**The Theory of Drama**

**THE STAGING**

To be successfully staged, a play must observe certain rules:

* short and intense (the maximum of realization):
* limitation opposed on the subject-matter (not everything can be efficiently presented);
* the Aristotle’s three unities (of time, place, and action).

‘Poetic’ or ‘closet’ plays lack the speed of the action, and are thus intended for reading at home. They include long poetic descriptions and soliloquies, flat characterization, looser structure – all of which makes them less efficient when they are staged.

**THE STRUCTURE**

The traditional parts of drama:

1. The **exposition**. Informative and static function. Learn about the main characters (their believes and problems). Produces tension with the oppositions. Establishes the atmosphere (the mood) of the play. Shows the dramatic skill of the author (creating the atmosphere, arousing interest). The audience gets acquainted with the characters.

- *(King Lear, 1. 1; Hamlet, 1. 1 – 2)*

2. The **fist crisis** or the **conflict**. May be a physical happening on stage, a mental decision, or even a natural catastrophe. Starling, unusual development gives rise to a crisis, which leads to other actions and events. The characters are revealed in a new light. The action becomes more complex. The latent conflict of the story becomes palpably true. Must bear the essence of the dramatic opposition in the story (not giving the key to the solution of the problem, it must open possibilities).

- *(Othello, 1. 3: discourse between Iago and Roderigo)*

3. The **climax**. The problem is completely laid out. The opposition between the protagonist and the antagonist reaches its peak.

- (*Romeo and Juliet, 3. 5: the nuptial night; Macbeth, 3. 4: he cannot live in peace; King Lear, 3. 1 & 3. 2)*

4. The **denouement** (resolution). The climax is resolved. Past actions are explained. New evidence is brought to light. The relationships among the characters are revealed. Consists of the tragic moment and the moment of retardation. The tragic moment: is an additional moral burden on the hero (either an obstacle in his struggle to reach his aim or a moment which emphasizes and speeds up his decline). *(Hamlet: killing of Polonius)* The moment of retardation: can be moral (the audience realizes that the play might not end tragically) or technical (scenes are introduced to prevent the story from coming to the catastrophe too suddenly).

- *(King Lear, 5. 3: Edmund tries to save King Lear and Cordelia, and explains his relation to Goneril and Regan; Romeo and Juliet, 5. 2 – 3: Fair John fails to deliver the letter to Romeo)*

5. The **catastrophe**. By some discovery, the action comes to an end. The final battle between two

opposing forces is settled.

The scene and act division:

* Greek drama: pauses when the chorus has its say
* Latin playwright Seneca: introduced five acts (influential on Elizabethan period)

If a play is divided into acts, the suspense must be carried from one act to another. The actor before leaving the stage must be given a chance to make a strong impression. *(Hamlet, 1. 5: Hamlet’s words to Horatio and Marcellus)*

**THE PLOT**

A plan, an outline of the events of the story must be constructed so that it could be retold in a few sentences. The events must be placed in the environment, which will make them seem more effective and significant, and provide them with the greatest force possible.

Conventions for the **selection of the events**, which must convey:

1. The author’s attitudes to the problems, his views on life.
2. The author’s purpose, the message he wants to convey to the public.
3. The artistic taste of the period.

Conventions for the **construction of the events**:

1. A play should be simple in construction and should move with considerable speed.

2. The plot must be closely constructed.  
3. The events must follow in the natural and logical sequence of things.  
4. The scenes must be inevitable.  
5. The play must develop from one crisis to another.

Variations in the plot structure:

1. The **flash-back technique**. The chronological sequence of the events is altered.
2. The **subplots**. Adding interest to some aspect of the main plot, or introducing an emotional

relief. *(King Lear: Gloucester and his two sons)*

1. The **coincidences**. Aristotle suggested as few as possible. Good playwrights try to achieve the

appearance of possibility, because they should bear some likeness to truth. Inconsistency in a character more disturbing than that in the plot. *(Romeo and Juliet: Capulet’s Clown asks Romeo to read the invitation to the masked ball, Fair John does not deliver the letter to Romeo in time)*

1. The **contrast**. Heightens the emotional intensity. In Shakespeare: the character of a fool. *(King Lear: the Fool; Hamlet: the Grave-diggers; Macbeth: the “Porter scene”)*
2. The **surprise**. Reveals the true reactions of the characters. In Shakespeare: disguise. *(The Merchant of Venice)*
3. The **significant silence**. Measure the impact of what has been said by a character, and intensifies the meaning of his words. *(Hamlet, 1. 2: after Claudius’ speech)*
4. *The* ***dramatic irony*** *(double meaning). Applies to any play in which the audience is expected to know the outcome. Conflict between the two dramatic expressions: what is going on on the stage, and what is in the spectator’s mind. Suggestions made on stage produce the effect of movement in time. The author alters the tone of speech, the speed, and the movements on the stage.*

*(Hamlet, 1. 2)*

*KING: ... But now my cousin Hamlet, and my son – HAMLET: A little more than kin, and less than kind. KING: How is it that the clouds still hang on you, HAMLET: Not so, my lord, I am too much in the “son”.*

1. The messengers, letters, or discussions about characters which are not present. Plot material which cannot be conveniently shown on stage. *(Hamlet: Hamlet’s letter to Horatio)*

**CHARACTERS**

Individuals with trades valid for a large group of people. Should be portrayed in such a way that they can be psychologically explained. Should be clear, unambiguous, yet open to several possible interpretations. If presented in a wholly bad light, the character is not persuasive (should possess also some good features) and vice-versa.

**Types of characters:**

* Minor characters (usually flat types). A stock character is called one dimensional: has only one characteristic feature prevailing.
* Major characters. A round character embodies both general and individual characteristics.

Revealing character’s characteristics:

1. The **soliloquy** (monologue).

* -  Artificial device expresses sincerity (direct, honest expression of his thoughts, feeling). It shows that the character really knows himself.
* -  Reveals a hypocrite. In other scenes the character expresses different notions and is reveal in a true light in the soliloquy. (Othello, 1. 3: Iago’s soliloquy)
* -  Asserts complexity and irrationality. *(Hamlet, 3. 1: Hamlet’s meditation on death)*

2. The dialogue of a character.  
-What the character is saying, who is he speaking to, what is his relationship towards the character he is addressing, what are his motives, what aims is he trying to achieve.

3. The dialogue about a certain character.  
- Must also take into account intentionally misleading observations.

4. The introduction of a confidant.  
- A person who is entrusted with character’s private affairs or secrets. *(Hamlet: Horatio; Romeo*

*and Juliet: the Nurse)*

5. The character’s actions.  
- Taken into account the very simplest and smallest gestures.

6. The relationship among various characters.

1. The outward expressions of a character.

-The mimicry, gesture, movement, clothing.

**THE DIALOGUE**

The language should differ according to the type of a person; nevertheless it should be rich and metaphorical in style, and condense in speed. Characters must be communicative, because every idea must be conveyed by means of speech. In modern plays there is a use of colloquial, everyday speech (full of clichés, meaningless exclamations, repetitions).

The difference in genres:

1. Comedy: fast in speed, witty language.
2. Tragedy: slow in speed, graceful language (full of thoughts, arguments, and persuasion).

The functions:

1. It conveys a meaning.  
2. An aesthetic function. Pleases with its beauty.

The asides reveal the character’s thoughts.

**THE CHORUS**

Derives from Greek drama. Function: to tell the audience about the past, to comment on the present, express forebodings about the future. Acts as an audience, although being the mouthpiece for the author. In Elizabethan drama, minor characters take over the function of chorus. *(Hamlet: Horatio and the Grave- diggers)*

The usage:

1. A hindrance. Stops the action, discuses the preceding developments on the stage.
2. An alienation effect between the action taking place on the stage and the (emotional) perception of the audience.

**THE FUNCTIONS OF PROSE AND VERSE DRAMA**

Poetry in drama: the play is removed one step further from literal realism. The language must stay dramatic, and give stimulus to the action.

Poetry advantages:

* -  expresses general truths more adequately;
* -  the imagery gives broader implications;
* -  effectively used in monologues;
* -  secure the depth and intensity (provides a wider range of the speaker’s feelings).

Verse drama: use of a certain metrical pattern in the everyday language.

**THE DRAMATIC MEANING**

What happens in the mind of a character is not the same as what happens in the mind of the audience (=dramatic irony). Achieved if the play has in itself many meanings so that there is a wide variety of possible interpretations.

The meaning of a play (as opposed to the plot) is based on impressions gathered throughout the play. Single impression is static, but a number of shifting impressions produce the effect of movement in time. An impression should be presented so that we acknowledge its relevance, and associate it with the following impression.

**The Aristotle’s Concept of Tragedy**

*Tragedy is a mimesis (*an imitation, a representation, a reproduction*) of an* ***action****, which is* ***serious****, complete in itself, and of a* ***certain length****; it is expressed in a* ***speech made beautiful*** *in different ways in different parts of a play; it is acted, not narrated; and by exciting* ***pity and fear****, it gives a healthy relief to such emotions.*

* external (physical happenings) and inner (acting of words and ideas) **action** *(all Shakespeare’s tragedies)*
* **serious** = the subject-matter is worth being presented (*all Shakespeare’s tragedies)*
* a **certain length** = performed as one whole, closely knitted, no additional plots (the unity of

action)

* **speech made beautiful** = the direction, the choice of words and the way they are put together, differs from the everyday language *(all Shakespeare’s tragedies)*
* **pity** is present in the observer and the play gives a healthy relief to the excess of these

emotions, liberating and ennobling the observer (*all Shakespeare’s tragedies)*

* the tragedy should be fundamentally true to life: contradictions between his weaknesses and his courage *(Hamlet)*, or man’s stupidity and his nobility *(Othello)*
* surprise should not be an element of drama
* must possess suspense (created with the help of language and structure) and tragic irony
* catharsis = the moment of reversal and recognition > the fate of a character changes, he realizes that he has been working towards his own ruin > the greatest tragedy lies in the hero’s actions or decisions as well (the tragic error) *(Othello, Hamlet, King Lear...)*
* the realisation of the tragic error gives the audience hope that goodness will be restored, yet that does not happen
* the characters should not be either too good or too bad (goodness derives not from moral quality but from strength and intensity of someone’s mental or moral nature)
* the three unities of time, place, and action *(Othello)*
* characters are taken from a higher social class *(all Shakespeare)*
* the story is based on a historical myth which is know to many people *(Macbeth,King Lear)*