THE ROAD TO MECCA
ATHOL FUGARD

Lecture 10
Lecturer: Greta de Wet
Introduction

Road to Mecca : Playscript/Drama
Meant to be performed
All the action takes place via spoken words or dialogue

Literary texts can be divided in three genres :
Prose : fiction or non-fiction (chapters), Poetry (stanzas), Drama (Acts : divided into scenes)

Road to Mecca filmed in 1992
Drama Terminology

Dramatis personae: List of characters in play
Stage directions: Tells director and actors what is happening on the stage at any point in play
Dialogue: Words spoken by characters in play
Road to Mecca: divided into two Acts
First Act: Elsa Barlow arrives at Miss Helen’s home in Nieu-Bethesda: Introduction of problems two women are facing
Second Act: Marius Byleveld arrives
Third Act: Helen has to make a decision about her life
Nieu Bethesda

Little town in Karoo
12 hours’ drive from Cape Town
Cold in winter/hot in summer
Semi-desert but town has plentiful supply of water to sustain farming community
Conservative community: most people know each other and strangers are few
At the time of Helen Martins: no running water or electricity
Helen Martins : Miss Helen : 1897-1976
Based on the life of the real Helen Martins
Play based on important events of her life: divorce from her husband and return to Nieu Bethesda in the 1930’s to care for ill mother who died in 1941
Stayed alone in house after mother’s death
Ill one night and while watching moon shining through window decided would change it by bringing light into environment
Fugard based play on Helen’s life, but not everything based on true life
“ Stefanus “
Piet vd Merwe and Koos Malgas
Elsa Barlow

Character based on young social worker that meant so much to Miss Helen in her later life
Details changed: not real name: becomes teacher instead of social worker in drama
Play opens with Elsa’s arrival from Cape Town: tired and irritable
Gave lift to young African lady with baby between Cape Town and Cradock: significant
English speaking
Single, relationship with married man, abortion
Essence of friendship: Trust
Play ends on note of hope
Dominee Marius Byleveld

Pastor/Dominee: Dutch Reformed Church
Part of job to take care of people, physically and spiritually
Knows everybody
Helen describes him as old friend
Unspoken conflict over religious and artistic issues
Conflict polite
Sees Helen’s art as idoltry
Feel statues refer to another religion or vision
In conflict with religion: church
Symbols in Road to Mecca

Symbols: An object, event etc that represents a more general quality or situation
A symbol is an image or object that represents another quality or meaning
Religions are particularly rich in symbols
Literature uses symbols too e.g. red rose = romantic love
Owl: Helen’s personal totem animal: insight and wisdom
Mecca: Capital of Saudi Arabia: holy city of Islam. Symbol of spiritual or personal goal
Glass: Reflects light: symbol of clarity and happiness
Camels and riders: Mecca desert country: camels ability to undertake long journeys across desert landscape
Religion and Conflict

Human history full of religious conflicts and wars.
Pilgrimage: religious people travelling to holy places:
pilgrims: Canterbury, Lourdes, Jerusalem, Mecca (Hajj)

Conflict between Helen’s Mecca and Ds Marius
Christian faith

Opposition between what Christian church wants for Helen and what she wants for herself.

Idea of Mecca: Helen associates religious values with her art: freedom to express herself and inner vision.

Mecca goal of Helen’s journey as artist
As long as work continues on her Mecca, she will have a reason to live.

Art: expression of freedom: images of imagination.
Interpretation of Helen’s art

Helen: Mecca: spiritual fulfilment: rebellious against what society expects from her: threat to established norms of village

Elsa: Beautiful

Marius: Cement monstrosities, dangerous, idolatory

Play: explore problems of freedom, art, religion, women’s place in society
Women in Road to Mecca

Helen: Divorced, single, no children, sculptor: did not conform to society
Katrina: Seventeen, beaten by drunken husband, baby, poor
Elsa: single, affair with married man, teacher at coloured school outspoken against policy of racial inequality