

THE ANALYSIS OF PLAY CONSTRUCTION AND DRAMATIC PRINCIPLE

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1: Dramatic structure - Wikipedia

The analysis of play construction and dramatic principle. by Price, W. T. (William Thompson), Publication date [c] Topics Drama -- Technique.

Among the group are Mrs. Eynsford-Hill and her daughter, Clara, who are waiting for the son, Freddy, to return with a cab. When he returns in failure, he is again sent in search of a cab. As he leaves, he collides with a young flower girl with a thick Cockney accent, and he ruins many of her flowers. This gentleman, Colonel Pickering, refuses to buy the flowers, but he gives the girl some money. Members of the crowd warn the girl against taking the money because there is a man behind her taking notes of everything she says. When the flower girl Eliza loudly proclaims that "I am a good girl, I am," the bystanders begin to protest. The note taker, it turns out, is Professor Henry Higgins, an expert in phonetics. He even maintains that he could take this "ragamuffin" of a flower girl and teach her to talk like a duchess in three months. At this time, the elder gentleman identifies himself as Colonel Pickering, the author of a book on Sanskrit, who has come to meet the famous Henry Higgins, to whom he is now talking. The two go off to discuss their mutual interest in phonetics. The girl, Eliza Doolittle, remembers that Higgins bragged about being able to teach her to speak like a duchess, and she has come to take lessons so that she can get a position in a flower shop. Pickering makes a wager with Higgins, who, in the spirit of good sport, decides to take the bet: Pearce to take the girl away, scrub her, and burn her clothes. These turn out to be the same people whom we saw under the portico in the first act. Now, however, none of the guests recognize that Eliza is the "ragamuffin" flower girl of that night. Higgins points out that the girl is far from being ready to be presented in public. Sometime later, Higgins, Pickering, and Eliza return late in the evening. They are so extremely proud that they totally ignore Eliza and her contribution to the success of the "experiment. Eliza is concerned with what will happen to her now that the experiment is over: Is she to be tossed back into the gutter; what is her future place? Higgins cannot see that this is a problem, and after telling her that all of the clothes that she has been wearing belong to her, he retires for the evening. He has telephoned the police and is then surprised to learn that Eliza is upstairs. While waiting for Eliza, Mr. He has thus been forced into middle-class morality, and he and his common-law wife are miserable. He has come to invite Eliza to his wedding, another concession to dreadful middle-class morality. As they all prepare to leave, Higgins restrains Eliza and tries to get her to return to his house. He maintains that he treats everyone with complete equality. To him, he makes no social distinction between the way he would treat a flower girl or a duchess. Higgins then admits that he misses her and also admires her newfound independence. He further maintains that she should return, and the three of them will live equally, as "three bachelors.

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2: Full text of "The analysis of play construction and dramatic principle"

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There is no standard established, with one important exception: Myth as drama Brander Matthews, an American playwright and teacher of literature, who in at Columbia University was the first at an English-speaking university to be appointed Professor of Dramatic Literature, states in *The Development of the Drama*, that the principles and structure of the drama form "an unbroken chain from the crudest mythological pantomime of primitive man down to the severest problem-play of the stern Scandinavian, whose example has been so stimulating to the modern stage. Yet, in recognition of at what Aristotle himself aimed his words in the *Poetics*, one should use caution in applying them to other stories than those performed on a stage - whether it is the floor of a theater or the stage of the silver screen. With myth, though, it has to be decided to what extent it relates to oral tale, to written fiction and to drama. The answer is not obvious. Myths of central and cosmological nature were most likely orally transmitted, long before they were written down, and although they may have transformed greatly in that process from mouth to pen, they were certainly given their plot and structure already well before. As oral tales, they need to be much closer to the enacted drama than a written story must, or they would most likely have been forgotten through the generations. Also, it is commonplace in cultures past and present, to enact their central myths - if not in pantomime, so in performances with more or less of a ritual structure. But the most firm indication of their dramatic nature is the structure of all those myths remaining with us, either in documents only, or in practice as well. Definitely, the principles of the drama are present in myths, at least to the extent that those principles are meaningful to apply to them. His short book is somewhat the stage on which all such thoughts have been acted out. When Aristotle and his *Poetics* can be doubted, this is usually because of a questionable later rephrasing of them, often in such a way that his words have been misinterpreted to be more categorical, more decisive, than they really are. Therefore, Aristotle has been questioned mainly when his rules of the drama have been regarded as more firm than he himself would have them in his *Poetics*, the most significant example of which is in the doctrine of the unity of time and place - the idea that a drama should only encompass the time span it would take to enact it, and occupy only the space that would fit onto a stage. Aristotle with a bust of Homer, by Rembrandt In its essence as well as in its details, though, the Aristotelean structure of the drama remains intact, following the principles of the *Poetics*. Other gaps are in the actual text, which remains with us in an incomplete form. He knows, though, what it takes to write convincingly - the poet must have as much of it as possible "before his own eyes," in his own vivid imagination. To persuade the spectators of the play, it needs to be both written and enacted "under the influence of passion," since one needs to be agitated oneself, to agitate others, and so forth. Thereby Aristotle concludes in the *Poetics* that "poetry is the province either of one who is naturally clever, or of one who is insane. Any kind of poetry, actually any art, is a form of imitation - what sets the art forms apart is merely with what means the imitations are made. Mankind imitates from childhood and on, Aristotle states in his *Poetics*, and we take delight in it - contrary to the animals. Aristotle states that mimesis is done primarily as a way of learning, of acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary. And we learn according to our individual stature: Aristotle does not spell out the conclusion very clearly in the *Poetics*, but the latter, disturbing form of imitation, gives good reason for why no poetry suffices, if only dealing with delightful things. Narrowing it down to the imitation made in poetry, in the construction of fables, Aristotle sees the major forms being the epic, the tragedy, the comedy, the choric hymn dithyrambic poetry, and that accompanied by the flute and lyre, all being imitations but differing in three aspects: The epic is alone in imitating merely by words, whereas what fits on the stage imitates mainly by action. For the drama, what is being done is absolutely essential, for which Aristotle takes an etymological support in his *Poetics*, comparing the word drama with the Dorian word dran, to make. Also the word poetry relates to this, meaning the same,

and poet meaning maker. The word fable Aristotle defines as "the composition of incidents. Comedy, which Aristotle regards as the lesser of the two, portrays the ridiculous, and not vices which terrify or disgust, since it is necessary with "a portion of turpitude", but not to the extent that serious damage is done or pain induced. That would be better fit for the tragedy. Tragedy As for tragedy, Aristotle states in the Poetics that it is "an imitation of a worthy or illustrious and perfect action, possessing magnitude, in pleasing language. The men have certain characters, which are according to their manners, but what lightens or darkens their emotions is none other than their actions, what happens to them. The play must reach an end, "the greatest of all things," and in doing so it "embraces manners on account of actions. By these two a person is described, but it is from his actions that his quality is derived. So, what causes the actions? In the Poetics, Aristotle sees two causes: Of these the fable is the principal part, "the soul of tragedy," followed by the manners, then the sentiments, to explain "what is inherent in the subject," then diction putting it all into words. Music is "the greatest of the embellishments", but to Aristotle the spectacle of scenic decorations and effects is the least important to the drama and its power. So, one action means what we would call one complete story, so arranged in its transactions, "that any one of them being transposed, or taken away, the whole would become different. In the Poetics, Aristotle points out that this unity of action evidently contains a beginning, a middle and an end, where the beginning is what is "not posterior to another thing," while the middle needs to have had something happen before, and something to happen after it, but after the end "there is nothing else. Anything absurd can only exist outside of the drama, what is included in it must be believable, which is something achieved not by probability alone, "for it is probable that many things may take place contrary to probability. What takes place should have nothing irrational about it, but if this is unavoidable, the Poetics suggests that such events should have taken place outside of the drama enacted. There is yet reason not to adhere too closely to historic events, since it is by no means certain that all of the audience is familiar with the facts. The poet had better make use of his trade, imitation, and put the story together so that it seems possible, be it with or without actual events. Then, the events will "possess more of the marvelous," which is also the case if events out of fortune are such that they still give the impression of design, of things happening as they should. The revolution is a "mutation", by which actions turn into a contrary condition, which still has to happen in a probable or even necessary way. The discovery is simply a change from ignorance to knowledge of something central to the plot, but Aristotle regards the beauty of discovery as heightened if it is combined with revolution. An action which includes neither discovery nor revolution, Aristotle calls simple, otherwise complex - in which case it is essential that these "should be effected from the composition itself of the fable. Pity, says Aristotle in the Poetics, "is excited for one who does not deserve to be unfortunate; but fear, for one who resembles oneself. This change should be from prosperity to adversity, not the opposite, to evoke pity. For the same reason, tragic events should not take place between two enemies, but rather between friends or relatives, like when a brother kills a brother, or a son his mother, or intends to do it - "such subjects are to be sought for. Then the drama is accomplished, with no damage. Next to best is when a deed is done in ignorance, because it is without wickedness, "and the discovery excites horror. The ideal time which the fable of a tragedy encompasses is "one period of the sun, or admits but a small variation from this period," but more essential and accurate a limitation is "when the time of its duration is such as to render it probable that there can be a transition from prosperous to adverse, or from adverse to prosperous fortune. Th first three, pretty much the beginning, middle and end discussed above, are intervened by the chorus. Where it is essential for the tragedy to be enacted, the epic poem is a narration, following different laws from that of the drama. It is not necessary with the unity of action presented above, but there should be a unity of time, in such a way as "of such things as have happened in that time. The epic story requires revolutions and discoveries, as much as tragedy does, and sentiments and a good diction as well. Raising the question of which imitation is the more excellent, the epic or tragic, Aristotle concludes that the tragedy, "being crowded into a narrower compass," becomes more pleasing, also it shows more unity, and can therefore attain its end "in a greater degree". The end being the greatest of all things, tragedy with its superior ending must be the superior form of imitation.

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