

UNIT 1

I. THE BEGINNINGS OF AMERICAN DRAMA: COLONIES

- Beginning -no thought of an American drama.
- End of the eighteenth century - American theater well established.

- 1. imitation of English and European literature
- 2. presentation of distinctive American qualities.

- Spanish comedia, Marcos Farfán de los Godos, 1598 - *Le Theatre de Neptune en La Nouvelle-France* (Lescarbot, 1606) -*The Lost Lady* (1641, Sir William Berkeley -*Ye Bare and Ye Cubb* (William Darby, 1665, Accomac County, Virginia) - *Androborus* (Robert Hunter, 1714)

- Handicaps: 0. exigencies of war, yellow fever, the copyright bogey...
- 1. antagonism of religious groups. 2. opposition by Governments.
- 3. opposition taxed the inventive resources and finesse of the Colonial actors and acting companies. - Bankruptcy

- Williamsburg, Virginia - New Theater (1732): George Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* (1706). - David Douglass -*The Prince of Phartia*

II. DRAMA DURING THE REVOLUTION AND POST-REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD UNTIL 1800

- British military -Spirit of nationalism - Moral lessons and dramatized political issues, social farces (native Yankee or Negro character - national plays - imitative of English drama. William Dunlap - Royall Tyler.

II.1. Plays Reflecting Patriot Views during the Revolution.

II.1.1. MRS. MERCY OTIS WARREN (1728-1814): PARTISAN SATIRIST.

- *The Adulateur* (1773), *The Group* (1775), *The Sack of Rome*, *The Ladies of Castile*, *The Blockheads* (1776)??.
- Bitter satire and poignant observations on liberty and patriotism - clearly amateurish and lacked any real dramatic talent.

II.1.2. HUGH HENRY BRACKENBRIDGE (1748-1816): WAR OF THE BELLE-LETTRES

- Novel *Modern Chivalry* - *The Battle of Bunkers-Hill* (1776) -*The Death of General Montgomery* (1777)
- Political farce-melodrama: *The Fall of the English Tyranny* (1776)

II.2. Plays Reflecting Loyalist Views during the Revolution

- THE BATTLE OF BROOKLYN, A FARCE IN TWO ACTS BY AUTHOR UNKNOWN (1776)

II.3. Nonpartisan Drama: "Both Your Houses"

- Colonel Robert Munford (c. 1713-1784), *The Candidates* and *The Patriots* (1798).

II.4. Royall Tyler (1757-1826): The Beginnings of American Comedy

- *The Contrast* - novel, *The Algerine Captive* (1797)
- Comic opera, *May-Day in Town; or, New York in an Uproar*

- Sacred dramas in blank verse: *The Origin of the Feast of Purim, Joseph and His Brethren, The Judgment of Solomon, The Island of Barrataria*

II.4.1. THE CONTRAST, BY ROYALL TYLER, 1787

II.5. William Dunlap (1766-1839): Father of American Drama

- 1st professional dramatist in America. Theater manager and producer, a *A History of the American Theatre* (1832) - Adaptation August von Kotzebue's *The Stranger* - As playwright: sentimental comedy, patriotic drama, the ballad-opera, Gothic melodrama, romantic tragedy, historic tragedy, farce, melodrama, adaptations, and translations: *André, The Father, Leicester, The Italian Fathers.*

II.6. Post-Revolutionary Drama: Varied Directions

- Nationalistic and Political Plays (with a nationalistic spirit, political issues, patriot leadership, and national affairs), Social Farces and early Character Types (social and political themes, varied satire, character types such as the Yankee, the Negro and the Indian), Romantic Tragedy, Strictly Moral Lessons, and College Drama.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS (UNIT 1):

- 1.- Which are the aims of Sargent Murray writings towards the drama and literature in general? Which is the main drawback of theater and its causes according to Sargent Murray in her "Panegyric on the Drama"??
- 2.- How does Sargent Murray answers to the allegations by governments and other authorities against theater?
- 3.- Which characteristics does Sargent Murray point out about the tragedies of Mrs. Mercy
- 4.- Which are the main literary characteristics of Mrs. Warren's "The Group"?
- 5.- How can you characterise Mrs. Warren "The Ladies of Castile"?
- 6.- Which are the main themes of *The Contrast* by Royall Tyler?
- 7.- How can you characterise *The Contrast* in literary terms?
- 8.- Name other themes and special moments in *The Contrast*.
- 9.- Can you find any instances of melodrama and the farce in *The Contrast*?
- 10.- Indicate any humorous and comic instances in *The Contrast*?

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS (UNIT 1):

1.- Which are the aims of Sargent Murray writings towards the drama and literature in general? Which is the main drawback of theater and its causes according to Sargent Murray in her "Panegyric on the Drama"??

She defends not only the writing of dramas but public performances as being appropriate to the times. Her specific interests is in women's attitudes toward and contribution to the arts.

Theatrical prohibition because of prodigality of time, exorbitant expenditures, idleness of theater makers and audiences, and relaxation of morals.

2.- How does Sargent Murray answers to the allegations by governments and other authorities against theater?

To prodigality of time, she says that people waste their time in the taverns, unnecessary gossiping, cards, scandal and the numerous vagaries of fashion more than in theaters.

To exorbitant expenditures, she states that the money employed in going to the theater is money well spent.

To idleness of theater, she assures that acting is laborious and educative and that virtuous theater is highly influential in regulating opinions, manners and morals of the populace.

To relaxation of morals, she says that under previous examination of wise men, theater would be well regulated and virtuous.

At the end, she affirms that theater can help people enjoy and encourage literary knowledge.

3.- Which characteristics does Sargent Murray point out about the tragedies of Mrs. Mercy Otis Warren in her article "Observations on the tragedies of Mrs. Warren"?

She opposes real patriots to foreign tastes and says that America is ready for cultural independence. She says that indigenous literature must be considered from a positive point of view by literary critics in order to give a push to American productions. Theater must work to shape native opinions and manners. American drama must be invigorated instead of despised.

Warren's plays are full of artificial advantages for the stage effect. There plays are nice examples of good theatrical parts written by Mrs. Warren. She makes a final plea for American drama. Religious education, literary and political influences from her life.

4.- Which are the main literary characteristics of Mrs. Warren's "The Group"?

Polemical farce in two acts. Names stand for human features. Old-fashioned language with abbreviations. Patriot theme about the situation in Massachusetts at the time of England's actions (Stamp Act, Intolerable Acts, Sugar Act, Townshend Acts) felt unbearable by the Sons of Liberty. Feelings of war, no fear for social changes. Also political patriotic ideals and utopian dreams. Opposition between fighters and "high" men.(Loyalists). End of battle, victory and mourn for the dead.

5.- How can you characterise Mrs. Warren "The Ladies of Castile"?

Dull didactic tragedy in verse, "The Ladies of Castile" describes Spain's last heroic struggle for liberty before the establishment of despotism by the family of Ferdinand. Concern for freedom from England's social as well as political control. Old-fashioned language.

6.- Which are the main themes of *The Contrast* by Royall Tyler?

Urban sophistication vs. rural naïvité, characteristic of post-Revolutionary America. Honest patriotic affirmations. Old Europe vs. young America. Cultural differences, also fashion contrasts.

7.- How can you characterise *The Contrast* in literary terms?

Comedy in five acts. More a caricature of society than a social comedy. There is much farcical action (gestures, comic wit, etc.). Influenced by *The School of Scandal* by Sheridan. Prologue as a national note well sustained. Celebration of the American character (Jonathan, "Yankee Doodle(garabato)"). American institutions must set the standard of individual behaviour. Endorsement of American way of life in 1787. Mastery in managing the dialogue. A lusty embodiment of American ideals, ignoring English tradition. Wit and humour. A liberal amount of sentiment, moralizing, and nationalism -necessary ingredients of the successful American play. The outcome is a national triumph, the necessary moral sentiment of the play is clear in Maria's 'filial obligation'. Also in Charlotte and Colonel Manly.

8.- Name other themes and special moments in *The Contrast*.

Act I. -Carpe diem (34). -Songs (36). -Danger of books (37). -Money vs. Love (37). -Daughter/father relationships. -Mother's dominance over father (38).

Act II. -Fashion (38). -Sentimentality vs. graveness (40). -French vs. American fashion (41/2). -Asides (42). -Practical type (Jonathan) (42). -Democracy (42). -Plays on words (43). -Contrast (43).

Act III.-Courtship Plans (Dimple) (45). -Servants (46). -Bad opinion about theater (46)(47)(48). -Patriotism (Yankee Doodle)(48). -Greek model to imitate (49). -Man superior to woman (50).

Act IV. -Cynicism with USA (53). -Patriotism (53/3). -Honor (55).

Act V. -Contrast USA vs. Europe (58).

9.- Can you find any instances of melodrama and the farce in *The Contrast*?

Melodrama: The villain (Dimple) and the hero (Manly) engage in a conflict. Disguises (Dimple's origin), letters, forgeries(falsificaciones), tricks and obscure plans (Dimple's, Charlotte's and Letitia's(42)), final discovery of plans (Mainly). Virtue always wins over evil. Evil is punished (Charlotte, Dimple), and virtue rewarded (Manly and Maria).

Farce: Gestures, exaggerated actions, cudgel (porra, garrote), comic hidings and tricks (Jessamy to Jonathan(44)).

10.- Indicate any humorous and comic instances in *The Contrast*?

Jonathan, Jessamy and Jenny (Servants)(42-44)(46-49)

Van Rough (59)