they would have a happy mask, they would have a sad mask, a tragic mask. In case all these because you just imagine that a Greek theater would accommodate how many people? How many people were there? It was not like a small class of twenty, twenty five. How many people? Just take a rough estimate. One thousand, you would not need a facial mask even for thousand. The theater of diagnosis that was it that is the word it was known as it could accommodate fifteen thousand people and generally, the total number of audience would be between ten and fifteen thousand. Just imagine because there was no other source of entertainment. So, on day, on a typical day of religious observance when it was the day of everybody from the Greek cities state would turn up to the theater.

It was not for entertainment. You must also remember that they did not look to theater for entertainment, the way theater is regarded as today. Why did they go to theater at all? It was theater was nothing but a kind of a reinforcement of the religious believes, so they attended theater in extreme awe and devotion. It was not a means or source of entertainment. Along with the mask, they would also wear the costumes that would represent their character type. So, you know the term stereotype, this is the origin of that word. They also change that, so during the course of the play they would change the masks several times because see these exaggerated and stylized and very big masks. They should be seen to the last person sitting in the last row **right**.

Therefore, the necessity of having a large mask representing the emotion of the character and this is another important thing. The actors wore high boots called and the term is Cothurnus to give them added height. This is a typical cothurnus and it would have high heel. So, usually the actor who would play Oedipus would wore cothurnus because the king, you know if you remember your definition of an ideal tragic hero, a man of noble birth of course, and high stature you cannot have a short person of that was the belief.

So, it has a hero has to have height. So, that was the cothurnus to give an extra height to the characters and this is the very typical example of facial mask. Now, **you may** it may look quite funny to you now but this is what they wore during those days. So, you can

see a funny, a happy mask, a happy face and a sad face. From Greece, we will move on to Rome and the Romans theater. So, the Romans theaters never approached the heights of the Greek theater.

The Romans always had predicament for spectacle and for exaggeration much more than the Greeks and they had little interest in serious dramatic endeavors. They were drawn towards sensationalism and a spectacle and the earliest Roman plays were nothing but mere translations of the Greek plays. So, **they** we have a Greek Oedipus for example and we have a Romans Oedipus as well but much more over the thought I mean, I remember when you are doing Oedipus. Most of you felt that it is quite melodramatic. So, you can really imagine what Romans Oedipus would have been

Seneca, if you remember Seneca. This is the most famous, most representative Roman play **right**. Seneca and his works are known as Senecan tragedies. So, Seneca is the most well known Roman play **right** and in all he wrote nine tragedies. Most of which are extremely gloomy, extremely lurid and extremely gory and violent. They are also noted for their inflated rhetoric and you have done a little bit of Elizabethan stage also. So, can you comment on the impact of Seneca on the renaissance tragedies or the Elizabethan tragedies?

Many of the elizabethan tragedies were based on the original plays by Seneca. So, therefore, that the excessive element of violence and blood shed in them, they were most of them could trace their origins to plays by Seneca. This is Seneca as this is the sculpture of Seneca and then we will come to the decline of drama in ancient Greece and ancient Rome. So, as we were talking about the Romans had a preference for a spectacle and blood shed and with the decline of the Romans Empire the interest in theater also when and this was replaced. Theater was replaced by Pantomimes and Pantomimes remained extremely popular till the first century A.D. and then the mind tradition prevailed and for a very long period of time, the mind provided the theatrical continuity between the ancient world of theater and the medieval and there is the group of scholars who believed that the contemporary **(( ))** it owes its origins to pantomime and mime traditions of Rome but this proposition has not been sufficiently proved. Any questions **ok?**

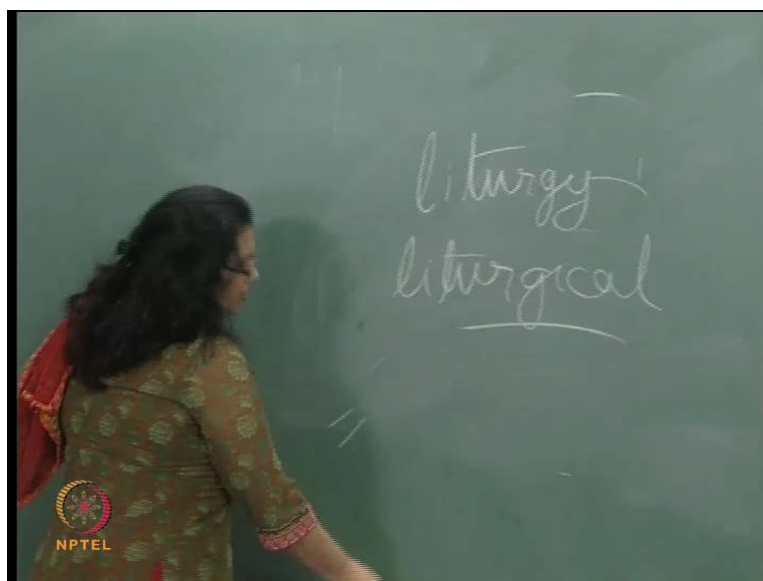


So, because **we are** we have ended talk about the ancient Greek and Roman Theater, would you like to comment? We have done a play by Sophocles if you remember right, that is Oedipus. Do you remember the other two place of the Trilogy? Antigone and Oedipus and Colonus **yeah**? So, I am there just I will read you a passage from Antigone which is a choral passage **ok**.

So, it is strophe and antistrophe, just a little bit. So, chorus sings here, blest are they whose days have not tasted of evil. For when a house hath once been shaken from heaven, there the curse fails nevermore, passing from life to life of the race; even as, when the surge is driven over the darkness of the deep by the fierce breadth of Thracian sea-winds, it rolls up the black sand from the depths, and there is sullen roar from wind-vexed headlands and that front the blows of the storm.

Then there is the antistrophe. I see that from olden times the sorrows in the house of the Labdacidae are heaped upon the sorrows of the dead; and generation is not freed by generation, but some god strikes them down, and the race hath no deliverance. Can you comment on this? This is from antigone and this is what is antigone? This is last in the Oedipus trilogy. So, whatever you heard could you interpret this roughly.

What is being talked about? The chorus is commenting on something. On what house of Labdacidae, yeah what is that tragedy? They are doomed by their own people. Here, they are finally doomed, so that is antigone. Antigone sort of you know concludes the enormous, the magnitude of tragedy, the enormous tragedy that has befallen this particular dynasty.



So, the chorus is commenting that their tragic fate is not yet over. It continues because the dynasty itself is doomed and also remember the invocation, the repeated reference to the gods and all those things are. Any questions or comments you would like to make so far? Then we will move on to see, we have finished the ancient period. We will move on to the English drama in during the medieval times, tenth century and so.

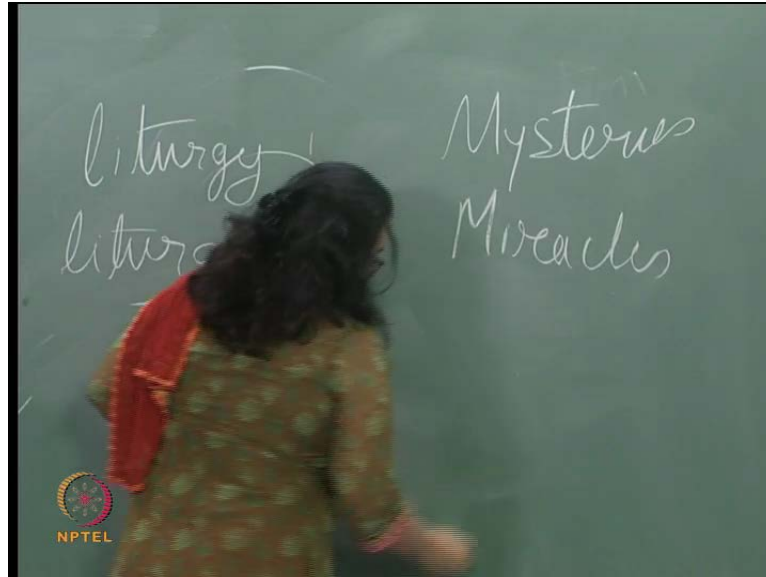
So, any idea what was the fate of drama? What was the fate of theater during the medieval period? We are talking about you know this is kind of interim period between the ancient Greek theater and also the modern Elizabethan periods. In between we had the medieval theater. What was happening (( )) good. Did you hear what she said?

**Yeah what yeah.** The church had the major say in the theater, in the drama of the medieval times. So, it was more or less because church was not just a house of god. It was many more things. So, people would look towards the church for shelter, for also treatment, for also education and gradually the church also got interested in theater. So, the earlier plays were basically religious in nature and the term that is used is liturgy and the derivation is liturgical.

So, drama was liturgical in nature, extremely religious in nature. This is one of a very well known example from a typical liturgical drama play. I will read it out to you. The women, the moaning women. Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified have only one to whom

answer with the angel, what Christians seek the living with the dead, the lord is risen as to his own he said.

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Remember, how he speaks in Galilee that he must die, but after it should see three days being past his Easter with tree. This is just a very small example of a typical liturgical play that would be performed in the medieval English churches.

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Are you familiar with the terms mysteries and miracles? What were these **yes Anisha**, the American play were Rome basically based on biblical character. Good. Both mysteries and miracle plays were based on two things; one was the biblical stories, biblical allusions. Secondly, on the life of the martyrdom of saints. So, the life of saints and stories from the bible, so that was the mysteries and the miracles and some well known mysteries were that title itself would suggest a lot the scarifies of Isaac and the mystery of the holy sacrament. So, these were extremely popular mysteries and miracles that the English church showed and again associated with this is another kind of play, moralities. Now, what could moralities be? Good, **yeah**. The directive plays more or less. So, what could be an idealized life **ok?**

What could be an ideal christian life? That was what it was the all about. Examples of moralities, I am sure you have done something in one of your earlier causes; moralities. See the characters were types, so you would have a common man and common man being confronted with sins, the sinning ways of life **ok**. So, you will have the seven deadly, personifications of the seven deadly scenes. For example, **yes** sloth. **Yeah** for example, anger. These characters, these attributes, these sins would be personified as actors and an average man and every man.

So, there was morality play and extremely a well known morality play title Every Man perhaps you are aware of that, Every Men and anonymously written. So, the authorship is unknown. I will read you a passage from Every Man which is, Every Man, you know are typical average man and how during the course of his life, he comes into contact this sins and then how he overcomes worldly temptations and then he is unlighted.

It is like an idealized kind of life which every man has to lead. So, here Everyman: Gentle knowledge, what do you call it? Knowledge: It is a garment of sorrow: from pain it will borrow; contrition it is, that getteth forgiveness. It pleaseth god passing well. Good-Deeds, so Good-Deeds is another character. Knowledge is one, Good-Deeds is another. Everyman, will you wear it for your heal? Everyman: Now blessed by Jesu. Mary's son! From now have I on true contrition and let us go now without tarrying. Good-Deeds, have we clear our reckoning? Good-Deeds: yeah indeed I have it here. Everyman: Then I trust we need not fear; now friends, let us not part in twain. Knowledge: Nay, Everyman that we will not, certain. Good-Deeds: Yet must thou lead with thee. Three persons of great might. Everyman: Who should they be? Good-Deeds: Discretion and Strength, they hight, and thy beauty may not abide behind. Knowledge: Also ye must call to mind. Your Five-Wits as for your counselors. Good-Deeds: You must have them ready at all hours. Everyman: How shall I get them hinder? Knowledge: You must call them all together, and they will hear you incontinent.

So, what is the idea behind a play like this? The first few lines, they should tell you. Man come everyman who is born on this earth ok. He is quite susceptible to sins, but it is through contrition, through regret that he seeks god's forgiveness. So, that is the moral, therefore the name moralities. These were the kinds of you know plays or this was the kind of drama that was in existence during the middle ages. Any questions? Do we have

any kind of plays or any kind of drama along the same lines as mysteries, moralities and miracles now a day's? **Guess Aneesha.**

In modern contemporary drama, unless and until you are talking about extremely preachy or extremely didactic sort of play, these plays have survived in the original form. They are still enacted, they are still read for academic knowledge for historical knowledge but by enlarge, **they have not** they did not have a far reaching influence on modern contemporary drama because you know the contemporary drama, we have people like Pinter and we have people like Stopper and we have people like Samshepard **ok.**

So, mysteries, miracles and moralities, perhaps you know has forms of direct literalism, has form of preaching, some good things of life. Perhaps they do exist but they did not have an influence on the contemporary drama **ok.** Alright, thank you so much then.