**DRAMA AND THEATRE[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**DRAMA** as literary genre

From Greek, *draein* = ‘to do’, to ‘act’

**TEXTUAL dimensions** of drama (dialogue, monologue, aside)

* Elements of **PLOT** (used in analysis of fiction as well): **exposition, complication, climax, denouement**  
  OR: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution/denouement

And many other variants.   
The moments of crisis and catastrophe are placed differently in different models

**LINEAR NARRATIVE/PLOT STRUCTURE** diagram (based on Aristotle’s scheme of “complication” and “unravelling” and Gustave Freytag’s “pyramid”, both based on the structure of drama):

**exposition** (presentation of original situation) – **complication/**conflict (suspense, leads to>>) – **climax** (turning point)– **resolution/**denouement/revelation

**RISING ACTION FALLING ACTION**

**climax**

**complication/conflict(s)**

**exposition denouement/resolution/revelation**

See also <https://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/student-interactives/plot-diagram>

* Three **UNITIES** of **time, place, action** (not devised by Aristotle, but adaptations of his *Poetics* in C16th and C17th (NB: Shakespeare’s dramas rarely conform to the rules)

- time-span of the cation the same as that in the play, max. 1 day

- action should be linear

- place should be constant

**Analysing a dramatic text** we should also take note of the following:

* What **GENRE**? – comedy/tragedy/tragicomedy/history play/conversational com./ closet drama (or **subgenre/** **inter-generic** features)
* Is it **EPIC** DRAMA **or ABSOLUTE** **DRAMA**?   
   - epic drama contains features of **fictional mediation** (narrator, chorus, epilogue and prologue)  
  - if action takes place with no fictional meditation, then it’s absolute drama.
* **CHARACTERS** and their   
  - **CONSTELLATIONS** (relationships between them) as well as   
  - **CONFIGURATIONS** (who is on stage at the same time)
* Moments of **DRAMATIC IRONY** – used to create **suspense**, **comic** effects, encourage **sympathy** for the character etc.
* **SETTING** – is “Aristotle’s” ideal of **unity** (of time, space and action) observed? What are the **changes in setting**, how do they **develop the plot?**
* **TIME** – how does the **timeline develop throughout** the play? Is it **linear**? Does it stretch, contract, pause – especially between acts and scenes?
* Significant **OBJECTS** – i.e. stage props – but also important motifs, topics, verbal materialand their repetition. Do they acquire symbolic value in the plot?

**Analysing the action** itself, we can employ **different kinds of critical lens** and approaches, or **combine** their criteria:

* **NEW-HISTORICIST** reading – applying **historical context**, reading it in view of historical facts such as political situation, period science and medicine
* **FEMINIST** reading – consider the **role of gender** for the play, its **plot**, **depiction of emotions** etc.
* **PSYCHOANALYTIC** READING – **explaining the motives** of characters as based on their family constellations
* **METATHEATRICALITY** – does the play comprise **verbal or non-verbal commentary** on the dramatic action or on the literariness of drama itself?

**ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF DRAMA IN ENGLISH**

* **Origins** of drama in cultic-ritual practice – ancient tragedies and comedies performed during fertility and harvesting festivals. In the Antiquity, drama was one of the major genres.
* During the MIDDLE AGES its importance waned.   
  - Early C11th – simple religious allegorical plays, mystery or miracle plays

- these, together with classical Roman drama (Plautus and Seneca, C2nd and C1st BC) influenced RENAISSANCE DRAMA.

* The first peak of drama in English – **ENGLISH RENAISSANCE THEATRE** – 1560s – 1640s (Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline theatre); blank verse
* The **PURITANS**, under the rule of O. **Cromwell** and his **Commonwealth** (1649–60), shut down English theatres on moral grounds and drama lost its status as a major genre.   
  - NB: In North **America** – due to the influence of **Puritanism** – drama was only established as a serious genre at the **beginning of C20th**.
* After **1660** a new boom – **RESTORATION DRAMA** (new genres, e.g. **comedy of manners** or **Restoration comedy**).
* C17th – HEROIC DRAMA (J. Dryden) – epic themes
* early C19th – CLOSET DRAMA (verse dramas, Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*) – read in private
* **REALISM AND NATURALISM** – late C19th, early C20th – drama regains importance (G. B. Shaw and O. Wilde)
* **EXPRESSIONIST THEATRE** & **THEATRE OF THE ABSURD**   
  - rejection of the illusion that reality can be represented on stage  
  - emphasis on abstract and stylized modes of representation.   
  - **parody of theatrical conventions**  
  - (S. Beckett; Tom Stoppard; Eug. Ionesco; Bertold Brecht; Tom Stoppard, V. Havel)

1. Based on Martin Middeke et. al, *English and American Practice: Theory and Practice* (Stuttgart: Springer, 2012); Mario Klarer, *Introduction to Literary Studies* (London: Routledge, 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)