

Machinery

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Today I shall be talking about “Machinery”. The word “Machinery” in the present context has to be taken as a literary term quite different from its non-specialized use in every day parlance in the sense of a collective noun referring to machines. The term is associated with the ancient Greek theatrical convention of “**deus ex machina**”. “**Deus ex machina**” is a Latin phrase which literally means “god out of the machine”. It was a convention in classical Greek drama to lower a god on the stage with the help of a crane at a critical juncture in the dramatic plot to rescue the hero from an extremely adverse situation. Euripides was a frequent user of this dramatic technique. In modern understanding, as J A Cuddon in the *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* rightly points out, the term has come to mean “any unanticipated intervener who resolves a difficult situation in any literary genre” (p. 195).

“Machinery” is also a distinguishing feature of an epic. As Alexander Pope famously explained in his dedicatory epistle to Miss Arabella Fermor in the 1714 extended edition of *The Rape of the Lock*,:

“The Machinery, Madam, is a term invented by the critics, to signify that part which the Deities, Angels, or Dæmons, are made to act in a poem”

So, “Machinery” as a literary term simply refers to the ensemble of gods, goddesses, angels, demons and similar supernatural entities who influence the course of action or control the fates of important characters in a literary work, particularly in an epic. The nomenclature of this literary device becomes reasonable to us if we take the clue from the ancient Greek dramatic convention of “deus ex machina” and by way of metonymic association take the word “machine” to mean a supernatural agency.