

E-Content on Drama for B.A. third Semester Students

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Chapter 1: Introduction to Drama

Meaning of Drama-

Do you know what a drama is? Drama is a story which is performed on the stage with the help of actors and actress. It is a form of literature written for performance before an audience. It represents human life through action, dialogue, gesture, movement, conflict, and theatrical presentation.

Drama, as a form of art, has always attracted the critics and scholars since the time of its origin. Although drama has seen many ups and downs, yet it has always been a popular form of art and so it has always been studied critically by the critics in every age and period. The popularity of drama is evident from the works of critics done on it.

In every period we find that drama is always a prominent form of art. In the 16th and 17th century drama saw its peak of popularity, especially during the Elizabethan period when Shakespeare wrote plays. During the Elizabethan period a number of dramatists wrote a lot of plays which became very popular during that time. During that time a number of well managed and well equipped theatres were established which attracted the playwrights, producers as well as audience.

The word drama has been taken from a Greek word, “Drao” which means to do or to act. In ancient Greece there were only two types of plays----- comedy and tragedy which were based on religious themes. Until Shakespeare’s time, there was no word like drama rather it was the word, play which was popularly used for drama and the writers of the drama were not called the dramatist but the play-maker and the place where the drama was performed live was known as a play house and not a theatre. It is only in the modern period that the word drama became popular and the term drama is used for such a play which is neither comedy nor tragedy.

The distinctive feature of drama is that it does not merely describe events; it presents them through characters acting on a stage. A dramatic work therefore has two dimensions:

- **Literary dimension:** the written script, plot, characters, dialogue, themes, and stage directions.

- **Performing dimension:** acting, direction, scenery, lighting, music, costume, movement, and audience participation.

Drama may be written in prose, verse, or a combination of both. It can be serious, comic, tragic, satirical, realistic, symbolic, or experimental.

Definition of Drama

A general definition of drama is:

Drama is the representation of human action through dialogue and performance.

Drama normally contains:

- Plot
- Character
- Dialogue.
- Setting.
- Theme.
- Stage directions.
- Performance elements.

Drama differs from ordinary narrative because the audience usually experiences the events directly rather than receiving them through a narrator.

Etymology of “Drama”

The word **drama** comes from the Greek word *drama*, meaning “action” or “deed.” It is derived from the Greek verb *dran*, meaning “to do,” “to act,” or “to perform.”

The etymology emphasises that drama is fundamentally an art of action. Characters do not merely discuss events; they perform actions that create the dramatic situation.

Drama as a Literary Art

Drama is a literary art because it uses language creatively and structurally. The playwright employs:

- Dialogue to reveal character and advance action.
- Monologue to express a character’s thoughts.
- Soliloquy to reveal private consciousness.
- Imagery and symbolism to deepen meaning.
- Dramatic irony to create tension.
- Verse, rhythm, metaphor, and rhetorical devices.
- Stage directions to guide performance.

The script can be studied like poetry or fiction because it contains artistic language, structure, characterisation, and thematic design.

Drama as a Performing Art

Drama becomes complete through performance. The written script is transformed into a living theatrical experience by:

- Actors.
- Director.
- Stage designers.
- Lighting designers.
- Costume and makeup artists.
- Musicians and sound designers.
- Technical staff.
- Audience.

The same play may produce different meanings when performed by different actors or directors. Thus, performance is not merely an illustration of the text; it is an interpretation of the text.

Drama and Other Literary Genres

Genre	Main Mode	Role of Narration	Role of Performance
Drama	Action and dialogue	Usually limited	Essential or highly significant
Fiction	Narrative and description	Central	Not necessary
Poetry	Rhythm, imagery, and lyrical expression	May be personal or impersonal	Optional
Essay	Argument and explanation	Central	Usually absent
Film	Visual and audiovisual action	Created through camera and editing	Essential

Drama is different from fiction because it usually avoids a lengthy narrator's explanation. Character and action must communicate meaning directly.

Drama is different from lyric poetry because it normally involves more than one speaking character and a developed conflict. Drama is also different from an essay because it presents ideas through action and situation rather than direct argument.

Aristotle's Definition

Aristotle defines tragedy as:

“An imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude.”

He argues that tragedy is enacted rather than narrated and that it arouses pity and fear, leading to catharsis. Aristotle gives primary importance to plot or action because drama represents what human beings do. His theory of tragedy remains one of the most influential foundations of dramatic criticism.¹

Dryden's Definition

John Dryden describes drama as:

“A just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours.”

This definition emphasises that drama imitates human behaviour, emotions, manners, weaknesses, and social relationships. Drama becomes convincing when its characters appear psychologically and socially recognisable.

A. C. Bradley's View

A. C. Bradley's criticism of Shakespearean tragedy focuses on the relationship between character, action, and suffering. In Shakespearean tragedy, the central figure is usually an important person whose character and circumstances contribute to a catastrophic fall.

Bradley's approach is significant because it examines:

- The tragic hero.
- The hero's internal conflict.
- The role of fate and circumstance.
- Moral and psychological suffering.
- The movement from prosperity to catastrophe.

Functions of Drama

Drama performs several functions:

- It entertains the audience.
- It represents human experience.
- It explores moral and social problems.
- It produces emotional effects.
- It encourages critical thought.
- It preserves cultural memory.
- It questions social conventions.
- It develops empathy by presenting different perspectives.

Chapter 2: Historical Development of Greek Drama/Origin of Drama

Greek drama developed from religious ceremonies dedicated to Dionysus, the god associated with wine, fertility, and celebration. These ceremonies gradually developed into organised dramatic performances.

Main Features

- Open-air theatres.

- Large audiences.
- Use of masks.
- Chorus.
- Male actors performing female roles.
- Religious and mythological subjects.
- Formal structure.
- Important role of music and dance.

Greek Tragedy

Greek tragedy generally dealt with:

- Conflict between human beings and divine power.
- Fate and free will.
- Guilt and responsibility.
- Family curses.
- Moral law.
- Political and religious duty.

Important Greek tragedians include:

- **Aeschylus:** Often associated with the development of the second actor and larger dramatic conflict.
- **Sophocles:** Known for structural balance and psychological tragedy, especially *Oedipus Rex*.
- **Euripides:** Known for realism, emotional complexity, and critical treatment of traditional myths.

Greek Comedy

Aristophanes is the best-known representative of Old Comedy. His plays use fantasy, political satire, exaggeration, parody, and direct criticism of public figures and institutions.

Roman Drama

Roman drama borrowed heavily from Greek drama but developed its own style. Roman theatre often emphasised entertainment, spectacle, rhetoric, violence, and comic situations.

Plautus

Plautus wrote lively comedies containing:

- Mistaken identity.
- Clever servants.
- Disguise.

- Intrigue.
- Domestic conflict.
- Verbal humour.

Terence

Terence developed more refined comedy. His plays are known for:

- Complex family relationships.
- Moral questions.
- Polished dialogue.
- Psychological observation.

Seneca

Seneca influenced later European revenge tragedy. His plays are associated with:

- Revenge.
- Ghosts.
- Violence.
- Rhetorical speeches.
- Moral corruption.
- Supernatural elements.

Medieval Drama

After the decline of classical theatre, drama became closely connected with Christian religious practice.

Liturgical Drama

Liturgical drama was performed within or near churches and presented biblical events. It emerged from religious ceremonies and dialogues in the Christian liturgy.

Mystery Plays

Mystery plays dramatised stories from the Bible, including:

- Creation.
- The Fall of Man.
- The Nativity.
- The Crucifixion.
- The Resurrection.
- The Last Judgement.

Miracle Plays- Miracle plays presented the lives, martyrdoms, and miracles of saints.

Morality Plays- Morality plays used personified characters to teach moral lessons. Characters might include:

- Everyman.
- Death.
- Knowledge.
- Good Deeds.
- Vice.
- Virtue.

The morality play often presents the struggle between good and evil within the human soul.

Renaissance Drama

The Renaissance revived interest in Greek and Roman literature. It also promoted humanism, individualism, scientific curiosity, and interest in worldly experience.

Main Features

- Revival of classical forms.
- Human-centred themes.
- Interest in history and politics.
- Expansion of individual characterisation.
- Development of blank verse.
- Mixture of tragic and comic elements.
- Greater use of subplots.
- Permanent public theatres.

English Renaissance drama reached a high point in the works of Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and other playwrights.

Elizabethan Drama

Elizabethan drama flourished during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Public theatres became important cultural institutions.

Main Features

- Powerful poetic language.
- Blank verse.
- Historical subjects.
- Revenge plots.
- Romantic subplots.

- Supernatural elements.
- Complex characters.
- Mixing of tragedy and comedy.
- Direct relationship with the audience.

Shakespeare's plays demonstrate the flexibility of Elizabethan drama. His tragedies, comedies, histories, and romances combine psychological depth with theatrical variety.

Jacobean Drama

Jacobean drama developed during the reign of James I. It is generally darker and more pessimistic than Elizabethan drama.

Main Features

- Revenge.
- Violence.
- Corruption.
- Sexual politics.
- Moral decay.
- Psychological instability.
- Obsession with death.
- Conflict between appearance and reality.

Important Jacobean dramatists include John Webster, Thomas Middleton, John Ford, and Cyril Tourneur.

Restoration Drama

English theatres reopened in 1660 after a long period of closure. Restoration drama reflected the manners and interests of the aristocratic society.

Comedy of Manners

Restoration comedy is especially associated with comedy of manners. It satirises:

- Marriage arrangements.
- Sexual relationships.
- Fashion.
- Social reputation.
- Hypocrisy.
- Wealth and inheritance.
- Aristocratic conversation.

Its language is witty, polished, artificial, and often sexually suggestive.

Modern Drama

Modern drama emerged in response to social change, industrialisation, urban life, scientific developments, world wars, and psychological theories.

Main Concerns

- Social injustice.
- Class conflict.
- Gender relations.
- Marriage and family.
- Industrialisation.
- War.
- Psychological conflict.
- Alienation.
- Loss of religious certainty.
- Individual freedom.

Modern playwrights include Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekhov, August Strindberg, George Bernard Shaw, Eugene O'Neill, and Arthur Miller.

Postmodern Theatre

Postmodern theatre challenges traditional assumptions about plot, character, identity, and meaning.

Features

- Fragmented structure.
- Non-linear narrative.
- Mixing of genres.
- Parody and pastiche.
- Unstable identity.
- Self-conscious theatricality.
- Audience participation.
- Intertextuality.
- Unresolved endings.
- Use of multimedia and technology.

Postmodern theatre often questions whether a single, stable interpretation of a play is possible.

Chapter 3: Elements of Drama

Plot-

Plot is the organised arrangement of events in a play. It establishes relationships of cause and effect and guides the movement of the action.

A strong plot usually contains:

- Beginning.
- Development.
- Conflict.
- Turning point.
- Consequences.
- Resolution.

Plot is not simply a list of events. It is the meaningful arrangement of events.

Aristotle's Concept of Plot

Aristotle calls plot the **soul of tragedy**. He considers action more important than character because tragedy represents what people do. Aristotle's plot should be:

- Complete.
- Unified.
- Significant.
- Probable or necessary.
- Organised around a central action.

A complete plot has a beginning, middle, and end. Every major incident should contribute to the development of the whole action. Aristotle also discusses **reversal**, **recognition**, and **suffering** as important elements of tragic structure. [iep.utm+1](#)

Reversal

Reversal, or *peripeteia*, is a sudden change in the direction of the action. A situation of prosperity may become one of disaster.

Recognition

Recognition, or *anagnorisis*, is a movement from ignorance to knowledge. A character discovers an important truth about identity, family, crime, or circumstance.

Suffering

Suffering, or *pathos*, is a destructive or painful action such as death, injury, torture, or emotional devastation.

Dramatic Structure

Exposition

Exposition introduces:

- Characters.
- Setting.
- Background.
- Social situation.
- Initial conflict.

It provides the information needed for the audience to understand the action.

Rising Action

Rising action consists of complications that increase tension. Conflicts deepen, decisions become more difficult, and the consequences of actions become more serious.

Climax

The climax is the moment of greatest intensity or the major turning point. It may involve:

- A revelation.
- A decision.
- A confrontation.
- A reversal of fortune.
- The defeat or success of a major plan.

Falling Action

Falling action shows the consequences of the climax. The conflict moves toward its final outcome.

Resolution

Resolution, or dénouement, brings the dramatic action to a conclusion. It may restore order, establish a new order, or leave the conflict deliberately unresolved.

Main Plot and Subplot

The **main plot** concerns the central action and principal conflict of the play.

A **subplot** is a secondary action. It may:

- Contrast with the main plot.
- Parallel the main plot.
- Provide comic relief.
- Develop a secondary character.
- Clarify the central theme.

- Increase dramatic irony.

A good subplot should support the meaning and structure of the main plot.

Character

Character refers to the persons who participate in a drama. Characterisation is the process through which the playwright presents their qualities, motives, conflicts, relationships, and development.

Character may be revealed through:

- Dialogue.
- Action.
- Appearance.
- Reactions of other characters.
- Soliloquy.
- Stage directions.
- Private thoughts.
- Changes in behaviour.

Flat and Round Characters

E. M. Forster distinguishes between flat and round characters.

Flat Character

A flat character is built around a single idea, quality, or dominant trait. Such a character is often predictable and may represent a social type.

Round Character

A round character possesses complexity, contradiction, psychological depth, and the capacity to surprise the audience.

The distinction is not a judgement of quality. A flat character may be perfectly suitable for a comic or minor role, while a protagonist often requires greater complexity.

Protagonist and Antagonist

The **protagonist** is the central character or force around which the main action develops.

The **antagonist** is the character, group, institution, idea, or circumstance that opposes the protagonist.

The antagonist need not always be morally evil. It may simply represent an opposing desire or worldview.

Dynamic and Static Characters

A **dynamic character** changes significantly during the drama. The change may be moral, psychological, intellectual, emotional, or social.

A **static character** remains substantially unchanged. Static characters may nevertheless be important because they provide contrast or stability.

Theme

Theme is the central idea, concern, or insight explored by a play.

Common dramatic themes include:

- Love.
- Death.
- Revenge.
- Ambition.
- Power.
- Justice.
- Freedom.
- Identity.
- Fate.
- War.
- Gender.
- Social inequality.
- Appearance and reality.

A theme should not be reduced to a single moral statement. It develops through the interaction of plot, character, language, setting, and symbol.

Major and Minor Themes

A **major theme** dominates the play and influences the central action.

A **minor theme** is a supporting concern that enriches the dramatic world.

For example, ambition may be the major theme in *Macbeth*, while guilt, masculinity, supernatural power, and political legitimacy operate as related themes.

Symbolism

Symbolism occurs when an object, action, character, colour, place, or event suggests meanings beyond its literal function.

Examples include:

- Blood as a symbol of guilt or violence.
- Darkness as a symbol of secrecy or evil.
- A storm as a symbol of disorder.

- Blindness as a symbol of ignorance.
- A crown as a symbol of power and responsibility.

Motif

A motif is a recurring image, object, phrase, action, or situation that reinforces a theme.

In *Macbeth*, recurring motifs include:

- Blood.
- Sleep.
- Darkness.
- Disease.
- Clothing.
- Unnatural events.

Setting

Setting refers to the time, place, social environment, and psychological atmosphere of a play.

Physical Setting

Physical setting includes:

- Landscape.
- Buildings.
- Rooms.
- Streets.
- Weather.
- Geographical location.

Historical Setting

Historical setting refers to the period and political circumstances in which the action occurs.

Social Setting

Social setting includes:

- Class.
- Religion.
- Gender relations.
- Customs.
- Occupation.
- Family structure.

- Political institutions.

Psychological Setting

Psychological setting is the emotional and mental atmosphere of the play. A scene may create an atmosphere of fear, uncertainty, loneliness, joy, tension, or oppression.

Dialogue

Dialogue is conversation between characters. It performs several functions:

- Advances the plot.
- Reveals character.
- Establishes conflict.
- Communicates information.
- Creates rhythm and pace.
- Expresses theme.
- Produces humour or suspense.

Dialogue may be realistic, poetic, symbolic, argumentative, comic, or formal.

Spectacle

Spectacle includes the visual and sensory elements of performance:

- Movement.
- Gesture.
- Lighting.
- Music.
- Costume.
- Scenery.
- Props.
- Sound effects.
- Make-up.
- Stage design.

Aristotle regarded spectacle as less central than plot, but modern theatre often uses spectacle as a major means of meaning-making.

Chapter 4: Dramatic Devices

Soliloquy

A soliloquy is a speech delivered by a character who is alone on stage or believes that they are alone. It reveals thoughts that other characters do not hear.

Functions of soliloquy include:

- Revealing inner conflict.
- Presenting private motives.
- Explaining decisions.
- Creating intimacy with the audience.
- Slowing external action for psychological reflection.

Hamlet Example

Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" soliloquy examines:

- Existence and death.
- Suffering.
- Fear of the unknown.
- Human hesitation.
- The conflict between thought and action.

The speech is important because it reveals Hamlet's philosophical and psychological uncertainty.

Aside

An aside is a short remark spoken directly to the audience or another character. Other characters on stage are conventionally assumed not to hear it.

An aside may:

- Reveal a secret.
- Produce humour.
- Create dramatic irony.
- Show a character's true intention.
- Establish a confidential relationship with the audience.

Dramatic Irony

Dramatic irony occurs when the audience knows something that one or more characters do not know.

Effects

- Suspense.
- Anxiety.
- Tragic tension.

- Humour.
- Sympathy.
- Anticipation.

Oedipus Rex

In *Oedipus Rex*, the audience gradually understands that Oedipus himself is connected with the crime he is investigating, while Oedipus remains unaware for much of the play. This creates intense dramatic irony.

Comic Relief

Comic relief is a humorous scene, character, or episode inserted into a serious or tragic play.

Functions include:

- Reducing emotional tension.
- Providing temporary relief.
- Contrasting with tragic events.
- Making the serious atmosphere more powerful.
- Presenting an alternative social perspective.

The Porter scene in *Macbeth* is commonly discussed as comic relief because it follows the murder of Duncan and temporarily changes the emotional tone.

Chorus

The chorus originated in Greek drama. It may:

- Comment on events.
- Represent society.
- Express collective emotion.
- Explain background.
- Offer moral reflection.
- Respond to the protagonist.
- Connect scenes.

The chorus may function as a bridge between performers and spectators.

Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing is the use of hints or signs that anticipate later events.

Forms of foreshadowing include:

- Prophecy.
- Dreams.

- Warnings.
- Repeated images.
- Ominous dialogue.
- Symbolic objects.
- Unusual natural events.

In *Macbeth*, the witches' prophecies foreshadow Macbeth's rise and destruction. Images of blood and darkness also prepare the audience for violence and guilt.

Flashback

A flashback presents an event from the past during the current action.

It may:

- Explain a character's history.
- Reveal past trauma.
- Clarify a relationship.
- Supply missing information.
- Change the audience's interpretation.

Flashbacks are especially common in modern and cinematic drama.

Symbolism

Symbolism allows a concrete theatrical element to carry abstract meaning. It is often expressed through:

- Objects.
- Colours.
- Repeated actions.
- Places.
- Weather.
- Names.
- Sounds.
- Lighting.

Symbolic meaning should be interpreted in relation to the whole play rather than in isolation.

Examples from Major Plays

Hamlet

Important devices in *Hamlet* include:

- Soliloquy.

- Play-within-the-play.
- Dramatic irony.
- Ghost.
- Symbolism of disease and decay.
- Delayed action.
- Appearance versus reality.

Macbeth

Important devices include:

- Prophecy.
- Soliloquy.
- Symbolism of blood and darkness.
- Supernatural elements.
- Dramatic irony.
- Comic relief.
- Repeated imagery of sleep and disease.

Oedipus Rex

Important devices include:

- Dramatic irony.
- Prophecy.
- Recognition.
- Reversal.
- Chorus.
- Symbolism of sight and blindness.
- Investigation as plot structure.

Chapter 5: Types of Drama

Tragedy

Tragedy is a serious form of drama in which a central character experiences suffering, reversal, and catastrophe.

Common features include:

- Serious subject.

- Central conflict.
- Moral or psychological complexity.
- Suffering.
- Reversal of fortune.
- Death or loss.
- Emotional effect on the audience.

Aristotle's Theory of Tragedy

Aristotle defines tragedy as the imitation of a serious and complete action of significant magnitude, presented dramatically, which arouses pity and fear and produces catharsis. Aristotle places plot above character because the arrangement of incidents produces the tragic effect.english.hawaii+1

The six elements of tragedy are:

1. Plot.
2. Character.
3. Thought.
4. Diction.
5. Music.
6. Spectacle.

Plot is the most important element, while spectacle is considered the least artistic because it depends more on stage technology than on the playwright's construction.

Hamartia

Hamartia is commonly understood as a tragic error, mistake, or flaw that contributes to the hero's downfall.

It need not mean deliberate wickedness. A tragic hero may suffer because of:

- Error in judgement.
- Ignorance.
- Misinterpretation.
- Excessive confidence.
- A psychological weakness.
- A mistaken decision.

In *Oedipus Rex*, the tragedy develops through ignorance, impulsive action, and an attempt to escape prophecy.

Hubris

Hubris means excessive pride or overconfidence. A character suffering from hubris may believe that human power can overcome moral, natural, or divine limits.

Hubris may lead to:

- Disregard of warnings.
- Insult to divine authority.
- Abuse of political power.
- Inability to recognise limitations.
- Destructive decisions.

Catharsis

Catharsis is the emotional effect produced by tragedy. Aristotle connects it with pity and fear. The audience feels pity for the suffering character and fear because the tragic possibility is connected with human vulnerability.

Catharsis has been interpreted as:

- Purification.
- Purgation.
- Cleansing.
- Emotional release.
- Intellectual clarification.

Aristotle's theory explains tragedy as an art that evokes pity and fear and brings these emotions toward a proper resolution.^{britannica+1}

Comedy

Comedy generally presents human weakness, social confusion, mistaken identity, and conflict in a humorous manner. It often ends with reconciliation, marriage, celebration, social restoration, or a new understanding.

Classical Comedy

Classical comedy follows patterns derived from Greek and Roman comedy. It often includes:

- Stock characters.
- Confusion.
- Disguise.
- Clever servants.
- Family conflict.
- Social satire.
- Happy resolution.

Romantic Comedy

Romantic comedy focuses on love and relationships. Its common features include:

- Lovers separated by circumstances.
- Misunderstanding.
- Disguise.
- Opposition from parents or society.
- Recognition.
- Reunion or marriage.

Comedy of Manners

Comedy of manners satirises the manners and social behaviour of a particular class. It examines:

- Fashion.
- Marriage.
- Reputation.
- Sexual conduct.
- Conversation.
- Hypocrisy.
- Social status.

Restoration comedy is strongly associated with this form.

Satirical Comedy

Satirical comedy uses humour, irony, exaggeration, and ridicule to criticise social institutions, political practices, moral weakness, or public hypocrisy.

Tragi-Comedy

Tragi-comedy combines tragic and comic elements. It may contain danger, suffering, and serious conflict but avoid complete catastrophe.

Features include:

- Mixed emotional tone.
- Serious and comic characters.
- Threat without total destruction.
- Uncertain moral atmosphere.
- Reconciliation or survival.

Farce

Farce is a highly exaggerated form of comedy based on improbable situations and physical humour.

Common features include:

- Mistaken identity.
- Disguise.
- Slapstick.
- Rapid entrances and exits.
- Overlapping misunderstandings.
- Exaggerated characters.
- Unrealistic coincidence.

Melodrama

Melodrama uses sensational action and strong emotional contrasts.

Features include:

- Clear distinction between good and evil.
- Villain and innocent victim.
- Suspense.
- Sudden reversals.
- Emotional music.
- Moral certainty.
- Spectacular events.

Masque

A masque is a form of court entertainment combining:

- Poetry.
- Music.
- Dance.
- Costume.
- Allegory.
- Scenic design.
- Mythological characters.
- Spectacle.

Masques were especially important in Renaissance and early modern England.

One-Act Play

A one-act play is a short drama consisting of a single act. It usually has:

- Limited characters.
 - One principal setting.
 - Concentrated conflict.
 - Short duration.
 - Economy of dialogue.
 - Rapid development.
 - Strong ending or moment of revelation.
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Chapter 6: Modern Drama

Problem Play

The problem play examines social, political, moral, and intellectual problems through dramatic conflict.

George Bernard Shaw is strongly associated with the problem play. His dramas often challenge:

- Social inequality.
- Marriage conventions.
- Capitalism.
- War.
- Poverty.
- Gender expectations.
- Religious and moral assumptions.

Features

- Realistic settings.
- Intellectual dialogue.
- Social debate.
- Contemporary issues.
- Rejection of conventional romantic solutions.
- Characters representing conflicting viewpoints.

Shaw often uses drama as a form of social criticism and public discussion.

Theatre of the Absurd

Martin Esslin popularised the term **Theatre of the Absurd**. The term describes a group of post-war plays that represent human existence as uncertain, repetitive, isolated, and lacking a guaranteed system of meaning.

Features

- Fragmented dialogue.
- Repetition.
- Circular action.
- Silence and pause.
- Lack of conventional plot.
- Unresolved endings.
- Strange or illogical situations.
- Breakdown of communication.
- Characters trapped in repetitive conditions.

The Theatre of the Absurd is not simply meaningless theatre. Its apparent meaninglessness becomes a way of representing the crisis of meaning experienced by modern human beings.

Expressionism

Expressionism presents the inner emotional and psychological reality of characters rather than external reality in a realistic manner.

Features

- Distorted scenery.
- Symbolic figures.
- Abstract settings.
- Fragmented scenes.
- Heightened language.
- Dreams and nightmares.
- Social alienation.
- Representations of fear and anxiety.

Expressionist drama often shows the world as experienced by a disturbed or oppressed consciousness.

Epic Theatre

Bertolt Brecht developed Epic Theatre as an alternative to conventional dramatic theatre.

Main Features

- Episodic plot.
- Narration.
- Songs.
- Placards.
- Direct address.
- Visible stage machinery.
- Historical settings.
- Sudden changes of scene.
- Actor-audience distance.
- Critical spectatorship.

Epic Theatre does not encourage the audience to lose itself completely in the fictional world. Instead, it encourages the audience to think about social causes and possible change.

Existential Drama

Existential drama explores the human condition in a world where meaning is not guaranteed.

Themes

- Freedom.
- Choice.
- Responsibility.
- Isolation.
- Anxiety.
- Death.
- Absurdity.
- Meaninglessness.
- Authenticity.
- Moral uncertainty.

The existential character must make choices without complete certainty. Dramatic conflict often arises from the burden of freedom and responsibility.

Chapter 7: Major Dramatic Theories

Aristotle's *Poetics*

Aristotle's *Poetics* is one of the earliest systematic studies of literature and drama.

Main Ideas

- Art is imitation, or *mimesis*.
- Tragedy imitates serious action.
- Plot is the soul of tragedy.
- A plot should be complete and unified.
- Tragedy should arouse pity and fear.
- Catharsis is a central effect.
- Reversal and recognition strengthen the plot.
- Character should support the action.
- Dramatic action is more important than narration.

Aristotle's theory is primarily concerned with how tragedy is constructed and how it affects an audience.[iep.utm+1](#)

Brecht's Alienation Effect

Brecht's alienation effect is also called the **distancing effect**. It prevents the audience from becoming completely absorbed in the dramatic illusion.

Techniques

- Direct address.
- Songs that interrupt the action.
- Narrators.
- Placards.
- Visible lighting.
- Actors commenting on their characters.
- Historical settings.
- Abrupt scene changes.
- Exposed stage machinery.

Purpose

The purpose is not to eliminate emotion but to transform passive emotion into critical understanding. Brecht wanted audiences to ask:

- Why did this event occur?
- Who benefits from the social arrangement?
- Could the situation be changed?
- What responsibility does society bear?

Stanislavski's System

Konstantin Stanislavski developed a system of actor training that aimed at psychological truth and believable performance.

Main Principles

- Given circumstances.
- Character objectives.
- Super-objective.
- Emotional truth.
- Imagination.
- Concentration.
- Inner motivation.
- Physical action.
- Observation.
- Ensemble performance.
- Memory and sensory experience.

The actor does not merely imitate an external emotion. The actor studies the character's circumstances and objectives and performs actions that make the character's behaviour convincing.

Importance

Stanislavski influenced modern realistic acting and later developments associated with Method acting. His system is especially useful for plays based on psychological realism.

Martin Esslin and Absurd Theatre

Martin Esslin's theory groups together dramatic works that challenge conventional ideas of plot, language, and meaning.

Main Principles

- Human beings seek order but encounter uncertainty.
- Language may fail to communicate.
- Repetition may replace development.
- Characters may lack clear histories or goals.
- Time may appear circular rather than progressive.
- Endings may remain unresolved.
- Meaning may be suggested rather than explained.

The Theatre of the Absurd uses theatrical form itself to represent uncertainty and the instability of human existence.

Chapter 8: Summary and Review

Key Terms

- **Drama:** A literary work intended for performance.
- **Action:** Events performed by characters.
- **Plot:** The organised pattern of incidents.
- **Character:** A person or figure in a play.
- **Protagonist:** The central character.
- **Antagonist:** The opposing force.
- **Conflict:** The struggle between opposing forces.
- **Theme:** The central idea of a play.
- **Setting:** The time, place, social environment, and atmosphere.
- **Dialogue:** Conversation between characters.
- **Monologue:** A long speech by one character.
- **Soliloquy:** A speech revealing private thoughts.
- **Aside:** A remark unheard by other characters.
- **Chorus:** A group commenting on dramatic action.
- **Exposition:** Introduction of background and circumstances.
- **Climax:** The highest point or turning point.
- **Resolution:** The conclusion of the action.
- **Hamartia:** A tragic error or flaw.
- **Hubris:** Excessive pride.
- **Catharsis:** The emotional effect of tragedy involving pity and fear.
- **Peripeteia:** Reversal of fortune.
- **Anagnorisis:** Recognition or discovery.
- **Dramatic irony:** The audience knows more than a character.
- **Comic relief:** Humour inserted into serious action.
- **Foreshadowing:** Hints of future events.
- **Flashback:** Presentation of an earlier event.

- **Symbol:** An element with literal and additional meanings.
- **Motif:** A recurring image or idea.
- **Farce:** Exaggerated comedy based on improbable situations.
- **Melodrama:** Sensational drama with clear moral oppositions.
- **Epic Theatre:** Brechtian theatre encouraging critical spectatorship.
- **Alienation effect:** Distancing the audience from complete emotional identification.
- **Absurd Theatre:** Drama representing uncertainty, repetition, and crisis of meaning.
- **Expressionism:** Drama presenting inner psychological reality through distortion.
- **Problem play:** Drama focused on social or moral issues.

Important Quotations

The following are short, commonly studied formulations:

- Aristotle: “Tragedy is an imitation of an action.”
- Aristotle: “Plot is the soul of tragedy.”
- Shakespeare, *Hamlet*: “To be, or not to be.”
- Shakespeare, *Macbeth*: “Out, damned spot!”
- Shakespeare, *Macbeth*: “Fair is foul, and foul is fair.”
- Shakespeare, *Macbeth*: “Life’s but a walking shadow.”
- Brecht: “Theatre consists in producing representations of living men.”
- Dryden: Drama is “a just and lively image of human nature.”
- Stanislavski: “An actor lives, weeps, and laughs on the stage.”
- Sophoclean tragedy: sight and blindness represent knowledge and ignorance.

The exact wording of quotations may vary between translations and editions, so students should consult the prescribed text when quoting in examinations.

Short-Answer Questions

What is drama?

Drama is a literary form intended for performance. It represents human action through dialogue, gesture, movement, conflict, and theatrical presentation.

What is the origin of the word “drama”?

The word comes from the Greek *dran*, meaning “to do,” “to act,” or “to perform.”

Why drama is called a performing art?

Drama is called a performing art because its written script is realised through actors, direction, stage design, music, lighting, costume, and audience interaction.

What is plot?

Plot is the organised arrangement of incidents in a drama. It creates unity, causality, conflict, suspense, and resolution.

What is Aristotle's view of plot?

Aristotle considers plot the soul of tragedy. He argues that it should be complete, unified, significant, and organised according to probability or necessity.

What is exposition?

Exposition introduces the characters, setting, background, and initial situation of a play.

What is a sub-plot?

A subplot is a secondary action that parallels, contrasts with, or supports the main plot.

What is a flat character?

A flat character is built around a single dominant quality or idea and is generally predictable.

What is a round character?

A round character is complex, psychologically developed, and capable of surprising the audience.

What is hamartia?

Hamartia is a tragic error, mistake, or flaw that contributes to the downfall of the tragic hero.

What is hubris?

Hubris is excessive pride or overconfidence that causes a character to violate limits or ignore warnings.

What is catharsis?

Catharsis is the emotional effect of tragedy, traditionally associated with the arousal and resolution or purification of pity and fear.^{britannica+1}

What is a soliloquy?

A soliloquy is a speech in which a character, usually alone, expresses private thoughts.

What is dramatic irony?

Dramatic irony occurs when the audience knows something important that a character does not know.

What is comic relief?

Comic relief is a humorous scene or character introduced into a serious drama to relieve tension.

What is the alienation effect?

The alienation effect is Brecht's technique of preventing complete emotional identification so that the audience observes and judges the social action critically.

What is the Theatre of the Absurd?

The Theatre of the Absurd is a dramatic tendency that represents human existence through repetition, fragmented language, uncertainty, circular action, and lack of conventional resolution.

Long-Answer Questions

Discuss drama as both a literary and performing art.

A complete answer should include:

- Definition of drama.
- Literary features of the dramatic script.
- Importance of dialogue, character, plot, and theme.
- Role of stage directions.
- Contribution of actors, director, design, music, and audience.
- Difference between reading and watching drama.
- Relationship between text and performance.
- Concluding statement that drama unites language with action.

Trace the development of drama from Greece to the postmodern period.

A complete answer should discuss:

- Religious origins of Greek drama.
- Greek tragedy and comedy.
- Roman adaptation.
- Medieval religious drama.
- Renaissance humanism.
- Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre.
- Restoration comedy.
- Modern realism and problem plays.
- Expressionism, Epic Theatre, and Absurd Theatre.
- Postmodern fragmentation and experimentation.

Explain Aristotle's concept of plot.

A complete answer should include:

- Plot as the soul of tragedy.
- Plot as arrangement of incidents.
- Beginning, middle, and end.
- Unity of action.

- Probability and necessity.
- Reversal.
- Recognition.
- Suffering.
- Relationship between plot and catharsis.
- Importance of action over character description.

Discuss the major types of drama.

A complete answer should define and explain:

- Tragedy.
- Comedy.
- Classical comedy.
- Romantic comedy.
- Comedy of manners.
- Satirical comedy.
- Tragi-comedy.
- Farce.
- Melodrama.
- Masque.
- One-act play.

Suitable examples should be added from prescribed texts.

Compare Brecht's Epic Theatre with Stanislavski's realistic theatre.

Feature	Brecht	Stanislavski
Main aim	Critical social awareness	Psychological truth
Audience	Reflective and analytical	Emotionally involved
Acting	Shows constructed performance	Creates believable character
Stage illusion	Frequently interrupted	Generally maintained
Techniques	Songs, placards, narration, direct address	Objectives, given circumstances, inner motivation
Character	Social and historical context	Psychological development

Feature	Brecht	Stanislavski
Theatre	Epic and episodic	Realistic and immersive

Explain the Theatre of the Absurd.

A complete answer should include:

- Meaning of absurdity.
- Martin Esslin's contribution.
- Post-war cultural context.
- Breakdown of communication.
- Repetition and circularity.
- Weak or absent conventional plot.
- Silence and pause.
- Unresolved endings.
- Isolation and uncertainty.
- Search for meaning in a seemingly meaningless world.

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. The word "drama" comes from which language?
 - a) Latin
 - b) Greek
 - c) French
 - d) German

Answer: b) Greek

2. The Greek word *dran* means:
 - a) To sing
 - b) To write
 - c) To act
 - d) To think

Answer: c) To act

3. According to Aristotle, the soul of tragedy is:
 - a) Character
 - b) Plot
 - c) Spectacle
 - d) Costume

Answer: b) Plot

4. Aristotle associates tragedy with:
 - a) Love and marriage
 - b) Pity and fear
 - c) Anger and revenge
 - d) Laughter and celebration

Answer: b) Pity and fear

5. Catharsis is associated with:

- a) Comedy
- b) Tragedy
- c) Farce only
- d) Masque only

Answer: b) Tragedy

6. The terms flat and round character were popularised by:

- a) E. M. Forster
- b) Martin Esslin
- c) Bertolt Brecht
- d) A. C. Bradley

Answer: a) E. M. Forster

7. The central character of a drama is called the:

- a) Antagonist
- b) Protagonist
- c) Chorus
- d) Narrator

Answer: b) Protagonist

8. A speech delivered by a character who is alone is a:

- a) Dialogue
- b) Chorus
- c) Soliloquy
- d) Aside

Answer: c) Soliloquy

9. A remark intended for the audience but not heard by other characters is called:

- a) Aside
- b) Epilogue
- c) Flashback
- d) Exposition

Answer: a) Aside

10. When the audience knows more than a character, the device is:

- a) Symbolism
- b) Dramatic irony
- c) Comic relief
- d) Foreshadowing

Answer: b) Dramatic irony

11. The witches' predictions in *Macbeth* are examples of:

- a) Foreshadowing
- b) Flashback
- c) Farce
- d) Exposition only

Answer: a) Foreshadowing

12. The Porter scene in *Macbeth* is generally considered:

- a) A masque
- b) Comic relief
- c) A subplot
- d) A soliloquy

Answer: b) Comic relief

13. The blindness motif is especially important in:

- a) *Oedipus Rex*
- b) *The Comedy of Errors*
- c) *The Importance of Being Earnest*
- d) *Pygmalion*

Answer: a) Oedipus Rex

14. Hamartia refers to:

- a) A comic character
- b) A tragic error or flaw
- c) A stage direction
- d) A type of scenery

Answer: b) A tragic error or flaw

15. Excessive pride is called:

- a) Catharsis
- b) Hubris
- c) Anagnorisis
- d) Peripeteia

Answer: b) Hubris

16. Reversal of fortune is known as:

- a) Peripeteia
- b) Mimesis
- c) Diction
- d) Spectacle

Answer: a) Peripeteia

17. Recognition or discovery is called:

- a) Anagnorisis
- b) Hamartia
- c) Melodrama
- d) Exposition

Answer: a) Anagnorisis

18. Comedy of manners satirises:

- a) Natural scenery
- b) Social behaviour and conventions
- c) Religious myths only
- d) War narratives only

Answer: b) Social behaviour and conventions

19. Farce depends primarily on:

- a) Philosophical argument
- b) Improbable situations and physical humour
- c) Historical accuracy
- d) Religious ceremony

Answer: b) Improbable situations and physical humour

20. The problem play is especially associated with:

- a) G. B. Shaw
- b) Sophocles
- c) Seneca
- d) Aristophanes

Answer: a) G. B. Shaw

21. The term Theatre of the Absurd was popularised by:

- a) Martin Esslin
- b) John Dryden
- c) E. M. Forster
- d) A. C. Bradley

Answer: a) Martin Esslin

22. Epic Theatre is associated with:

- a) Bertolt Brecht
- b) Aristotle
- c) Stanislavski
- d) Shakespeare

Answer: a) Bertolt Brecht

23. The alienation effect aims to produce:

- a) Complete emotional illusion
- b) Critical distance
- c) Comic confusion
- d) Musical spectacle

Answer: b) Critical distance

24. Stanislavski's system focuses mainly on:

- a) Psychological truth and believable action
- b) Masks and chorus
- c) Placards and narration
- d) Improvised farce

Answer: a) Psychological truth and believable action

25. Expressionism presents primarily:

- a) External reality in documentary form
- b) Inner psychological reality
- c) Classical mythology
- d) Social manners

Answer: b) Inner psychological reality

26. A one-act play usually has:

- a) Many unrelated plots
- b) Concentrated action
- c) Several dozen characters
- d) No conflict

Answer: b) Concentrated action

27. A recurring image or idea is called a:

- a) Motif
- b) Climax
- c) Chorus
- d) Prologue

Answer: a) Motif

28. The final stage of dramatic structure is generally called:

- a) Exposition
- b) Rising action
- c) Resolution
- d) Complication

Answer: c) Resolution

29. Greek drama was closely connected with festivals dedicated to:

- a) Apollo
- b) Dionysus
- c) Zeus only
- d) Hermes

Answer: b) Dionysus

30. Medieval morality plays commonly used:

- a) Personified virtues and vices
- b) Scientific experiments
- c) Realistic detectives
- d) Silent films

Answer: a) Personified virtues and vices