

Government Degree College Jakhini Varanasi

Subject: English

Class: B. A.

Semester: III

Name of the paper: English prose and writing skills

Topic: Drama forms

Sub Topic: Closet Drama

Keywords: Reading, Ideas, Enactment, Stage

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Closet Drama

A closet drama is a genre of drama that is primarily written for the purpose of reading rather than enacting it on the stage. It is a form of drama based on dialogue that is read like a play but cannot be performed as play on stage.

The precursor of this form existed during classical times. Closet drama was popular in the early 19th century when melodrama and burlesque dominated the theater and poets attempted to raise dramatic standards by reviving past traditions. Plato's famous work *Apology* is known as tragic drama and not as philosophic dialogue. Likewise, the sayings of Cicero, Strabo, and Seneca were also worth reading rather than acting and since then only the comic theater survived transplantation from Greece to Rome. During the Romantic Age and the Victorian Era many poets used closet drama as a form for their poetic epics.

Byron's *Manfred* (1817) and Shelley's *The Cenci* (1819) imitate Shakespeare, and Goethe's *Fast* (Part I, 1808; Part II, 1832) draws in part on the Elizabethan tradition. Milton's *Samson Agonistes* (1671) and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1819) are based on Greek tragedies. *Prometheus Unbound* would not only take more than five hours to perform properly, it would be extremely difficult to bring it to life on stage with all its Olympian gods, Titans and mythic creatures.

Notable among other closet dramas are Robert Browning's *Strafford* (1837) and *Pippa Passes* (1841) and Thomas Hardy's *The Dynasts*. *The Dynasts* is Hardy's most ambitious plays and in early 1900s, an attempt was made to perform it on stage

by Brave Theater, although it is obviously meant to be performed in the minds of the readers. This play is based on Napoleonic war and celestial entities are chief narrator who consider human as insignificant as ants. *The Dynasts* is a long play consisting of not five acts but nineteen acts so arranging all characters as to maintain the originality of the play which make it difficult to perform on stage.

Thus, anti-theatrical impulse led them to withdrawal from theater but modernist theater is much gratuitous to Yeats, Brecht and Becket who enriched it with poetic and novelistic techniques. In spite of being not very popular genre, many *closet dramas* were written in Victorian times, afterwards and are being written today even.