

## Introduction to Drama

Drama is the specific mode of fiction represented in performance: a play, opera, mime, ballet, etc., performed in a theatre, or on radio or television. Considered as a genre of poetry in general, the dramatic mode has been contrasted with the epic and the lyrical modes ever since Aristotle's *Poetics* (c. 335 BC)—the earliest work of dramatic theory.

The term "drama" comes from a Greek word meaning "action" (Classical Greek: δράμα, *drama*), which is derived from "I do" (Classical Greek: δράω, *drao*). The two masks associated with drama represent the traditional generic division between comedy and tragedy.

In English (as was the analogous case in many other European languages), the word *play* or *game* (translating the Anglo-Saxon *pleġan* or Latin *ludus*) was the standard term for dramas until William Shakespeare's time—just as its creator was a *play-maker* rather than a *dramatist* and the building was a *play-house* rather than a *theatre*.<sup>[3]</sup>

The use of "drama" in a more narrow sense to designate a specific *type* of play dates from the modern era. "Drama" in this sense refers to a play that is *neither* a comedy nor a tragedy—for example, Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* (1873) or Chekhov's *Ivanov* (1887). It is this narrower sense that the film and television industries, along with film studies, adopted to describe "drama" as a genre within their respective media. The term "radio drama" has been used in both senses—originally transmitted in a live performance. May also refer to the more high-brow and serious end of the dramatic output of radio.

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

Mime is a form of drama where the action of a story is told only through the movement of the body. Drama can be combined with music: the dramatic text in opera is generally sung throughout; as for in some ballets dance "expresses or imitates emotion, character, and narrative action". Musicals include both spoken dialogue and songs; and some forms of drama have incidental music or musical

accompaniment underscoring the dialogue (melodrama and Japanese Nō, for example).<sup>[7]</sup> Closet drama is a form that is intended to be read, rather than performed.<sup>[8]</sup> In improvisation, the drama does not pre-exist the moment of performance; performers devise a dramatic script spontaneously before an audience.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Classical Greek drama[edit]

Western drama originates in classical Greece.<sup>[10]</sup> The theatrical culture of the city-state of Athens produced three genres of drama: tragedy, comedy, and the satyr play. Their origins remain obscure, though by the 5th century BC they were institutionalised in competitions held as part of festivities celebrating the god Dionysus.<sup>[11]</sup> Historians know the names of many ancient Greek dramatists, not least Thespis, who is credited with the innovation of an actor ("*hypokrites*") who speaks (rather than sings) and impersonates a character (rather than speaking in his own person), while interacting with the chorus and its leader ("*coryphaeus*"), who were a traditional part of the performance of non-dramatic poetry (dithyrambic, lyric and epic).<sup>[12]</sup>

Only a small fraction of the work of five dramatists, however, has survived to this day: we have a small number of complete texts by the tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, and the comic writers Aristophanes and, from the late 4th century, Menander.<sup>[13]</sup> Aeschylus' historical tragedy *The Persians* is the oldest surviving drama, although when it won first prize at the City Dionysia competition in 472 BC, he had been writing plays for more than 25 years.<sup>[14]</sup> The competition ("*agon*") for tragedies may have begun as early as 534 BC; official records ("*didaskaliai*") begin from 501 BC when the satyr play was introduced.<sup>[15]</sup> Tragic dramatists were required to present a tetralogy of plays (though the individual works were not necessarily connected by story or theme), which usually consisted of three tragedies and one satyr play (though exceptions were made, as with Euripides' *Alcestis* in 438 BC). Comedy was officially recognized with a prize in the competition from 487 to 486 BC.

Five comic dramatists competed at the City Dionysia (though during the Peloponnesian War this may have been reduced to three), each offering a single comedy.<sup>[16]</sup> Ancient Greek comedy is traditionally

divided between "old comedy" (5th century BC), "middle comedy" (4th century BC) and "new comedy" (late 4th century to 2nd BC).<sup>[17]</sup>