

An Introduction to Drama

The Nature of Drama

Drama may be defined as a mode of storytelling enacted by live performers before an audience. The Greek root of the word *drama* literally means "action happening before the eyes." In this sense, the drama differs from fiction in that the plot, characters, and setting must all be conveyed to the audience with the limitations of space and time inherent in this form.

While a novel may stretch its plot across a nearly infinite length of time or pages and fill its story with as many characters as necessary, a play must simplify its structure to be enjoyed and understood within an audience's practical attention span and within the limited resources of a particular physical space. Because of these constraints placed upon the playwright, drama was prized as one of the highest forms of art by the Ancient Greeks.

From this classical heritage, drama has been an important form of popular entertainment, religious ritual, social commentary, and creative expression down to the present day. Even in our modern age, with the proliferation of technology and amusement, contemporary audiences still respond to the immediacy and intimacy of live performers engaged in action unfolding in front of them. While its form has changed over time, the basic elements of the drama have remained since the Greeks.

Evolution of English Drama

The origin of the drama is deeply rooted in the religious nature of mankind. The same applies not only to English dramas, but also to dramas from other countries. Ancient Greek and Roman dramas mainly dealt with the religious ceremonies of the people.

It was a religious element that led to the development of the drama. Most of the Bible is written in Latin, so the general public could not understand its meaning. For this reason, the priests found some new teaching methods and tried to explain the teachings of the Bible to the general public. To this end, they have developed a new way in which the gospel story is explained through living pictures. The cast recreated the story in a stupid show

Background and Origin of English Drama

Emergence

The Romans introduced the drama to England in the Middle Ages. But England did not exist until hundreds of years after the Romans left.

The performance is based on the folk tales of St. George, Robin Hood and the Dragon. The artist went from town to town to play these folk tales. In return for their service, they received money and hospitality. The mysteries and moral plays at the medieval religious festival were Christian-themed.

English Renaissance

The English Renaissance, an English cultural and artistic movement that lasted from the 16th to the early 17th century, paved the way for the dominance of British drama. Queen Elizabeth I ruled at a time when great poetry and drama were born.

Notable playwrights of the time are William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Ben Johnson, and John Webster. Playwrights wrote plays on subjects such as history, comedy, and tragedy. While most playwrights specialize in only one subject, Shakespeare became an artist who created plays based on all three subjects.

Interregnum (1649-1660)

During the armistice, the Puritans closed British theaters for their religious and ideological reasons. However, in London the theaters reopened shortly after the Restoration in 1660. With the support of Prince Charles II, the theater continued to thrive.

Wide and socially mixed audiences were attracted by topical writing and by the introduction of the first professional actresses (in Shakespeare's time, all female roles had been played by boys). Sexual frankness was the highlight of the comedy during the Restoration period. The aristocratic spirit of Prince Charles II and his court promoted such plays that began in 1660 and continued until 1685.

18th Century

The British Restoration comedy, which began in the late 17th century, declined with the advent of the 18th century. Family tragedy and sentimental comedy have become a new taste of this era.

Burlesque and musical entertainment at the fair booth, which preceded the British music hall, flourished during this period, reducing the popularity of legal British theater. By the early 19th century, few English dramas were being written, except for closet drama, plays intended to be presented privately rather than on stage.

Victorian Era (1837-1901)

During the Victorian era, plays written by Shakespeare competed with musical burlesques and comic operas. Reed Entertainment, a German company, tried to start a musical theater in England in 1855. In 1890, the first series of musical comedies of the Edwardian era were released in this country. With the development of public transportation, the audience moved, and now it is possible to go to the theater until late at night. The number of prospects for English theaters has increased significantly. As a result, performances in theaters began to become longer.

As time passed, more and more people began to visit the theater. This made drama a lucrative business. The increase in the audience led to an increase in the production value of the drama. This art form has recorded consistent performance as it grows in popularity. Towards the end of the Victorian era, the fame of the leading poets and playwrights of the time, W. S. Gilbert and Oscar Wilde, rose. The plays Wilde wrote closely resemble those of Edwardian playwrights such as George Bernard Shaw (Ireland) and Henrik Ibsen (Norway).

The Present Time

Many of the 20th century musical dramas were written by Andrew Lloyd Webber, who dominated the stage at the time. His work has been immensely popular. As a result, the drama went on Broadway in New York and around the world.

Some of them have also been made into feature films. Postmodernism had a major impact on the existence of British drama at the end of the 20th century. However, there are still many theaters around Shaftesbury Avenue in West London. Based in Stratford upon Avon (Shakespeare's hometown), the Royal Shakespeare Company now produces most plays written by the legendary playwright.

William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare is the father of English Drama. He wrote 18 comedies, 10 Tragedies and 10 Histories. Shakespeare's era began in the 16th century in community theaters. He wrote for

modern theater and manipulated the Elizabethan stage with great resourcefulness and ingenuity. William Shakespeare was an English playwright, poet and actor, considered by many to be the greatest writer in the English language and the greatest playwright in the world. He is often referred to as Britain's national poet and "The Bard of Avon".

Types of Drama

Drama is a major literary Genre, frequently subdivided into the categories of Tragedy, Comedy, and Tragicomedy. Further subdivisions include Melodrama and Farce.

Tragedy is broadly applied to literary, and especially to dramatic, representations of serious actions which eventuate in a disastrous conclusion for the protagonist (the main character). Tragedy is fundamentally a serious play in which the tragic hero faces problems and obstacles but cannot hope to overcome them and ultimately he is defeated.

Comedy is a type of drama that celebrates or satirizes the follies of characters. In the most common literary application, a comedy is a fictional work in which the materials are selected and managed primarily in order to interest and amuse us: the characters and their discomfitures engage our pleasurable attention rather than our profound concern, we are made to feel confident that no great disaster will occur, and usually the action turns out happily for the chief characters.

Tragicomedy is a play that generally incorporates both tragic and comic elements. It represents a serious action which threatens a tragic disaster to the protagonist, yet, by an abrupt reversal of circumstance, turns out happily. The name "tragicomedy" is sometimes also applied more loosely to plays with double plots, one serious and the other comic.

Melodrama is a type of drama that highlights suspense and romantic sentiment, with characters who are usually either clearly good or bad. As its name implies, the form frequently uses a musical background to underscore or heighten the emotional tone of a scene.

Farce is a type of comedy designed to provoke the audience to simple, hearty laughter in the parlance of the theatre. To do so it commonly employs highly exaggerated or caricatured types of characters, puts them into improbable and ludicrous situations, and often makes free use of sexual mix-ups, broad verbal humor, and physical bustle and horseplay.

The Elements of Drama

Aristotle outlined the most basic elements that comprise any narrative, and any study of literature must begin with his list. The most important elements are:

Plot

Plot is the plan, design, scheme or pattern of events and further, the organization of incident and character in such a way as to induce curiosity and suspense in the spectator or reader. An ideal plot encompasses the following sequential levels: exposition-complication-resolution.

A typical plot consists of a tripartite (three-part) action structure: rising action, climax, and falling action. The **rising action** of a work consists of the main character's attempts to overcome whatever obstacles stand in his or her way. This struggle usually results in the greatest dramatic moment of the story, the **climax**. After this climax follows the story's **falling action**, also called the denouement. The engine that drives this entire plot structure is **conflict**. Conflict may be internal (a man against himself) or external (a man against another man, society, nature, etc.) Stories may contain several different conflicts of internal or external natures. The main purpose of such conflict is to create a sense of **suspense** in the reader to foster continued interest in the narrative. This structure may also be referred to as the obstacle-anxiety-relief cycle.

In many cases, flashback and foreshadowing introduce information concerning the past or future into the narrative. **Flashback** is a change in the temporal sequence of the story so that it moves back to show events that took place earlier than those already shown. Occasionally the flashback will involve a return to a scene that the audience has already witnessed. This type of flashback may be repeated a number of times, each time acquiring added significance as the plot progresses. **Foreshadowing**, on the other hand, is information presented in an earlier part of the story to make us accept as probable an event that takes place later on in the narrative.

Setting

Setting is the where (place) and when (time), and by extension, the social and political context of the action. The role that setting plays in a story and its overall significance in forming an understanding of the work varies greatly. Some stories are particular to a time and place, while others could be set against almost any backdrop.

Character

Character is a person or individual in the drama that may have defined personal qualities and/or histories. **Flat characters** (or two dimensional characters) demonstrate a lack of depth or change in the course of a drama event. **Rounded characters** (or three dimensional characters) feature more elaborate and complex traits and histories and are changed by dramatic action in the drama event.

Theme

A theme is what the story is truly about at its core. It is often the lesson or moral we are meant to take away from this particular story. Plot and narrative are vehicles that drive the reader or viewer to the theme in a story.