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## 1.1 OBJECTIVES

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### In this Unit we shall

- Know a few definitions of drama.
- Discuss characteristics of drama.
- Discuss drama as a form of literature which will include a comparison between novel and drama as literary forms, which would help you to understand the form of drama.
- Talk about brief history of the development of English Drama

### After completing the Unit, you should be able to

- Understand the term 'drama' as a form of literature
- Understand its history and its development
- Understand the form of Drama during various periods of English Literature

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## 1.2 INTRODUCTION

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Drama is one of the literary forms through which dramatists can directly speak to their readers or audience as well as they can receive instant feedback of audience. Drama is a mode of fictional representation through dialogue and performance. A few dramatists use their characters as a vehicle to convey their thoughts, values such as poets do with personae, and novelists do with narrators. In drama the characters live out a story without any comments of the author, providing the audience a direct presentation of characters' life experiences.

Drama is a distinctive fictitious form because it is intended to be performed out on a stage. The word 'drama' comes from the Greek word 'dran' meaning 'to act' or 'to do'. Drama brings a story to life before our eyes, the story of a play or drama is told through dialogue and action and is combined with the setting that the audience perceives essentially from scenery and props.

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## 1.3 DEFINITIONS OF DRAMA

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Here are some of the definitions of drama that I would prefer to discuss:

- In general any work meant to be performed on a stage by actors. A more particular meaning is a serious play; not necessarily tragedy.
- The form of composition designed for performance in the theatre, in which actors take the roles of the characters, perform the indicated actions, and utter the written dialogue. (The common alternative name for a dramatic composition is a play.)
- Drama is intended to replicate human behaviour and action in the midst of tragedy and everyday life. A number of genres exist within drama, each with their own storytelling methods, character types and dramatic approach. There are four main genres of drama: the tragedy, comedy, melodrama and tragicomedy.

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## 1.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF DRAMA

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Aristotle in his *Poetics*, the first systematic treatise of Western dramaturgy, talks about six constituent parts of tragedy which are applicable to drama in general. These are: Plot, Character, Thought, Diction, Music and Spectacle. Plot is the arrangement of incidents in the play. Characters are the actors who play different roles. Thought means what the characters think and feel. Diction is the language of the play. Music is the sound effects and songs. Spectacle is the theatrical effect including scenery and props used as setting.

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## 1.5 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NOVEL AND DRAMA

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The novel is self-contained; that is, it provides within its own compass everything that the writer deemed necessary for the comprehension and enjoyment of his work. The drama, on the other hand, when it reaches us in the form of print, and when we read it as literature, in the same way as we read a novel, is not in this sense self-contained. It implies everywhere the co-operation of elements outside itself, and for the moment these elements are lacking. What we read is, in fact, little more than a bare outline which the playwright intended to be filled in by the art of the actor and the “business” of the boards—a literary basis for that stage-representation upon which he calculated for the full execution of his design. In the mere perusal of a play, therefore, we labour under certain drawbacks and difficulties, for much of its effect is likely to be lost upon us for want of those continual appeals to the imagination, those descriptions, explanations, and personal commentaries, which in a novel help us to visualise scenes, understand people, estimate motives, grasp the ethical import of actions. For this reason, the comprehension and enjoyment of a play as a piece of literature must always make immeasurably greater demands upon us than the comprehension and enjoyment of a novel. We have to supply for ourselves the external conditions from which it derives much of its life, and the whole machinery of actual performance; in countless cases of detail, where, had we been spectators, we should have relied upon the “reading” of the actor, we must as students have recourse to our own powers of apprehension and interpretation; our imagination must be so alert that every scene may be conceived as if it were passing before us in action. In ordinary practice—and particularly in our study of Shakespeare, whose works we persist in treating as “pure” literature, and rarely regard in their primary qualities as plays written expressly for the stage—we are too apt to neglect these simple but far-reaching considerations. It is worthwhile, therefore, to insist that in our study of any drama we should do our utmost to recreate its proper theatrical circumstances and surroundings, and thus to make our private reading of it so far as possible an adequate substitute for public performance.

**Check your progress 1:**

**Q.1 Answer the following questions.**

1. What is drama?

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2. Which are the characteristics of drama?

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3. How does a drama differ from a novel?

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**1.6 HISTORY OF ENGLISH DRAMA**

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**1.6.1 The Beginnings: Greek Drama**

The origins of Greek drama are obscure, but it seems to have grown out of choral performance. We have only the words of choral lyrics, but the Greek word *choros* (chorus) itself refers to dancing, and the original experience was a combination of movement, words and music. Later Greeks believed that drama began with a single actor in dialogue with the chorus; Aeschylus was said to have introduced the second actor and Sophocles to have been the first to use a third. Supposedly there were never more than three speaking actors, dividing all the roles between them.

Dramas at Athens were performed in festivals. At the biggest of these, the Great Dionysian, performances were spread over four days. The last part of it was devoted to comedy; for the festival's earlier part three playwrights were selected and each produced four plays which they directed themselves; three tragedies and a satyr play. Tragedy was the first form of drama that was produced and performed. Thus, drama originates from religious practice.

**1.6.2 Drama from Chaucer to Spenser:**

The ancient classical drama had long ceased to be a vital force, and the only trace of it was in the mimes or professional strolling players to be found throughout the middle ages in all parts of Europe. To them

medieval drama owes little or nothing. Popular mummings at great festivals, a crude survival of ancient pagan ritual, developed into more elaborate amusements, with morris dancing and simple dramatizations of the feats of such heroes as Robin Hood and St George. These festivities were the occasion of much popular fun and licence, particularly at the election of the 'Abbot of Unreason', with his attendants, the hobby horse and the clown.

**The Miracle Play:** It is in the church and its liturgy that we find the stimulus which leads to the rebirth of drama. The commonly used antiphonal singing had in it the elements of dialogue, while the obvious dramatic possibilities in the Roman Catholic ritual, especially in the Mass, were gradually developed as part of the elaborate ceremonial of the great religious feasts like Easter. As early as the tenth century we hear of Easter representations of the empty tomb of Christ, with dialogue between one figure sitting out side and the three others who come in as if seeking something. The authorities were quick to appreciate the instructional value of such presentations as an addition to the Latin liturgy, and to this dramatization of the *quem quoritis* (whom seek ye?) rapid additions seem to have been made, both at Easter and at other feasts.

The writers seem to have turned next to other New Testament stories, Such as the Annunciation and the Nativity, and then to the Old Testament, where the Fall and the stories of Noah and Daniel were among the most popular. By the fourteenth century we have the evolution of complete cycles of plays, covering the history of the world from the Creation to the Day of Judgement, and there is a common tendency to incorporate into them material from legend and the saints' lives. It has long been the fashion to call the Biblical plays 'mysteries' and those dealing with saints' lives 'miracles,' but there is no evidence to justify this distinction in England, though it seems to have been used in France. We hear of no play being called a 'mystery' in England before the eighteenth century, and it seems probable that all out-of-door liturgical dramas in this century were known as 'miracles.'

From the eleventh century onward monastic and cathedral records frequently mention properties used in such dramatic representations. The performances were still part of the liturgy, spoken in Latin by clerics, and their role was a subordinate one. Slowly, however, the vernacular crept in to usurp the place of the Latin, minor clerics and then laymen were introduced as actors, and numerous episodes began to be found in single performances. This growth necessitated the moving of the presentation from the choir (its original place) to the nave of the church, and rapidly the liturgical drama grew to overshadow the ritual of which it had been a very small part. By the twelfth century the dramas, in quest of still more space, seem to have moved into the open, and the organization had begun to pass from ecclesiastical to lay hands. The vernacular was by now the

usual medium, and the growing secularization of the drama is reflected in an edict of 1210 forbidding clergy to take part in the plays.

From the clergy, control passed first to the religious and social guilds, and then to the trade guilds, under the general control of the council of the town. The guilds, which were wealthy, and keen rivals in public show, became responsible for the productions. Each guild took on a separate episode from a cycle—often an episode suited to its own interests. Thus at Chester the water-leaders and drawers of the Dee performed Noah's Deluge. The growing elaboration of presentation, stimulated by guild rivalry, and the extension of the cycles led to the evolution of the ambulatory cycle, in which each episode was performed on a two-decked cart, or pageant. This pageant consisted of one enclosed room, which served both as Hell and as a tiring room, and a second storey open to the sky, on which the action was performed. It was towed round the town so that the play could be performed at fixed points, and at York we read of twelve places at which each play was given in a sequence which began at 4.30 A.M. and went on until the light failed. In London, about 1500, the plays, which were presented very elaborately, lasted from four to seven days.

For such elaborate cycles presented out of doors only summer festivals were really suitable, and after the creation, in 1311, of the feast of Corpus Christi, which fell in May or June, when weather was likely to be good and the hours of daylight were long, most of the play cycles began to attach themselves to that feast. Here and there however, and notably at Chester, the plays were associated with Whitsuntide. The cycles, some of which were performed annually, and some only at intervals of several years, made Corpus Christi a great public holiday. Soon the licence and revelry of the crowds congregated in the great religious centres on this occasion were arousing strong ecclesiastical opposition and leading to deterioration in the religious significance and spirit of the plays. Though their composition probably remained in clerical hands, a growing secularization of tone is clearly discernible. \

### **1.6.3 The Age of Elizabeth:**

The opening of the Elizabethan period saw the drama struggling into maturity. The early type of the time was scholarly in tone and aristocratic in authorship. An example of the earliest type of playwright is Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke (1554-1628), who distinguished himself both as a dramatic and lyrical poet.

Next came the work of the university Wits, Peele, Greene, Lodge, Kyd, and, greatest of all, Marlowe. In their hands drama first began to realize its latent potentialities, and the exuberance and vitality which typify Elizabethan drama first made themselves felt.

To this stage succeeded that of Shakespeare, which covered approximately the years 1595 to 1615. Of this drama all we can say here is that it is the crown and flower of the Elizabethan literary achievement, and embodies almost the entire spirit both of drama and poetry. This Age

produced tragedies, comedies, tragi-comedies and romances. It is called the Golden Age in the history of English drama.

The decline begins with Jonson, and continues with Beaumont and Fletcher, Dekker, Heywood, and the other dramatists mentioned in this chapter. The decline is made clear in several ways: in the narrowing of the ample Shakespearian motive, local, and fragmentary importance; in the lack of creative power in the characterization, resulting sometimes in mere types or 'humours,' or (as in Dekker and Fletcher) in superficial improvisation, or in ponderous tragical figures (as in Webster and Tourneur); and, lastly, in the degradation of the style, which will be noted below. Sometimes the decline is gilded with delicate fancy, as in Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess*, or in the exquisite *The Parliament of Bees* (1641) by John Day (fl. 1606); but the grace and charm of such plays cannot conceal the falling off in power and imagination.

With regard to the development of the different dramatic types, we have already noted that tragedy developed first; in Shakespeare all kinds received attention, tragedy most of all. In post-Shakespearian drama light comedy was a very popular species, partly because the tragic note of exalted pity had degenerated into melodrama and horrors.

A special word is perhaps necessary on the *masque*, which during this time had a brief but brilliant career. The masque is a short dramatic performance composed for some particular festive occasion, such as the marriage or majority of a great man's son; it is distinguished by ornate stage-setting, by lyrics, music, and dancing, and by allegorical characters. It finds a place in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and other plays; it is strongly developed in the works of Jonson, Fletcher, and other poets of the time; and it attains its climax during the next age in the *Comus* (1637) of Milton.

#### **1.6.4 The Age of Milton:**

There was decline and temporary collapse of drama in 1642. The plays of Massinger sustain the expiring spirit of the great Elizabethans; those of Ford follow the tragical school of Webster and Tourneur. Other playwrights are James Shirley (1596-1666), who wrote some pleasing comedies of London life, such as *The lady of Pleasure* (1635), and the feebler writers Suckling and Davenant.

#### **1.6.5 The Age of Dryden:**

During this age, the development of drama became evident in the form of heroic tragedy. The tragic faculty is weakening all through the period, even in comparison with the post-Shakespearian plays. Some of the significant heroic tragedies are Dryden's *All for Love* and Otway's *Venice Preserv'd*. Based on the theme of epics and love, such plays are written in rhyming pentameters couplets where characters are of almost superhuman stature.

In comedy the advance is noteworthy. The comedy of humours, popular during the time of Ben Johnson is now mostly replaced by the comedy of manners during the Age of Dryden. Comedy has acquired a new snap and glitter, and the almost universal medium is prose. Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700), Wycherley's *The Country-Wife* (1673), and Farquhar's *The Beaux Stratagem*(1707) are good examples of Comedy of Manners.

### 1.6.6 The Age of Pope:

Here there is almost a blank. The brilliant and exotic flower of Restoration comedy has withered, and nothing of any merit takes its place. In tragedy Addison's *Cato* is almost the only passable example. In comedy Steele's plays are a survival of the Restoration type, but they have a sentimental, didactic piety quite alien from their models. The only advance in the drama is shown in *The Beggar's Opera*, whose robust vitality, sprightly music, and charming songs make it stand alone in its generation.

### 1.6.7 The Return to Nature:

Drama was written as freely as ever, but rather as a form of literary exercise than as a serious attempt at creating a new dramatic standard. Tragedy almost monopolized the activities of the major poets. Of all the tragedies Shelley's *The Cenci* came first in power and simplicity. Byron's tragedies had little merit as dramas; and Wordsworth's *The Borderers* and Coleridge's *Remorse* added little to the fame of their authors. The comic spirit in drama was in abeyance. Shelley's *Oedipus Tyrannus*, or *Swellfoot the Tyrant*, is almost the only instance of it worth mention, and this was a poor specimen of that writer's creative power.

- **Check your progress 2**

#### Q.1 Answer the following questions

1. How did drama originate?

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2. Write a brief note on Elizabethan Drama.

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### 1.6.8 The Victorian Age:

Several of the major poets of the period wrote tragedy on the lines of the accepted models. Few of these attained to real distinction; they were rather the conscientious efforts of men who were striving to succeed in the impossible task of really reviving the poetical drama. Of them all,



Swinburne's tragedies, especially those concerned with Mary Queen of Scots, possess the greatest warmth and energy; and Browning's earlier plays, before he overdeveloped his style, have sincerity and sometimes real dramatic power. As for comedy, it was almost wholly neglected as a purely literary form.

A development to be noticed is the popularity of the dramatic monologue. In *Ulysses*, *Tithonus*, and other pieces Tennyson achieved some of his most successful results; and Browning's host of monologues, wide in range and striking in detail, are perhaps his greatest contribution to literature. The method common to this kind of monologue was to take some character and make him reveal his inmost self in his own words.

### **1.6.9 Modern English Drama:**

English Drama during the Modernist Period (1845-1945 A.D.) can be categorized into three phases:

- The first and the earliest phase of Modernism in English Drama is marked by the plays of G.B. Shaw and John Galsworthy, which constitute the category of social drama modelled on the plays of Ibsen.
- The second and the middle phase of Modernist English drama comprises the plays of Irish movement contributed by some elites like Yeats. In this phase, the drama contained the spirit of nationalism.
- The third and the final phase include plays of T.S. Eliot and Christopher Fry. This phase saw the composition of Poetic Drama inspired by the earlier Elizabethan and Jacobean tradition.

### **Characteristics of Modern Drama:**

- **Realism:** It was the most significant feature of this time. Dramatists of early Modern age were keen to capture realistic picture of life including social problems. Henrik Ibsen was the chief exponent of realistic drama. Dramatists of this time wrote Problem Plays, plays dealing with problems of marriage, justice, law, administration and strife between capital and labour.
- **Plays of Ideas:** Plays written during this period were more of ideas having less action. Dramatists wanted to bring reform in the society and they used plays as mediums to convey their ideas.
- **Irish Movement:** W.B. Yeats thought it important to revive Irish past through dramatic representation. With efforts of Yeats, J.M. Synge, Murrey and Lady Gregory, Irish revival which was known as Celtic revival. Abbey Theatre was established in Dublin, Ireland in 1904 and plays dealing with Irish folk tradition were performed there. Drama in hands of these dramatists ceased to be realistic and became an expression of hopes and aspirations of Irish peasantry.

### **1.6.10 Post-1920s English Drama:**

The arrival of the cinema constituted a new threat to the theatre. Its precise effect on the older form is difficult to determine. Certainly it has become the entertainment for the masses. Theatre considered, and still considers cinema as an immensely powerful competitor. Along with this,

there was also the emergence of Radio and Television. All this affected the popularity of drama as a literary form. Few other characteristics are as follows:

- Decline in Realism
- The Revival of Poetic Drama
- Expressionism
- Experiments in Technique
- Complete Blackout after the World Wars
- Theatre of Absurd
- **Check your progress 3:**

**Q.1 Fill in the gaps using appropriate options from the given below.**

1. Drama is intended to be \_\_\_\_\_.  
a. recited b. performed c. sung d. only read
2. The first and earliest form of drama was \_\_\_\_\_.  
a. tragedy b. comedy c. tragic-comedy d. melodrama
3. Drama differs from novel. How?  
a. Novel has a plot. b. Novel has characters.  
c. Novel is self-contained. d. Novel has themes.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ is a significant characteristic of Modern drama.  
a. Realism b. Romanticism c. Classicism d. Surrealism
5. There was temporary collapse of English drama in the year \_\_\_\_\_.  
a. 1635 b. 1642 c. 1646 d. 1660
6. \_\_\_\_\_ developed after World War II.  
a. Symbolism b. Theatre of the Absurd c. Abbey Theatre d. Expressionism
7. \_\_\_\_\_ is an element of Drama.  
a. Plot b. Theme c. Narrative d. Imagery
8. Which period is known as the Golden period for English drama?  
a. Age of Dryden b. Age of Pope c. Victorian Age d. Elizabethan Age
9. When was Abbey Theatre established?  
a. 1904 b. 1907 c. 1910 d. 1918
10. *The Way of the World* is a famous comedy written by \_\_\_\_\_.  
a. Dryden b. Wyckerly c. Farquhar d. Congreve

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## 1.7 LET US SUM UP

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After going through the meaning, origin and development of drama, we may say that drama is a composite art. It has its roots in ancient time. In course of time it has remarkably changed. The changes can be seen both in structure and theme of the plays. With the development of film industry, we can see a decline in theatrical activities. Now plays rather scripts are written for TV and films. But we still do have theatre companies and audiences who appreciate stage performances.

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## 1.8 KEY WORDS

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|----------------------|---|
| <b>Comprehension</b> | Thorough understanding, totality of intensions in a context given for discussion                |
| <b>Chorus</b>        | A group of singers distinct from the principal performers in a dramatic or poetical performance |
| <b>Melodrama</b>     | Song-drama, a form of sensational drama   |
| <b>Monologue</b>     | A single person speaking alone with or without audience   |
| <b>Satyr</b>         | Man with horse's tails and ears   |
| <b>Personae</b>      | Characters in a drama   |

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## 1.9 SUGGESTED BOOKS

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- Abrams, M. H., and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2012.
- Cuddon, J.A. and Habib, M.A.R. *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*. Penguin Books, 2014.
- Albert, Edward. *History of English Literature*. Oxford University Press, 1971.
- Hudson, William H. *An Introduction to the Study of English Literature*. Maple Press, 2012.
- Jenkyns, Richard. *Classical Literature: A Pelican Introduction*. Penguin, 2015.

### ❖ Answers:

#### Check Your Progress 1

Answer:1 Drama is the form of composition designed for performance in the theatre, in which actors take the roles of the characters, perform the indicated actions, and utter the written dialogue. (The common alternative name for a dramatic composition is a play.)

Answer:2 There are six characteristics/elements of drama: Plot, Character, Thought, Diction, Music and Spectacle.

Answer:3 The novel is self-contained; that is, it provides within its own compass everything that the writer deemed necessary for the comprehension and enjoyment of his work. The drama, on the other hand, when it reaches us in the form of print, and when we read it as literature, in the same way as we read a novel, is not in this sense self-contained. A novelist can make the readers visualize each scene or incident through description, use of symbols and imagery etc. While a dramatist can't put everything in his text of drama, we can get the whole idea about it only through watching it performed.

- **Check your progress 2:**

Answer:1 The origins of Greek drama are obscure, but it seems to have grown out of choral performance. We have only the words of choral lyrics, but the Greek word *choros* (chorus) itself refers to dancing, and the original experience was a combination of movement, words and music.

Dramas at Athens were performed in festivals. At the biggest of these, the Great Dionysia, performances were spread over four days. The last part of it was devoted to comedy; for the festival's earlier part three playwrights were selected and each produced four plays which they directed themselves; three tragedies and a satyr play.

Answer:2 The opening of the Elizabethan period saw the drama struggling into maturity. The early type of the time was scholarly in tone and aristocratic in authorship. An example of the earliest type of playwright is Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke (1554-1628), who distinguished himself both as a dramatic and lyrical poet.

Next came the work of the university Wits, Peele, Greene, Lodge, Kyd, and, greatest of all, Marlowe. In their hands drama first began to realize its latent potentialities, and the exuberance and vitality which typify Elizabethan drama first made themselves felt.

To this stage succeeded that of Shakespeare, which covered approximately the years 1595 to 1615. Of this drama all we can say here is that it is the crown and flower of the Elizabethan literary achievement, and embodies almost the entire spirit both of drama and poetry. Tragedies, comedies, tragi-comedies, history plays and romances made this age rich.

**Check your progress 3:**

**Q.1 Multiple Choice Questions:**

1.(b) 2.(a) 3.(c) 4.(a) 5.(b) 6.(b) 7.(a) 8.(d) 9.(a) 10.(d)