

# Melodrama

## Definition of Melodrama

Melodrama is a subgenre of [drama](#), which is an exaggerated form of this [genre](#). Melodramas deal with sensational and romantic topics that appeal to the emotions of the common [audience](#). Originally, it made use of melody and music, while modern melodramas may not contain any music at all. In fact, a melodrama gives preference to a detailed [characterization](#) where characters are simply drawn, one-dimensional, or stereotyped. Typically, melodrama uses stock characters including a heroes, heroines, and villains.

## Examples of Melodrama in Literature

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### Example #1: *Still Life, Brief Encounter* (By Noel Coward)

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Noel Coward's heartbreaking drama *Still Life, Brief Encounter*, tells the story of two people who seemed destined to be unhappy. In the film, a leading role and married woman, Laura Jesson, encounters a doctor, Alec Harvey, in a train station. They decide to meet once in a week at the same station. Soon they begin to feel delighted in each other's company and share everything. Eventually they come to realize that they are in love with each other. Their realization, however, leads to a tragic notion that they cannot leave their families, which finally ends up in unrequited love, with their lives doomed into despondency.

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### Example #2: *Mildred Pierce* (By James M. Cain)

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A blend of melodrama and film noir, *Mildred Pierce*, is based on James M. Cain's novel of the same title. The story is about a struggling waitress, Mildred, who wishes to provide a better life to her daughters than she had,

after separating from her husband. For this, she takes the help of a real estate agent, after which she becomes the owner of a restaurant.

Mildred tries to make her older daughter tie the knot with a formerly wealthy man, Monte Beragon, to improve her financial position and win back her alienated daughter Vera. Instead, Vera starts enjoying the playboy lifestyle of Monte, and drains her mother's finances. This leads to Mildred's financial ruin, and the murder of Monte. Consequently, Vera goes to jail. This shows the type of melodrama created to impact the audience.

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### **Example #3: *Kitty Foyle* (By Christopher Morley)**

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Christopher Morley's novel, *Kitty Foyle*, has been adapted to film, in which the author narrates the story in the form of a melodrama. The film stars Kitty as a saleswoman who desires to make her living on her own. Nevertheless, she marries Wyn Strafford, then due to class differences, the couple separates very soon. Kitty then engages in a relationship with a doctor, Mark Eisen, but their relationship could not be successful. She again decides to marry Wyn when he comes back. Though the class difference remains, he wishes to live with Kitty. Kitty suffers a lot and returns to her sales job. Thus, the audience sees many ups and downs in Kitty's life through this classic melodrama.

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### **Example #4: *Now Voyager* (By Olive Higgins Prouty)**

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Based on the novel *Now Voyager*, by Olive Higgins Prouty, this melodrama tells the story of a woman, Charlotte Vale, who suffers a lifetime repression due to her domineering mother, who finally breaks her free at the request of Charlotte's psychiatrist. Thus, she takes a voyage where she encounters Jerry Durrance, a loyal father and loveless husband, whose wife is manipulative and jealous. Charlotte pulls back Jerry's emotionally disturbed daughter from the brink. She then enters into another relationship, but could not push Jerry out of her mind. By the end, though Charlotte could not get her desired man, she becomes self-assured and more confident.

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### **Example #5: *Wuthering Heights* (By Emily Bronte)**

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Film director William Wyler adapted Emily Bronte's classic and popular novel *Wuthering Heights* into a film. The novel is a sweeping romantic melodrama in which love and class division are destined to become a [tragedy](#). The film stars Heathcliff as an orphan, who is taken into a wealthy family where he falls in love with Cathy, his foster sister.

Though Cathy also feels the same for him, she nevertheless marries a wealthy neighbor, leaving Heathcliff with no choice. Returning as a wealthy man after some years, the sparks begin to fly again for Cathy, and a vengeful Heathcliff marries Geraldine Fitzgerald, sister of Cathy's husband, in order to arouse her jealousy. By the end, Catherine dies, and Heathcliff follows her as he could not brook this loss any more.

### **Function of Melodrama**

Melodrama is an exaggerated form of drama, where authors enhance the storylines in order to tug the heartstrings of the audience. Typically, these types of dramas focus on sensational plots that revolve around tragedy, unrequited love, loss, or heightened emotion; featuring long-suffering protagonists, especially females, attempting in vain to overcome impossible odds. Its purpose is to play on the feelings and emotions of the audience. We see the use of melodramatic plots more often in films, theater, television, radio, cartoons, and comics.