

What is drama?

Drama is the specific mode of fiction represented in performance: a story enacted on stage for a live audience. The term comes from a Greek word (dran) meaning "action" which is derived from "to do".

A drama is the imitation of a complete action, adapted to the sympathetic attention of man, developed in a succession of continuously interesting and continuously related incidents, acted and expressed by means of speech and the symbols, actualities, and conditions of life.

The drama in general is a reflex of life. The truth of this is to be found in the literature of any people, for in this form in proportion to its development at any given period, more than in any other form, are embodied sentiment and manners. The playwright may treat his theme as he may, with idealism or realism, and there yet remains in his work something of his time.

The drama deals with men. It requires spectators, and is addressed to the eye, the ear, and the moral nature. It is a form of literature and of entertainment into which all human emotions and experience may be translated under certain conditions.

Drama is a display of emotions, a representation of relationships and the portrayal of the different phases of human life. It sketches different personalities and represents a wide variety of emotions through the different characters it portrays.

Aristotle, a philosopher who wrote on a variety of subjects writes that there are six elements of drama, namely the plot, theme, character, dialog, music and the visual element.

Drama production & Reception

The enactment of drama in theatre, performed by actors on a stage before an audience, presupposes collaborative modes of production and a collective form of reception. The structure of dramatic texts, unlike other forms of literature, is directly influenced by this collaborative production and collective reception.

The dramatic mode

Considered as a genre of poetry in general, the dramatic mode has been contrasted with the epic and the lyrical modes ever since **Aristotle's *Poetics*** (c. 335 BC)—the earliest work of dramatic theory.

Drama was considered a genre of poetry by the ancient Greeks. Aristotle offered drama as a general term to describe forms of poetry that were acted. The Roman writer **Horace** stated that the purpose of drama was either to delight (comedy) or instruct (tragedy).

The early modern tragedy *Hamlet* (1601) by **Shakespeare** and the classical Athenian tragedy **Oedipus the King** (c. 429 BC) by **Sophocles** are among the supreme masterpieces of the art of drama.

The Types of DRAMA

Classification of Dramatic Plays

In a strict sense, plays are classified as being either tragedies or comedies. The broad difference between the two is in the ending. Comedies end happily. Tragedies end on an unhappy note.

The nature of tragedy

The tragedy acts as a purge. It arouses our pity for the stricken one and our terror that we ourselves may be struck down. As the play closes we are washed clean of these emotions and we feel better for the experience.

Types of tragedies

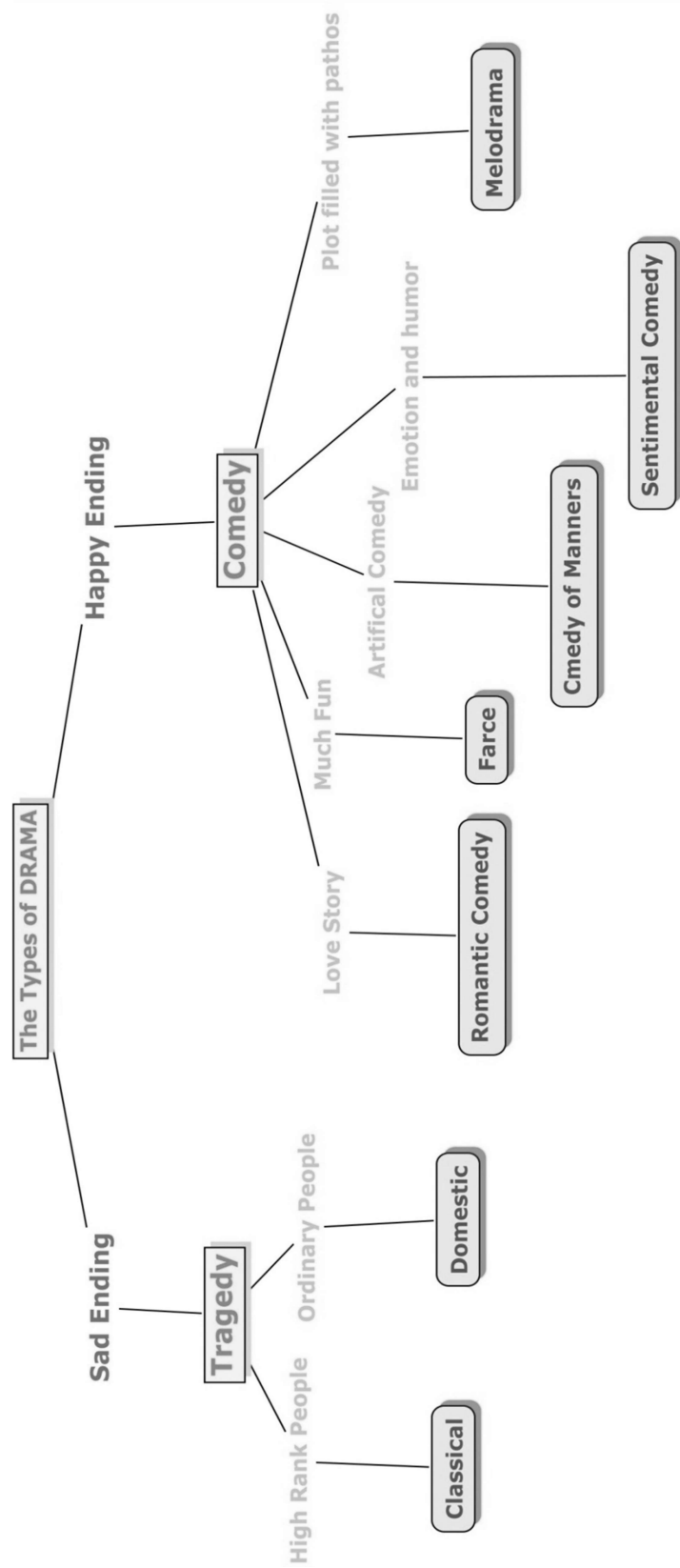
1. A **classical tragedy** tells of a high and noble person who falls because of a "tragic flaw," a weakness in his own character.
2. A **domestic tragedy** concerns the lives of ordinary people brought low by circumstances beyond their control. Domestic tragedy may be realistic seemingly true to life or naturalistic realistic and on the seamy side of life.

Types of comedies

1. A **romantic comedy** is a **love story**. The main characters are lovers; the secondary characters are comic. In the end the lovers are always united.
2. **Farce** is comedy at its broadest. **Much fun** and horseplay enliven the action.
3. The **comedy of manners**, or **artificial comedy**, is subtle, witty, and often mocking.
4. **Sentimental comedy** mixes sentimental **emotion with its humor**.
5. **Melodrama** has a **plot filled with pathos** and menacing threats by a villain, but it does include comic relief and has a happy ending. It depends upon physical action rather than upon character probing.

Tragic or comic

Tragic or comic, the action of the play comes from conflict of characters how the stage people react to each other. These reactions make the play.



Plot and Dramatic structure

Definitions:

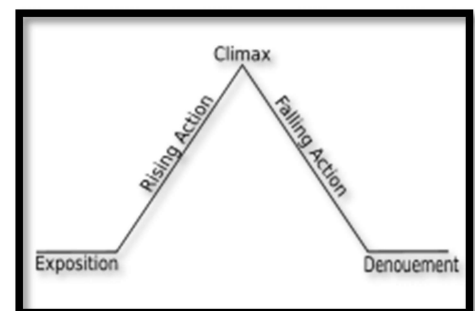
- **Plot** is a literary term for the events a story comprises, particularly as they relate to one another in a pattern, a sequence, through cause and effect, or by coincidence. It is the artistic arrangement of a sequence of events.
- **Dramatic structure** is the structure of a dramatic work such as a play or film.

Historical development of the concept:

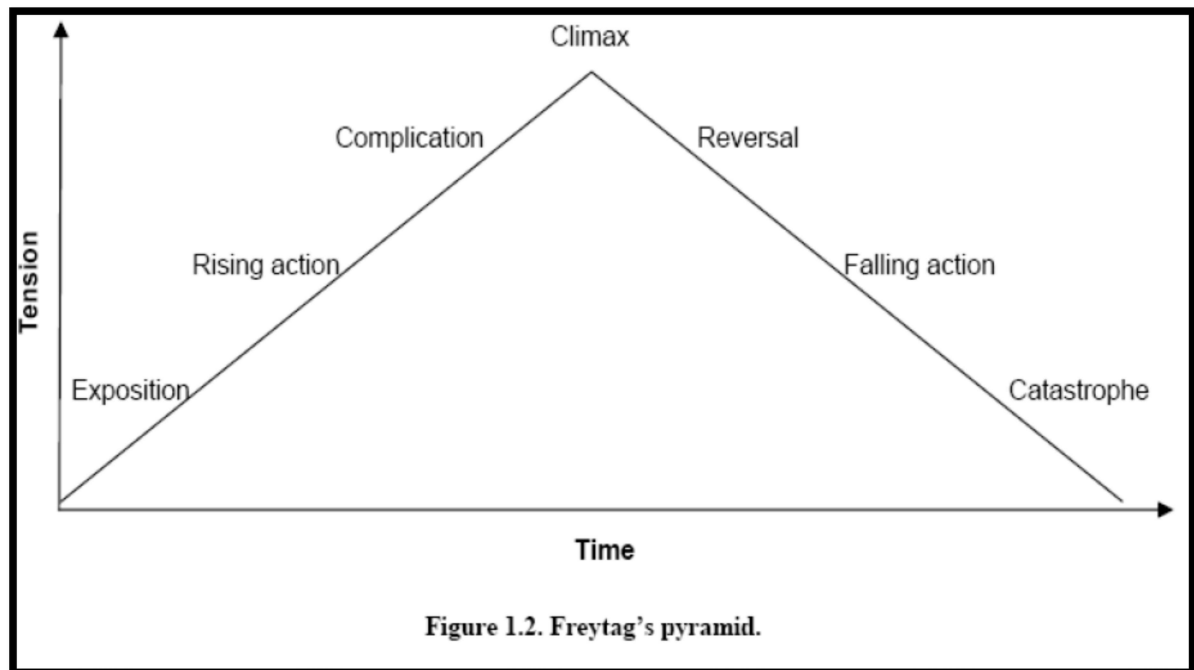
- In his *Poetics*, Aristotle considered plot ("mythos") the most important element of drama—more important than character, for example. He put forth the idea that ("A whole is what has a beginning and middle and end. This three-part view of a plot structure (with a beginning, middle, and end – technically, the protasis, epitasis, and catastrophe) must causally relate to one another as being either necessary, or probable.
- The Roman drama critic Horace advocated a 5-act structure: ("A play should not be shorter or longer than five acts").
- In 1863, the German playwright and novelist Gustav Freytag (1816 –1895) wrote *Die Technik des Dramas*, a definitive study of the 5-act dramatic structure, in which he laid out what has come to be known as Freytag's pyramid. Freytag saw common patterns in the plots of stories and novels and developed a diagram to analyze them. He diagrammed a story's plot using a pyramid.

Freytag's Pyramid

A diagram of dramatic structure that is a visual representation of the structure of a story's events. It shows complication and emotional tension rising like one side of a pyramid toward its apex, which represents the climax of action. Once the climax is over, the descending side of the pyramid depicts the decrease in tension and complication as the drama reaches its conclusion and denouement. Freytag designed the chart for discussing tragedy, but it can be applied to many kinds of fiction. It is also called Freytag's Triangle, Freytag's Arc.



The dramatic structure in Freytag's Pyramid



1. **Exposition**: setting the scene. The writer introduces the characters and setting, providing description and background.
Inciting Incident: something happens to begin the action. A single event usually signals the beginning of the main conflict. The inciting incident is sometimes called 'the complication'.
2. **Rising Action**: the story builds and gets more exciting.
3. **Climax**: the moment of greatest tension in a story. This is often the most exciting event. It is the event that the rising action builds up to and that the falling action follows.
4. **Falling Action**: events happen as a result of the climax and we know that the story will soon end.
Resolution: the character solves the main problem/conflict or someone solves it for him or her.
5. **Dénouement**: (a French term, pronounced: day-noo-moh) the ending. At this point, any remaining secrets, questions or mysteries which remain after the resolution are solved by the characters or explained by the author. Sometimes the author leaves us to think about the THEME or future possibilities for the characters.

Criticism of Freytag's Pyramid

Freytag's analysis was intended to apply not to modern drama, but rather to ancient Greek and Shakespearean drama.

A specific exposition stage is criticized by Lajos Egri in *The Art of Dramatic Writing*. He states, “exposition itself is part of the whole play, and not simply a fixture to be used at the beginning and then discarded.” According to Egri, the actions of a character reveal who they are, and exposition should come about naturally. The beginning of the play should therefore begin with the initial conflict.

Contemporary dramas increasingly use the fall to increase the relative height of the climax and dramatic impact (melodrama). The protagonist reaches up but falls and succumbs to their doubts, fears, and limitations. Arguably, the negative climax occurs when they have an epiphany and encounter their greatest fear or lose something important. This loss gives them the courage to take on another obstacle. This confrontation becomes the classic climax.

Character and characterization

Character: a character is one of the persons who appears in the play, one of the dramatis personae (literally, the persons of the play). Characterization is the process of conveying information about characters.

Importance of characterization

"Characters in a play can only exist with reference to the Action, and character can be brought out in no other way than by throwing people into given relations." *The Analysis of Play Construction and Dramatic Principle*, by: W. T. PRICE. P.335

"In the serious drama, it is impossible to consider plot wholly apart from character or character apart from plot. At least, this ought to be so, for the plot being grounded in causality, not accident, its action is the inevitable outgrowth of the characters concerned in it." *The Drama: its Laws and Technique*, by: Elisabeth Woodridge. P. 116.

The great realists of dramaturgy have relied heavily on implicit characterization which occupies the main body of their character driven plays. Examples of these playwrights are Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg and Anton Chekhov. Such psychological epics indirectly characterize the protagonists so that the audience is drawn into their inner turmoil as they are slowly revealed over the three hours of time spent with the characters.

Character development is very important in character-driven literature, where stories focus not on events, but on individual personalities. A well-developed character is one that has been thoroughly characterized, with many traits shown in the narrative. A well-developed character acts according to past instances provided by its visible traits unless more information about the character is provided. The better the audience knows the character, the better the character development. Characterization makes characters well-rounded and complex. In contrast, an underdeveloped character is considered flat or stereotypical.

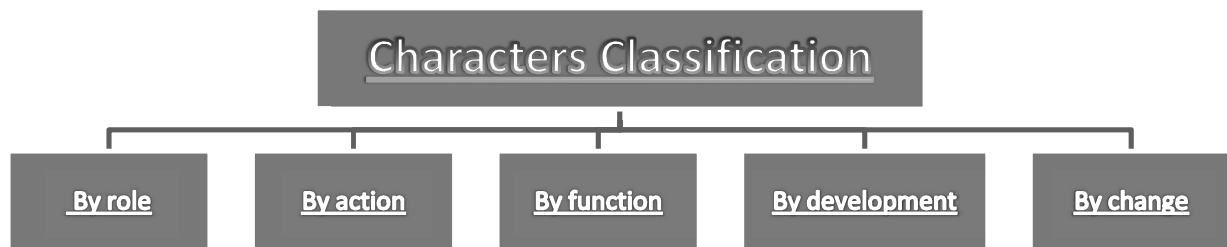
How characters are characterized

Characters may be presented by means of description, through their actions, speech, or thoughts. There are two ways an author can convey information about a character:

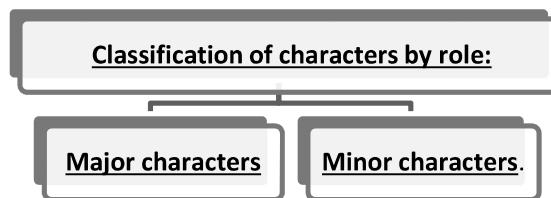
Direct or explicit characterization: The author literally tells the audience what a character is like. This may be done via the narrator, another character or by the character him- or herself.

Indirect or implicit characterization: The audience must deduce for themselves what the character is like through the character's thoughts, actions, speech (choice of words, way of talking), looks and interaction with other characters, including other characters' reactions to that particular person.

Characters Classification

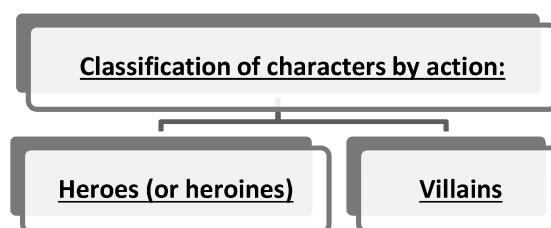


Classification of characters by role:



Most plays contain major characters and minor characters. The delineation and development of major characters is essential to the play; the conflict between Hamlet and Claudius depends upon the character of each. A minor character like Marcellus serves a specific function, to inform Hamlet of the appearance of his father's ghost. Once, that is done, he can depart in peace, for we need not know what sort of person he is or what happens to him. The distinction between major and minor characters is one of degree, as the character of Horatio might illustrate.

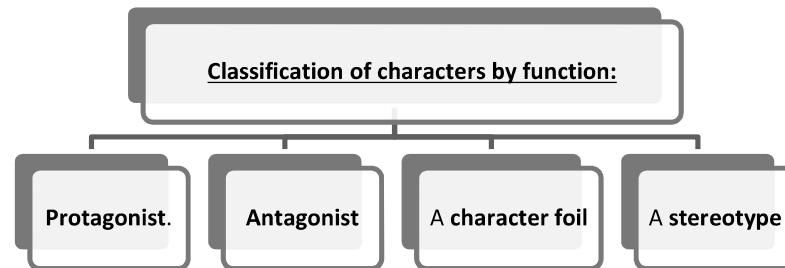
Classification of characters by action:



The distinction between heroes (or heroines) and villains, between good guys and bad guys, between virtue and vice is useful in dealing with certain types of plays, but in many modern plays

(and some not so modern) it is difficult to make. Is Gregers Werle in *The Wild Duck*, for example, a hero or a villain?

Classification of characters by function:



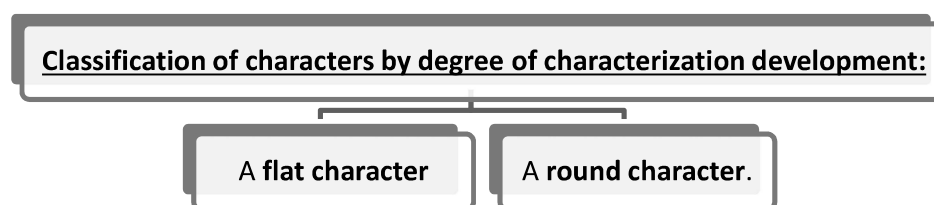
The protagonist is the central character (person, animal, or personified object) in the plot's conflict.

The antagonist is the force in conflict with the protagonist. It may be society, nature, or fate, as well as another person. It can also be the protagonist's own self, if he or she has an internal conflict.

A character foil is a character whose traits are in direct contrast to those of the principal character. The foil therefore highlights the traits of the protagonist. The foil is usually a minor character, although if there are two protagonists, they may be foils of each other.

A stereotype is a character who possesses expected traits of a group rather than being an individual. Using stereotypes is usually considered an indication of poor quality, especially in cases such as members of minority groups, people with disabilities, or women. However, stereotypes can be useful in furthering the story quickly and are acceptable in minor roles if they do not provide hurtful portraits of the groups in question.

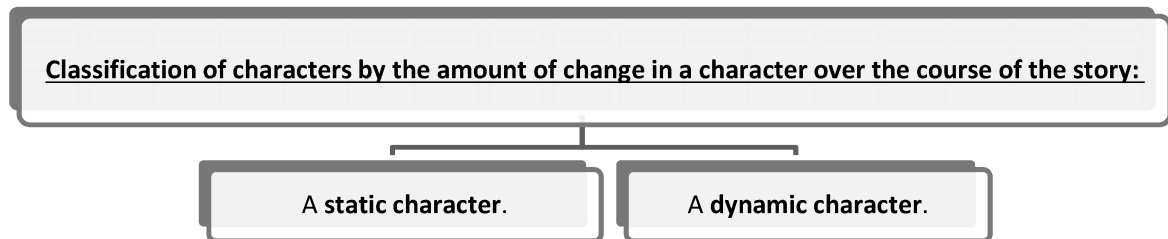
Classification of characters by degree of characterization development:



A flat character is not fully developed; we know only one side of the character.

A round character is fully-developed, with many traits--bad and good--shown in the story. We feel that we know the character so well that he or she has become a real person.

Classification of characters by the amount of change in a character over the course of the story:



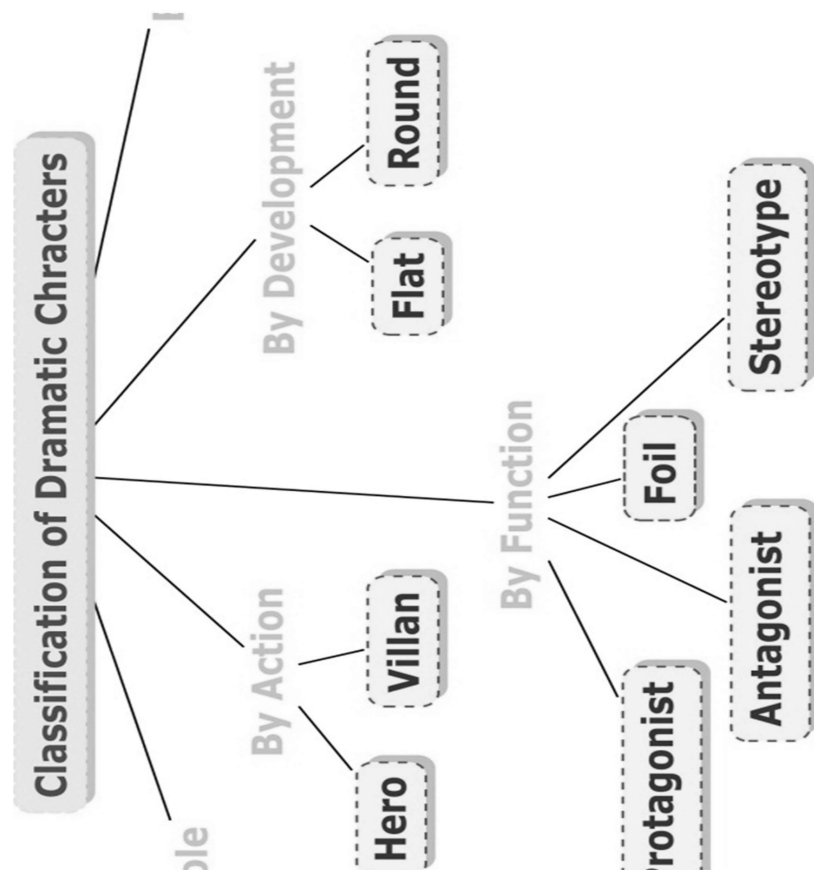
A static character is one who does not experience a basic character change during the course of the story.

A dynamic character is one who experiences a basic change in character through the events of the story. This change is internal and may be sudden, but the events of the plot should make it seem inevitable.

Change and development in a character

The following table summarizes how the development and change in characters interact:

Character	Dynamic	Static
Round	Considered the best type of character development. Usually the protagonist.	Development is considered well-done.
Flat	Characters cannot be dynamic and flat, because in a flat character we do not know enough about them for them to recognize a change. If a flat character seems to change, it is usually due to poor writing.	In very simple books, or in fairy tales, the protagonist may be flat and static. Also appropriate for minor characters in other books.



Theme

The theme of a drama refers to the central idea of the play. It can either be clearly stated through dialog or action or can be inferred after watching the entire performance.

Themes develop from a playwright's personal values (moral, social, or political) expressed through a play's plot and characters. In a sense, the theme is your moral or ethical position about the story you're telling.

The plot has been called the body of a play and the theme has been called its soul. Most plays have a conflict of some kind between individuals, between man and society, man and some superior force or man and himself. The events that this conflict provokes make up the plot.

One of the first items of interest is the playwright's treatment of the plot and what theme he would draw from it. The same plots have been and will be used many times; it is the treatment

that supplies each effort with originality or artistic worth. Shakespeare is said to have borrowed all but one of his stories, but he presented them so much better than any of the previous authors that he is not seriously criticized for the borrowing.

The treatment of theme is equally varied. The same theme or story may be given a very serious or a very light touch. It may be a severe indictment or a tongue-in-cheek attack. It could point up a great lesson or show the same situation as a handicap to progress. The personality, background and social or artistic temperament of the playwright are responsible for the treatment that he gives to his story or theme. We must, therefore, both understand and evaluate these factors.

To endure, a play should have a theme. It is sometimes suggested in the title as in *Loyalties*, *Justice*, or *Strife*, *You can't Take It With You*, or *The Physician in Spite of Himself*. At other times it is found in the play itself, as in *Craig's Wife* when the aunt says to Mrs. Craig, "People who live to themselves are often left to themselves." Sometimes theme is less obvious, necessitating closer study.

If a play has a theme, we should be able to state it in general terms and in a single sentence, even at the risk of oversimplification. The theme of *Hamlet* is usually stated as the failure of a youth of poetic temperament to cope with circumstances that demand action. The theme of *Macbeth* is that too much ambition leads to destruction; a *Streetcar Named Desire*, that he who strives hardest to find happiness oftentimes finds the least; and of *Green pastures*, that even God must change with the universe.

Of course the theme, no matter how fully stated, is not the equivalent of the play. The play is a complex experience, and one must remain open to its manifold suggestions.

As indicated above, the statement of the play in specific terms is the plot presented. Plot and theme should go hand in hand. If the theme is one of nobility, or dignity, the plot must concern events and characters that measure up to that theme. As we analyze many plays, we find that some possess an excellent theme, but are supported by an inconsequential plot. One famous play of this nature, *Abie's Irish Rose*, held the stage for many years. The theme said: Difference of religion need not hinder a happy marriage. The plot was so thin and both characters and situation so stereotyped, that justice was not done to the theme. This weakness was most obvious in the play's revival after twenty years.

Examples of the frequent fault of superior plot and little or no theme come to us in much of the work of our current playwrights. Known for their cleverness in phrasing and timing, and their original extremely witty conceptions, these plays are often very successful. More often than not, however, they are utterly lacking in a theme or truth that will withstand more than momentary analysis. They are delightful but ephemeral. An audience believes them only while watching in the theatre. Consequently, the author, although now among our most popular, will not endure as artists, nor are their plays likely to be revived a hundred years hence. They but emphasize more strongly the axiom that a good plot or conflict is needed for transitory success, but a great theme is more likely to assure a play a long life.

Dialogue

The story of any play is taken forward by means of the dialog. The story is narrated to the audiences through the dialog written by the playwright. The success of a drama depends hugely on the contents of the dialog and the quality of dialog delivery by the actors of the play.

Dialogue provides the substance of a play. Each word uttered by the character furthers the business of the play, contributes to its effect as a whole. Therefore, a sense of DECORUM must be established by the characters, ie., what is said is appropriate to the role and situation of a character. Also the exposition of the play often falls on the dialogue of the characters. Remember exposition establishes the relationships, tensions or conflicts from which later plot developments derive.

Music

Music: This element of drama comprises the melody in the use of sounds and rhythm in dialogs as well as melodious compositions, which form a part of many plays. The background score, the songs and the sound effects that are used in a play make up the musical element of drama. Music composers and lyricists sit together to create music that can go well with the theme of the play. If the scenes of a play are accompanied by well-suited pieces of music, they become more effective on the audiences. Hence, music forms a very important element of drama.

Visual Element

Visual Element: While the dialog and music constitute the audible aspect of drama, the visual element deals with the scenes, costumes and special effects used in it. The visual element of drama, also known as the spectacle, renders a visual appeal to it. The costumes worn by the artists must suit the characters they are playing. Besides, it is important for the scenes to be dramatic enough to hold the audiences to their seats. The special effects used in a play add to the visual appeal. Thus, the spectacle forms an essential component of drama.

Origin and Development of drama

Classical Athenian drama

Western drama originates in classical Greece. The origins of Western drama can be traced to the celebratory music of 6th-century BC Attica, the Greek region centered on Athens. Although accounts of this period are inadequate, it appears that the poet Thespis developed a new musical form in which he impersonated a single character and engaged a chorus of singer-dancers in dialogue. As the first composer and soloist in this new form, which came to be known as tragedy, Thespis can be considered both the first dramatist and the first actor.

Of the hundreds of works produced by Greek tragic playwrights, only 32 plays by the three major innovators in this new art form survive. Aeschylus created the possibility of developing conflict between characters by introducing a second actor into the format. His seven surviving plays, three of which constitute the only extant trilogy are richly ambiguous inquiries into the paradoxical relationship between humans and the cosmos, in which people are made answerable for their acts, yet recognize that these acts are determined by the gods.

Roman drama

Following the expansion of the Roman Republic (509–27 BC) into several Greek territories between 270–240 BC, Rome encountered Greek drama. Theatre spread across Europe, around the Mediterranean and reached England; Roman theatre was more varied, extensive and sophisticated than that of any culture before it.

The year 240 BC marks the beginning of regular Roman drama. The first important works of Roman literature were the tragedies and comedies that Andronicus wrote from 240 BC. The Roman comedies that have survived are all comedies based on Greek subjects and come from two Roman dramatists: Plautus and Terence.

In re-working the Greek originals, the Roman comic dramatists abolished the role of the chorus in dividing the drama into episodes and introduced music (musical accompaniment to its dialogue).

No early Roman tragedy survives, though it was highly regarded in its day. From the time of the empire, the work of Seneca is known to historians.

Medieval drama

Medieval drama, when it emerged hundreds of years later, was a new creation rather than a rebirth, the drama of earlier times having had almost no influence on it. The reason for this creation came from a quarter that had traditionally opposed any form of theater: the Christian church. In the Easter service, and later in the Christmas service, bits of chanted dialogue, called tropes, were interpolated into the liturgy. Priests, impersonating biblical figures, acted out minuscule scenes from the holiday stories. Eventually, these playlets grew more elaborate and abandoned the inside of the church for the church steps and the adjacent marketplace. Secular elements crept in as the artisan guilds took responsibility for these performances; although the glorification of God and the redemption of humanity remained prime concerns, the celebration of local industry was not neglected.

In the Middle Ages, drama in the vernacular languages of Europe may have emerged from religious enactments of the liturgy. Mystery plays were presented on the porch of the cathedrals or by strolling players on feast days. Miracle and mystery plays, along with moralities and interludes, later evolved into more elaborate forms of drama, such as was seen on the Elizabethan stages.

Elizabethan and Jacobean

One of the great flowerings of drama in England occurred in the 16th and 17th centuries. Many of these plays were written in verse, particularly iambic pentameter. In addition to Shakespeare, such authors as Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Middleton, and Ben Jonson were prominent playwrights during this period.

As in the medieval period, historical plays celebrated the lives of past kings, enhancing the image of the Tudor monarchy. Authors of this period drew some of their storylines from Greek mythology and Roman mythology or from the plays of eminent Roman playwrights such as Plautus and Terence.

Modern and postmodern

The pivotal and innovative contributions of the 19th-century Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen and the 20th-century German theatre practitioner Bertolt Brecht dominate modern drama; each inspired a tradition of imitators, which include many of the greatest playwrights of the modern era.