
UNIT 2 DIALOGUES AND MONOLOGUES

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2.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

In this Unit you are not learning about the nature of dialogue in drama only. It has a wider scope. It discusses the general principles of writing dialogues and monologues, one of which is that by dramatising our ideas in fiction, poetry, news reports, etc., we achieve certain effects which we can't otherwise. **Dialogues** and monologues, used **skilfully**, can make writing vivid and authentic. You will now learn that:

- the essence of dramatic dialogue in drama is its relation with characters and events;
- dialogue can add life to many forms of writing, such as fiction, poetry, drama, news reports;
- in each of these the **dialogue** tells us essential truths about the characters and the situation;
- dialogue reveals the personality of the speakers;
- even when they seem to talk out of character they may be revealing some unknown aspects of themselves; or
- they may reveal any changes they may have undergone in the course of the incidents;
dramatisation is a more direct and quick way of telling us the entire truth about the characters involved in a story;
- monologues are inevitable in certain situations, e.g., loneliness and grief. They are not merely a device of traditional drama.

After you've read this Unit, you should have no **difficulty** in choosing good passages of dramatic dialogues and monologues and doing the assignments. Perhaps you **will** be able to find **more** interesting passages than the ones given in this Unit.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the preceding Unit we saw how situations can be **dramatised** in **literature**—in **poetry**, drama and fiction. In the present Unit we are going to see how **dramatisation** can take place in the form of dialogues and monologues.

We have a rough idea of **what** dramatic dialogue means in a **drama**. There is an exchange of conversation between characters; **the** conversation is held in the present, but it embraces **the** past, and also influences the future course of action. The conversation is caused by some event or statement, by someone involved in the story and **the** situation. The dialogue is dramatic, because (a) it is **rooted** in the situation, (b) its substance affects the course of events, and (c) it reveals the personality of the speakers. In that sense, dramatic dialogue can be said to be a product of the past, present and future of an event, a story, and the characters involved in it.

2.2 DIALOGUE CAN PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN DRAMATISING IDEAS

Even outside the limits of drama, in different kinds of narratives, **such as** short story, novel and narrative poetry, dialogue can play an important **role by** helping a writer to **dramatise** ideas, incidents or crises. Dialogue is a useful artistic device to give one's narrative pace and verisimilitude. **Used skilfully,** it brings in the feeling of immediacy into the situation **creates the illusion that we** are actually witnessing a scene, hearing people talk, getting involved in the situation, getting to know the characters better.

2.3 DRAMATISED DIALOGUE IN FICTION

Let us see what all this **means**. Here is a dialogue from **Gr**aham Greene's *Brighton Rock*, (which, if you haven't read, you must—a Penguin edition is easily available):

She said, 'Pinkie, I got to tell you. I wanted to keep you from worrying—but there's got to be someone I don't have to lie to. That wasn't **Mum**, Pinkie.' He came slowly up, **watching** her closely, judging. 'Who was it?'
 'It was that woman. The one who used to come to Snow's asking questions.'
 'What did she want?'
 'She wanted me to go **away** from here.'
 'Why?'
 'Pinkie, she **knows**.'
 'Why, did you say it was your **Mum**?'
 'I told you—I didn't **want** you to worry.'

There are two persons in **this** dialogue. A girl, **not** very educated ('I got to tell you'), on the defensive and also protective ('I wanted to keep you from worrying'), is making a confession to a boy, who is her friend, perhaps her lover or husband. He is suspicious, cold, judging, accusing. Obviously, her trust in him is not returned. He is also involved in **something** serious, perhaps criminal ('she knows'), so that the woman who used to come to Snow's (the name of a teashop), wanted the girl to leave Pinkie. There is a deception, followed by a **confession**, which however is not taken lightly.

This piece of dialogue is **dramatic** in that it arises out of a situation and makes the **characters** come alive. A **woman** comes to see the girl (Rose), a woman old enough to look like **her** mother. She **knows** something, and the girl realises that the woman's knowledge would worry **Pinkie**. The woman also thinks that the girl should leave the place, as the place and the company she is keeping, is bad, perhaps dangerous. From this short extract, the **reader** can get an idea of the central **thrust** in the story—foolish, protective **love**, some nasty incident in the past, suspicion and accusation. Through the **dialogue**, we **can** identify the characters, reach out to their past, and **anticipate** their **future**.

2.4 DRAMATIC DIALOGUE IN POETRY

Let us take another example, this time from poetry, from Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* (Oxford University Press):

'John... John, calm down, calm down, at least
Tell me what happened. Did you tease him?
'Me tease him? That freak climbed the bed
And urinated near my head
Enough's enough! Liz, don't appease him.
Have the cat neutered. It'll cure
~~All~~ his aggression, that's for sure.'

When John's invective grows too **torrid**
(I'll cut them off myself,' et al.)
Liz exclaims, 'John, don't be so horrid.'
'Well, ship him off to Senegal
Or somewhere—Liz, you'd better do it—
Or—mark my words—that cat will rue it.'
'Oh, darling, don't be so annoyed.'
'What should I be then? Ovejayed?
'Of course not, dear. ~~I'm~~very sorry.
Let's change the sheets. He's twelve years old.
He really has a **heart** of gold.'
'I'll bet!' 'Well, dear, try not to worry.
As for that other thing, that would
—At his age—do more harm than good.'

'So what should I do—~~grin and~~ bear it?
'Make sure the bedroom door is locked.'

This is a **humorous** dialogue (humorous for the reader, at least) between lovers. The background is **very** clear. The woman's cat has urinated on the bed to spite the man; it's obvious that the cat hates him. The man can hardly contain his anger, and proposes measures, violent and non-violent, to remove the cat-menace. It's also obvious that **his** mistress is very fond of the cat. The dialogue tells us a lot about the man's **temper**, the woman's **amused** coolness, and the **cat's** personality. One can see that the cat is going to interfere seriously in the lovers' relationship.

The dialogue is dramatic, not the least because the author has handled the speech so well. One **notices** the speech rhythm—the short pauses, the exclamations, the questions, the use of parentheses, and the flow of John's invectives. There are other men, women, and cats in the story (which is in verse), and many other dialogues, but the one quoted here, is the only possible dialogue which could reveal the characters and the **situation**. It is the inevitability of the dialogue, inevitable because of the situation **and** the characters, that makes it dramatic. If narrated in the bland third person, the incident, which bears importantly on the **story**, would have lost its **immediacy** and **4** closeness to the reader.

2.5 DRAMATIC DIALOGUE IN DRAMA

Let us now examine a piece of dramatic dialogue from drama. It's from John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (Faber):

Cliff : (quietly). Don't let's brawl, boyo. It won't do any good.
Jimmy : Why don't ~~we~~ brawl? It's the only thing left I'm any good at.
Cliff : **Jimmy, boy—**
Jimmy : (to **Alison**). You've let this ~~genreflecting~~ sin jobber win you over, haven't you? She's got you back, hasn't she?
Helena : Oh for heaven's sake, don't be such a bully! You've no right to talk about her mother like that!

rooms, fabricated reports and sent them home. Here is one such report (*By-Line*, Penguin):

'How does Madrid seem?' I asked him.
 'There is a **terror** here,' said the journalist. 'There is evidence of it wherever you go. Thousands of bodies are being found.'
 'When did you get here?' I asked him.
 'Last night.'
 'Where did you see the **bodies**?'
 'They are around everywhere,' he said. 'You see them in the early morning.'
 '**Were** you out early **this** morning?'
 'No.'
 'Did you see any bodies?'
 'No,' he said. 'But I know they are there.'
 'What evidence of terror have you seen?'
 'Oh, it's there,' he said. 'You can't deny it's there.'
 'What evidence have you seen yourself?'
 'I haven't had time to see it myself but I know it is there.'
 'Listen,' I said. 'You get in here last night. You haven't even been out in the town and you tell us who are living here and **working** here that there is a terror.'

The report continues for another thousand words or so and ends by **observing** that 'the remarkable story at that time was that there was no terror in Madrid.' **Hemingway**, however, by **dramatising** an encounter, has already made his point; the rest of the report is a further exposure of the tall claims made by the journalist.

What are the elements of dramatisation in this dialogue? First, a vivid description of the man; a few details to fix his identity: watery eyes, strips of hair pasted carefully across his flat-topped bald head. A vague man, and a vain self-deluding man at that. In the dialogue the man goes on repeating vaguely: 'They are around everywhere; they are there; it's there. . . it's there; it is there; they are everywhere.' There is a **sharp contrast** between the author's personality—relentlessly questioning—and that of the armchair journalist, admitting that he has seen nothing, that he has not been out in the town at all, hasn't had any time to see it himself, etc.

2.7 PERSONALITY OF THE SPEAKER IN A DIALOGUE

This brings us to an important point about dramatic dialogue. The dialogue must not only arise from a particular situation, and involve a number of **persons**; it must also freely reflect the personality of the speakers: the **trusting** but fear-ridden, simple uneducated speech of Rose; the suspicious, accusing language of Pinkie; Liz, cool and temporising, trying to calm John down; the explosive anger of John; the violence of Jimmy's language contrasted with the upper-class contempt of Helena. The inevitability of the characters' speech is what makes these examples of dramatic writing so powerful. In each of the excerpts quoted, from fiction, verse, drama, and newspaper reporting, the **speaking** characters, emerge as rounded personalities; we can see their past as we witness their present; we can also guess which way the drama will move from the appropriateness of the words spoken by them. A successful dramatist has command over a wide range of speech—muted, violent, or tense; witty, combative, or tender; matter of fact or poetic—to convey a variety of situations and character reactions.

2.7.1 Characters speaking uncharacteristically

There are again situations in which characters may seem to speak uncharacteristically. A soldier and a man of pleasure may burst into metaphorical language, apparently out of tune with his **behaviour** in the rest of the narrative, but actually revealing aspects of his character not so far shown to us. **Antony** says in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*: 'Unarm, Eros, the long day's **task** is done.'

And we must sleep.' Coining **as** it does **from** a sensualist, **the** speech may seem sudden; but not in the 'dramatic context. A great soldier has lost his great love, as well **as** his last battle, and there is **now** only death. **Antony** is now rid of all his delusions of glory, and **comes** to **realise** the utter emptiness of the world. His great love for Cleopatra now **transforms** his personality as well as his language.

Similarly, in *Look Back in Anger*, **Jimmy** Porter flashes out in violent and abusive language. To his wife's face, he calls her **mother** a bitch and wishes her dead. This is, however, quite unlike the person who refers tenderly to his father's slow dying. The reader recalls how, **as** a child, **Jimmy** nursed his sick father, and shared his confidences. 'He would **talk** to me for long hours pouring out **all** that was left **of** his life. . . .'

This speech is not by any other character than Jimmy, except that in the process of dramatic revelation, the author has let us into Jimmy's past, shown us, in the flashback of his mind, **one** of the things that went into the making of the Jimmy of the present moment.

2.7.2 A character's speech is modified by the events in a drama

Thus, although a distinct speech is given to each character in dramatic writing, the speech can be **influenced** by the course of events, just as characters are transformed by what happens to them. What is important in dramatic dialogue, therefore, is the rightness of speech of a **character** in a developing situation. Speech is the expression of one's personality; if **the** personality does not change at **all** while the situation is changing it shows that **there** is no growth in the character; on the other hand, most live characters will respond to changes in the situation and show subtle modifications in the way they use language.

2.8 THE ADVANTAGES OF DRAMATISATION

Dramatised writing is **really** one way of achieving effects which could also have been achieved by other modes of narration, except that it is a more direct, a quicker way. It is a more direct way in **that** we **see** the characters living the drama of the moment, reacting to it, **influencing its** course, being shaped by what is happening to them and to others. It is a quicker way, because with the images and sounds of the language in their speech, the **characters** at once open up the entire world of experiences, ideas, and beliefs in which they **are** rooted. In their speech they are sharing meanings and experiences, showing a **community** of culture, or, when they fail to do so, pointing out the differences in the **worlds** they live in--; showing that such a contrast can underline human **situations** where social, cultural or emotional communication is impossible. The wide **gap** between Rose's simple trustfulness and Pinkie's corruption in Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock* is never bridged, neither in **the** events described, nor in their **language**.

Activity 2

In the squares provided, **make** tick marks against the statements you **think** are correct.

Dramatic dialogue

- i) helps to identify **themes** for new plays
- ii) is an artistic device **used** to create a sense of reality
- iii) teaches you how to use the Direct Speech form
- iv) brings an **immediacy** into the situation
- v) is not truly creative **writing**; the writer merely transcribes real conversations
- vi) enables a reader to **become** aware of the emotional atmosphere of a created work

2.9 MONOLOGUES

Much of what we have understood about dramatic dialogues also **applies** to **monologues**—the same **criteria** of the right speech to the right person in the right situation, the course of events **influencing** a character's action and **language**, speech **being** the expression of an entire personality. Except that in monologues the character is speaking to himself, thinking aloud as it were, or addressing the audience directly. He has a message or a piece of information which **cannot** be given in the normal course of a dialogue, or to which there should be no witnesses **participating** in the dramatised event. It is not simply a time-saving device of traditional drama, whereby the **dramatist** cuts short a scene or two by imparting some information directly which should have come in the course of dramatic action. The most important use of monologues in traditional drama was in **soliloquies**, grave and profound, which resounded from the stage in character actors' **declamations**. It is no longer **so**, because except for fools or history's **clowns**, people no longer declaim in the same old fashion.

2.9.1 The inevitability of monologues

We all speak monologues **with** ourselves when we are alone, in self-recrimination, in sarcasm, in making up our **minds**. Some who like themselves a lot, are said to congratulate themselves, make noble resolutions, remind themselves of the great deeds ahead, in monologues. Either type does not care to have witnesses to these moments of self-abasement or glorification. Dramatised monologues, however, are not always **so** self-centred. An incident or a situation produces reactions and pressures which demand to be **externalised**. Most of us are familiar with **Hemingway's** *The Old Man and the Sea* (Penguin, again)—the story of an old fisherman's lonely struggle **with** the largest fish he'd ever hooked, his long vigil over the stubborn fish, and the truths he learns in the course of his remarkable adventure. Here is an excerpt from the story when the man's struggles are nearly over:

'But man is not made for defeat,' he said. 'A man can be destroyed but not defeated.' I am **sorry** that I killed the fish though, he thought. Now the bad time is coming and I do not even have the harpoon. The dentuso [shark] is cruel and able and strong and intelligent. But I was more **intelligent** than he was, Perhaps not, he thought. Perhaps I was better armed. 'Don't think, old man,' he said aloud. 'Sail on his course and take it when it comes.' But I must **think**, he thought. Because it is all I have.

The old man must think, and in his utter loneliness he must also talk, or else he will go mad. **Speaking** monologues splits his self in two and thus give him a companion to talk to, to relieve his great **physical** and mental fatigue. It is not, for him, a theatrical device.

It is the same loneliness and her **inability** to share her thoughts with anyone else that makes Linda, in **Arthur** Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (Penguin), speak a monologue addressed to her dead husband: 'Forgive me, dear. I can't cry. I don't know what it is, but I can't cry. I don't understand it. Why did you ever do that? Help me, Willy, I can't cry. It seems to me that you're just on another trip. I keep expecting you. Willy, **dear**, I can't cry. Why did you do it? I search and search and I search, and I can't understand it, Willy. I made the last payment on the **house** today. Today, dear. And **there'll** be nobody home. (A sob rises in her throat.) We're free and **clear**. (Sobbing more fully, released). We're free. (Biff comes slowly toward her.) We're free. . . . We're free. . . .

2.9.2 A monologue is more than a device

Monologues are often regarded as dramatic devices to tell us what is **happening** in a person's **mind** at a significant **moment**. They are, however, more than a **device**, as in the present **example**; the distressed character must **speak**, **perform** that **physical action**, or else, . . . It is **this** utter **necessity** to speak that **makes** a monologue **truly** dramatic.

2.11 ACTIVITIES AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

i) Dramatic dialogue refers to dramatisation of ideas, moods, feelings and opinions in the form of conversation between characters in a literary work.

ii) Dialogues become dramatic only when their substance is rooted in the situations which give rise to them. They reveal the personalities of the speakers and influence the future action in the plot.

Activity 2

(ii), (iv) and (vi) are the correct answers.

Activity 3

Hints:

The name of the protagonist is Ram. **Shyam**, his friend and his room-mate keeps telling Ram that he should marry **Kailas Babu's** daughter. Even though he is now poor, he comes from a **family** of Rajas.

2.12 GLOSSARY

You will find in the glossary a short list of the literary terms used in this Unit.

Crisis: In fiction or in drama a crisis is an integral part of a plot. It is the point at which the two conflicting forces face each other in decisive action which leads to the climax, or the turning point of the action, for better or for worse.

Dramatic devices or conventions are employed in the structuring of a drama to create a sense of conviction in the audience. For example, the actors on the stage must be accepted as real persons, in life-like situations.

Monologue: This is a literary device whereby a single actor speaks his thoughts at length and with a sense of completeness, to a listener or an audience.

Narrative poetry: A narrative poem tells a story and can usually be placed in the following categories

- a) epic
- b) romance
- c) ballad

Soliloquy: It is a dramatic device used to provide the audience, in a play, with information concerning the motives and the innermost feelings of a character.