Drama
An Introduction
Drama comes from Greek words meaning "to do" or "to act."

A play is a story acted out.

Plays show people going through some eventful period in their lives, seriously or humorously.

The speech and action of a play recreate the flow of human life. A play comes fully to life only on the stage.
On the stage plays combine the talents of the author, director, actor, designer, and many others. Putting on a play is a team effort.

Dramatic performance involves an intricate process of rehearsal based upon imagery inherent in the dramatic text.

The dramatic text presents the drama as a range of verbal imagery.

The language of drama can range between great extremes: on the one hand, an intensely theatrical and ritualistic manner; and on the other, an almost exact reproduction of real life.
A dramatic monologue is a type of lyrical poem or narrative piece that has a person speaking to a select listener and revealing his character in a dramatic situation.
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.

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.
Tragedies end on an unhappy note.

- 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.
A classical tragedy tells of a high and noble person who falls because of a "tragic flaw," a weakness in his own character.

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.
Comedies end happily

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.

Farce is comedy at its broadest. Much fun and horseplay enliven the action.
- The comedy of manners, or artificial comedy, is subtle, witty, and often mocking.

- Sentimental comedy mixes sentimental emotion with its humor.

- 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.
Characters are important in plays.

Without the character there is no story, no climax, no resolution.

The audience watches a play because the characters/actors promise to take the audience on a journey to experience a story's fulfillment.

The audience is invested in the characters and cares what happens to them.
What a Drama MUST Have

- Full, rich, and interesting characters who are different enough from each other so that in one way or another they conflict. From this conflict comes the story

- A dramatic situations with a strongly plotted conclusions
The plot should be able to tell what happens and why

- The beginning, should tell the audience or reader what took place before the story leads into the present action.
- The middle carries the action forward, amid trouble and complications.
- In the end, the conflict is resolved, and the story comes to a satisfactory, but not necessarily a happy conclusion.

- It should be filled with characters whom real people admire and envy. The plots must be filled with action. It should penetrate both the heart and mind and shows man as he is, in all his misery and glory.
Ancient Drama

The origins of Western drama can be traced to the celebratory music of 6th-century BC Attica, the Greek region centered on Athens.

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 added a second actor to the play format thereby creating the possibility of conflict

■ His seven surviving plays, three of which constitute the only extant trilogy are richly ambiguous inquiries into the paradoxical (illogical/contradictory) 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. The battle between fate and self determination.
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 (worldly, material) 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.
Shakespeare dies in approximately 1616

Ben Jonson unofficial ‘poet laureate’ until his death in 1637

Plays mostly banned until Charles II takes over in 1660

Plays considered unholy, blasphemous and locations of licentious (immoral, wicked, shameless) behavior
The theaters established in the wake of Charles II's return from exile in France and the Restoration of the monarchy in England (1660) were intended primarily to serve the needs of a socially, politically, and aesthetically homogeneous class. At first they relied on the pre-Civil War repertoire; before long, however, they felt called upon to bring these plays into line with their more "refined," French-influenced sensibilities.
The themes, language, and dramaturgy of Shakespeare's plays were now considered out of date, so that during the next two centuries the works of England's greatest dramatist were never produced intact.

Owing much to Moliere, the English comedy of manners was typically a witty, brittle satire of current mores (traditions, customs) especially of relations between the sexes.

Among its leading examples were She Would if She Could (1668) and The Man of Mode (1676) by Sir George Etherege; The Country Wife (1675) by William Wycherley; The Way of the World (1700) by William Congreve; and The Recruiting Officer (1706) and The Beaux' Stratagem (1707) by George Farquhar.
The resurgence of Puritanism, especially after the Glorious Revolution of 1688, had a profound effect on 18th-century drama. Playwrights, retreating from the free-spirited licentiousness of the Restoration, turned towards softer, sentimental comedy and moralizing domestic tragedy.

- The London Merchant (1731) by George Lillo consolidated this trend.
- A prose tragedy of the lower middle class, and thus an important step on the road to realism, it illustrated the moral that a woman of easy virtue can lead an industrious young man to the gates of hell.

Satire enjoyed a brief revival with Henry Fielding and with John Gay, whose The Beggar's Opera (1728) met with phenomenal success.

- Their wit, however, was too sharp for the government, which retaliated by imposing strict censorship laws in 1737.
- For the next 150 years, few substantial English authors bothered with the drama.
In its purest form, Romanticism concentrated on the spiritual, which would allow humankind to transcend the limitations of the physical world and body and find an ideal truth.

- Subject matter was drawn from nature and "natural man" (such as the supposedly untouched Native American).

- Perhaps one of the best examples of Romantic drama is Faust (Part I, 1808; Part II, 1832) by the German playwright Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

- Based on the classic legend of the man who sells his soul to the devil, this play depicts humankind's attempt to master all knowledge and power in its constant struggle with the universe.
The Romantics focused on emotion rather than rationality, drew their examples from a study of the real world rather than the ideal, and glorified the idea of the artist as a mad genius unfettered by rules.

Romanticism thus gave rise to a vast array of dramatic literature and production that was often undisciplined and that often substituted emotional manipulation for substantial ideas.
Romanticism first appeared in Germany, a country with little native theatre other than rustic farces before the 18th century.

By the 1820s Romanticism dominated the theatre of most of Europe.
From the time of the Renaissance on, theatre seemed to be striving for total realism, or at least for the illusion of reality.

As it reached that goal in the late 19th century, a multifaceted, antirealistic reaction erupted.

Avant-garde Precursors of Modern Theatre Many movements generally lumped together as the avant-garde, attempted to suggest alternatives to the realistic drama and production.
The various theoreticians felt that Naturalism presented only superficial and thus limited or surface reality—that a greater truth or reality could be found in the spiritual or the unconscious.

Others felt that theatre had lost touch with its origins and had no meaning for modern society other than as a form of entertainment.

Paralleling modern art movements, they turned to symbol, abstraction, and ritual in an attempt to revitalize the theatre.

Although realism continues to be dominant in contemporary theatre, television and film now better serve its earlier functions.
The originator of many antirealist ideas was the German opera composer Richard Wagner.

He believed that the job of the playwright/composer was to create myths.

In so doing, Wagner felt, the creator of drama was portraying an ideal world in which the audience shared a communal experience, perhaps as the ancients had done.

He sought to depict the "soul state", or inner being, of characters rather than their superficial, realistic aspects.
Wagner was also responsible for reforming theatre architecture and dramatic presentation with his Festival Theatre at Bayreuth, Germany, completed in 1876.

The stage of this theatre was similar to other 19th-century stages even if better equipped, but in the auditorium Wagner removed the boxes and balconies and put in a fan-shaped seating area on a sloped floor, giving an equal view of the stage to all spectators. (This mimics a modern theater or movie house today)

Just before a performance the auditorium lights dimmed to total darkness-then a radical innovation. (also continued in today’s theaters and movies)
Symbolist Drama

- The Symbolist movement in France in the 1880s first adopted Wagner's ideas.

- The Symbolists called for "detheatricalizing" the theatre, meaning stripping away all the technological and scenic encumbrances of the 19th century and replacing them with a spirituality that was to come from the text and the acting.

- The texts were laden with symbolic imagery not easily construed-rather they were suggestive.

- The general mood of the plays was slow and dream-like.

- The intention was to evoke an unconscious response rather than an intellectual one and to depict the nonrational aspects of characters and events.
The Symbolist plays of Maurice Maeterlinck of Belgium and Paul Claudel of France, popular in the 1890s and early 20th century, are seldom performed today.

Strong Symbolist elements can be found, however, in the plays of Chekhov and the late works of Ibsen and Strindberg.

Symbolist influences are also evident in the works of such later playwrights as the Americans Eugene O'neill and Tennessee Williams and the Englishman Harold Pinter, propounder of "theatre of silence".

Also influenced by Wagner and the Symbolists were the Swiss scenic theorist Adolphe Appia and the English designer Edward Henry Gordon Craig, whose turn-of-the-century innovations shaped much of 20th-century scenic and lighting design. They both reacted against the realistic painted settings of the day, proposing instead suggestive or abstract settings that would create, through light and scenic elements, more of a mood or feeling than an illusion of a real place.
The Expressionist movement was popular in the 1910s and 1920s, largely in Germany.

- It explored the more violent, grotesque aspects of the human psyche, creating a nightmare world onstage.
- Scenographically, distortion and exaggeration and a suggestive use of light and shadow typify Expressionism.
- Stock types replaced individualized characters or allegorical figures, much as in the morality plays, and plots often revolved around the salvation of humankind.

Other movements of the first half of the century, such as Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism, sought to bring new artistic and scientific ideas into theatre.
Perhaps the most significant development influenced by Artaud was the ensemble theatre movement of the 1960s.

- Ensemble theatres abandoned the written text in favor of productions created by an ensemble of actors.
- The productions, which generally evolved out of months of work, relied heavily on physical movement, nonspecific language and sound, and often-unusual arrangements of space.
The most popular and influential nonrealistic genre of the 20th century was absurdism.

Absurdist dramatists saw, in the words of the Romanian-French playwright Eugène Ionesco, "man as lost in the world, all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless."

Absurdist drama tends to eliminate much of the cause-and-effect relationship among incidents, reduce language to a game and minimize its communicative power, reduce characters to archetypes, make place nonspecific, and view the world as alienating and incomprehensible.

Absurdism was at its peak in the 1950s, but continued to influence drama through the 1970s.

The American playwright Edward Albee's early dramas were classified as absurd because of the seemingly illogical or irrational elements that defined his characters' world of actions.
Although pure Naturalism was never very popular after World War I, drama in a realist style continued to dominate the commercial theatre, especially in the United States.

Even there, however, psychological realism seemed to be the goal, and nonrealistic scenic and dramatic devices were employed to achieve this end.

- The plays of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams, for instance, use memory scenes, dream sequences, purely symbolic characters, projections, and the like.
- European drama was not much influenced by psychological realism but was more concerned with plays of ideas.
- In England in the 1950s John Osborne's Look Back in Anger (1956) became a rallying point for the postwar "angry young men"; a Vietnam trilogy of the early 1970s, by the American playwright David Rabe, expressed the anger and frustration of many towards the war in Vietnam.
- Under the influence of Brecht, many postwar German playwrights wrote documentary dramas that, based on historical incidents, explored the moral obligations of individuals to themselves and to society. An example is The Deputy (1963), by Rolf Hochhuth, which deals with Pope Pius XII's silence during World War II.
Many playwrights of the 1960s and 1970s-Sam Shepard in the United States, Peter Handke in Austria, Tom Stoppard in England-built plays around language:

- language as a game, language as sound, language as a barrier, language as a reflection of society.
- In their plays, dialogue frequently cannot be read simply as a rational exchange of information.
- Many playwrights also mirrored society's frustration with a seemingly uncontrollable, self-destructive world.

In Europe in the 1970s, new playwriting was largely overshadowed by theatricalist productions, which generally took classical plays and reinterpreted them, often in bold new scenographic spectacles, expressing ideas more through action and the use of space than through language.
In the late 1970s a return to Naturalism in drama paralleled the art movement known as Photorealism.

- Typified by such plays as American Buffalo (1976) by David Mamet, little action occurs, the focus is on mundane characters and events, and language is fragmentary—much like everyday conversation.
- The settings are indistinguishable from reality.
- The intense focus on seemingly meaningless fragments of reality creates an absurdist, nightmarish quality: similar traits can be found in writers such as Stephen Poliakoff.
- A gritty social realism combined with very dark humor has also been popular; it can be seen in the very different work of Alan Ayckbourn, Mike Leigh, Michael Frayn, Alan Bleasdale, and Dennis Potter.

In all lands where the drama flourishes, the only constant factor today is what has always been constant: change. The most significant writers are still those who seek to redefine the basic premises of the art of drama.
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