

PNU University

Classical and Renaissance Drama

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«امروزه کتاب‌خوانی و علم‌آموزی، نه تنها یک وظیفه‌ی ملی، که یک واجب دینی است.»^۱

در عصر حاضر یکی از شاخصه‌های ارزیابی رشد، توسعه و پیشرفت فرهنگی هر کشوری میزان تولید کتاب، مطالعه و کتاب‌خوانی مردم آن مرز و بوم است. ایران اسلامی نیز از دیرباز تاکنون با داشتن تمدنی چندهزارساله و مراکز متعدد علمی، فرهنگی، کتابخانه‌های معتبر، علما و دانشمندان بزرگ با آثار ارزشمند تاریخی، سرآمد دولت‌ها و ملت‌های دیگر بوده و در عرصه‌ی فرهنگ و تمدن جهانی به‌سان خورشیدی تابناک همچنان می‌درخشد و با فرزندان نیک‌نهاد خویش هنرنمایی می‌کند. چه کسی است که در دنیا با دانشمندان فرزانه و نام‌آور ایرانی همچون ابوعلی سینا، ابوریحان بیرونی، فارابی، خوارزمی و ... همچنین شاعران برجسته‌ای نظیر فردوسی، سعدی، مولوی، حافظ و ... آشنا نباشد و در مقابل عظمت آنها سر تعظیم فرود نیاورد. تمامی این افتخارات ارزشمند، برگرفته از میزان عشق و علاقه فراوان ملت ما به فراگیری علم و دانش از طریق خواندن و مطالعه منابع و کتاب‌های گوناگون است. به شکرانه‌ی الهی، تاریخ و گذشته ما، همیشه درخشان و پربار است. ولی اکنون در این زمینه در چه جایگاهی قرار داریم؟ آمار و ارقام ارائه‌شده از سوی مجامع و سازمان‌های فرهنگی در مورد سرانه‌ی مطالعه‌ی هر ایرانی، برآیمان چندان امیدوارکننده نمی‌باشد.

کتاب، دروازه‌ای به سوی گستره‌ی دانش و معرفت است و کتاب خوب، یکی از بهترین ابزارهای کمال بشری است. همه‌ی دستاوردهای بشر در سراسر عمر جهان، تا آنجا که قابل کتابت بوده است، در میان دست‌نوشته‌هایی است که انسان‌ها پدید آورده و می‌آورند. در این مجموعه‌ی بی‌نظیر، تعالیم الهی، درس‌های پیامبران به بشر، و همچنین علوم مختلفی است که سعادت بشر بدون آگاهی از آنها امکان‌پذیر نیست. کسی که با دنیای زیبا و زندگی‌بخش کتاب ارتباط ندارد بی‌شک از مهم‌ترین دستاورد انسانی و نیز از بیشترین معارف الهی و بشری محروم است. با این دیدگاه، به‌روشنی می‌توان ارزش و مفهوم رمزی عمیق در این حقیقت تاریخی را دریافت که اولین خطاب خداوند متعال به پیامبر گرامی اسلام(ص) این است که «بخوان!» و در اولین

۱. پیام مقام معظم رهبری به مناسبت آغاز هفته کتاب ۷۲/۱۰/۴

سوره‌ای که بر آن فرستاده‌ی عظیم‌الشأن خداوند، فرود آمده، نام «قلم» به تجلیل یاد شده‌است: «إِقْرَأْ وَ رَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ. الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ» در اهمیت عنصر کتاب برای تکامل جامعه‌ی انسانی، همین بس که تمامی ادیان آسمانی و رجال بزرگ تاریخ بشری، از طریق کتاب جاودانه مانده‌اند.

دانشگاه پیام‌نور با گستره‌ی جغرافیایی ایران‌شمول خود با هدف آموزش برای همه، همه‌جا و همه‌وقت، به‌عنوان دانشگاهی کتاب‌محور در نظام آموزش عالی کشورمان، افتخار دارد جایگاه اندیشه‌سازی و خردورزی بخش عظیمی از جوانان جویای علم این مرز و بوم باشد. تلاش فراوانی در ایام طولانی فعالیت این دانشگاه انجام پذیرفته تا با بهره‌گیری از تجربه‌های گرانقدر استادان و صاحب‌نظران برجسته کشورمان، کتاب‌ها و منابع آموزشی درسی شاخص و خودآموز تولید شود. در آینده هم، این مهم با هدف ارتقای سطح علمی، روزآمدی و توجه بیشتر به نیازهای مخاطبان دانشگاه پیام‌نور با جدیت ادامه خواهد داشت. به‌طور قطع استفاده از نظرات استادان، صاحب‌نظران و دانشجویان محترم، ما را در انجام این وظیفه‌ی مهم و خطیر یاری‌رسان خواهد بود. پیشاپیش از تمامی عزیزانی که با نقد، تصحیح و پیشنهادهای خود ما را در انجام این وظیفه‌ی خطیر یاری می‌رسانند، سپاسگزاری می‌نماییم. لازم است از تمامی اندیشمندانی که تاکنون دانشگاه پیام‌نور را منزلگاه اندیشه‌سازی خود دانسته و ما را در تولید کتاب و محتوای آموزشی درسی یاری نموده‌اند، صمیمانه قدردانی گردد. موفقیت و بهروزی تمامی دانشجویان و دانش‌پژوهان عزیز آرزوی همیشگی ما است.

دانشگاه پیام‌نور

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Preface

This book does not aim at presenting a complete description or history of dramatic art. Nor does it offer or try to lay down the basics for writing, producing, or acting in a play. The book tries to give and also portray a picture of what was to be known as the classical and the Renaissance drama. Thus, the drama after Shakespeare is not the focus of this book. It is not an overstatement if one claims that the ancient Greek drama has greatly affected the western civilization. Knowing it and studying the full implications of it will help the students to know how the basics of western culture were founded.

Throughout the following lines, students will be presented with the beginnings and the growth of the drama in ancient times while at the same time a sample of that kind of drama will be given. After that, the Renaissance and its implications will become the subject of our discussion. Finally, the Shakespearean drama and a sample from his plays will be presented.

Chapter 1

The Nature of Drama

1.1 What is Drama?

Nowadays, the word drama has several different meanings. If you take a look at a dictionary, you would notice different confusing meanings for the word; e.g. it may refer to sensational breathtaking events. But, when used in literature, it has one clear, definite and exact meaning. Drama would refer to a group of people performing their roles in front of spectators. Yet, there still exist lots and lots of questions about the nature and the origins and the developments of the dramatic art, dramatists, styles, different dramatic genres and subgenres, rules of play writing, etc.

Regarding what has been called as drama, the first thing that comes to our minds is that plays are texts written to be performed. Thus, it is intended to be seen and heard. In a theater, the word theater comes from a Greek word meaning ‘to watch’, we also become an audience which, in Latin, means ‘to hear’. Accordingly, even the words-theater and audience-suggest that a play should be seen and heard. When we read a play rather than see and hear it in a theater, we lose a great deal due to the fact that we must see it and hear it with mind’s eyes and ears.

As it was already mentioned, when two persons speak and perform actions representing other people, it can be regarded as the basic requirement of true drama. In this sense, one man alone is not enough; that is a different art. People acting but not speaking are doing

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something which is often considered as close to drama, but true drama must depend on what we hear as well as what we see.

Similarly, people speaking without acting are only fulfilling half the requirements. It may be objected that we can hear a play on the radio without seeing it; people sit in the broadcasting studio and read their parts in the play while sitting in a circle round the microphone. And many people who are interested in drama organize themselves into play-reading societies and spend evenings together sitting and reading plays. But, in these cases, when plays are being read or listened to, the actions are imagined at the same time. For our purposes, the drama is something which can be both seen and read.

These, then, are the basic requirements, and from these are developed different kinds of drama. There are some plays which are almost entirely unhappy, and there are other plays which are almost entirely happy or amusing. Between these extremes there are many varieties of drama.

Like any other human phenomenon, drama, too, has its own developments, fluctuations and divisions. Among all, tragedy and comedy are probably the best known dramatic forms. Tragedy would be simply defined as a play with an unhappy ending and comedy which is in complete contrast with tragedy designates a play with a happy ending. Tragedy tends to portray large issues about humanity and his place in this world. Aristotle believes that poets use spoken language with high style for the episodes and also they would employ sung lyrics in the songs.

There are also different kinds of plays such as satire, thriller, morality, melodrama, and farce. Students are also encountered with two other terms when reading or studying drama, they are theatre and stage. Theatre would have the same applications as drama, e. g. 'modern drama', but it usually referred to a place where plays are enacted.

If we talk about 'the theatre' we tend to think more about the business, or industry, of drama, and how plays are performed, than about the contents of the plays themselves. Sometimes a play will be called 'good theatre' but not 'good drama'. This will suggest that the

play is very entertaining or exiting while it is being watched, but does not stimulate much thought after performance. A stage is simply referred to a platform on which plays are performed and is built for the spectator seats.

The word drama can also be confusing. Nowadays, the terms ‘a drama’ and ‘the Drama’ often occur in books about the plays. In this sense, a ‘drama’ is usually a play which is intensely exciting or moving, yet which can hardly be classified as Tragedy or Comedy. On the other hand, ‘Drama’ or the ‘Drama’ are terms used to cover all writing of drama or a large number of plays. Thus, we speak of ‘European Drama’, or of ‘Shakespearean Drama’ or of ‘the Drama of the 17th century’. In this regard, sometimes the word is written with a capital letter, when it has the general meaning.

Plays have always been written primarily for performance in a theatre, and the development of drama through the ages has always been connected with the development of the theater, where the plays are performed, and the development of acting, the way in which they are performed. Drama is not simply literature. It is a composite art-form, a mixture of literature and visual art, speech and movement, story and spectacle.

Accordingly, unlike short stories and novels, a play-as already mentioned-can be regarded as a work of storytelling in which actors represent the characters. Besides, it is worth mentioning that a play is supposed to be seen by the spectators not read privately by the readers. In this sense, when we go to theater we will be affected by the responses by other theater goers around us. It is in theater that we become a part of ‘members of a community’. But, it should also be noted that reading a play, privately on our own, may have its own advantages. As it was already mentioned, it is in the printed version of a play that it will be enacted on the stage of the mind.

1.2 How to Read a Play

In reading a play, there are some other issues that should be taken into account along with mentally hearing the lines. We have to see the characters, costumes and setting, we have to hear not only their words but also their tone. In doing so, we have to construct and, then, perform the play in the theater of our minds.

In this sense, the first thing to note is to pay attention to the list of characters and carefully read the descriptions the playwright has provided for us. If we consider Shakespeare as our symptom of the early playwrights, one cannot find much description about the characters. On the contrary, later playwrights aim at providing more descriptions on the characters: i.e. Tennessee Williams in *The Glass Menagerie* introduces Amanda Wingfield in such a way:

“Amanda Wingfield, the mother. A little woman of great but confused vitality clinging frantically to another time and place”

Afterwards, we need to pay a close attention to gestures and costumes which are inherent in the dialogue of the characters and the stage directions. Costumes, that the characters wear, may refer to some specific facts or symbols regarding the type of character who wears them; i.e. characters as being kings, soldiers, peasants etc.

Subsequently, it is worth mentioning that we have to notice the type of theater for which the play has been written. In this regard, one may refer to the ancient Greek theater, for which Sophocles has written *Antigone* and *King Oedipus*, in which we deal with a space in which performers acted in front of an audience seated on a hillside. On the other hand, in a more modern sense, we deal with a darkened area for the theater in which the performers move in a boxlike setting.

The next significant thing regarding a play is its setting provided by the playwright; one has to envision the set clearly. Herein, you can find an example *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller:

“Before us is the Salesman’s house. We are aware of towering, angular shapes behind it, surrounding it on all sides. Only the blue light

of the sky falls upon the house and forestage; the surrounding area shows an angry glow of orange.”

By reading the above lines, the readers would significantly become familiarized with the locale and visualize the play in their minds. However, such a strategy is somehow not evident in early plays.

The next important thing that we have to notice regarding a play is what has been called as sound effects, which refers to any artificial reproduction of sound or sounds intended to accompany action and supply realism in the theatre. In this sense, one can remember *Death of a Salesman* when just before the curtain goes up, “a melody is heard, played upon a flute. It is small and fine, telling of grass and trees and the horizon”; herein, the sound of the flute clearly refers us back to the world that the salesman is shut off from.

Moreover, it can be said that the essence of drama is conflict. This does not mean that there must be a fight or argument in every play, but it does suggest that the need for at least two people. In this sense, drama depends essentially on the relationship between people, or between people and God, and events which rule their lives. This is the center of drama, just as it is the center of human life as we know it. Thus, in drama, we are shown what happens when human beings come into contact or conflict with one another. Every human being is different, even in little ways, from every other. Consequently, it is the drama which shows these different characters interacting with one another. From there, the plot-or story-which can be regarded as the framework of every play, is developed.

Herein, plot which has been regarded as the gist of the narrative can be referred to the way the writer aims at arranging the happening of the story. Like any other narrative, the plot of a play should have rising action, a climax and a falling action; accordingly, we have tensions which rise (resulting in crisis) through complication and, then, we have the climax in which the fate of the protagonist is determined. Finally, there is the ending or denouement in which the tensions slacken and come to an end.

1.3 Difference between Drama and other Literary Genres

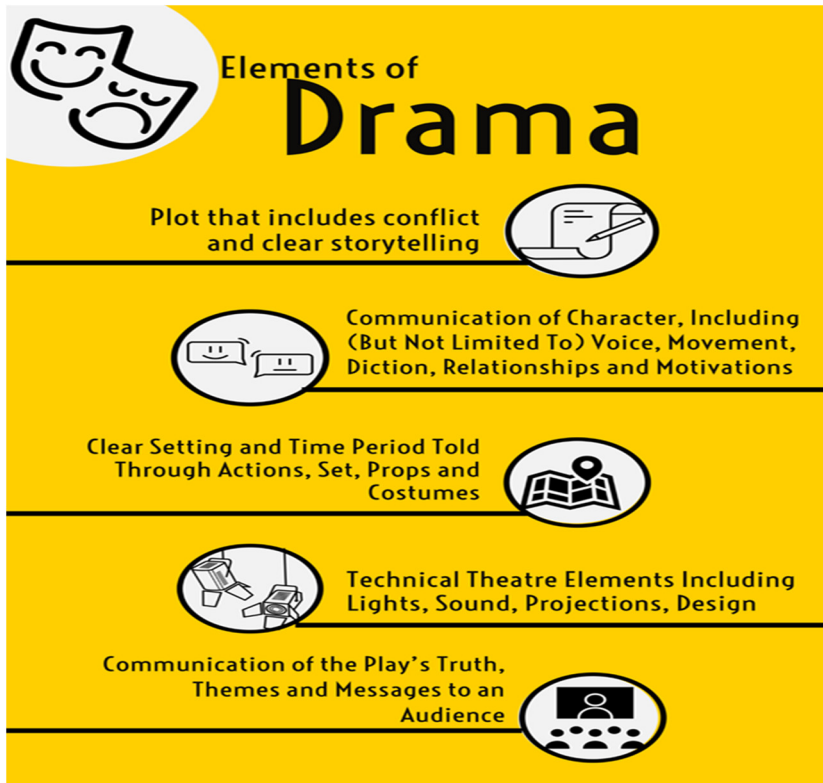
In contrast to any other work of art, as it was already mentioned, a dramatic work narrates actions and events in which actors represent the characters. However, it is worth mentioning that a play is clearly different from fiction or poetry. In this sense, it addresses not the readers but the spectators. When we experience ourselves in a theater and part of an audience, wholly different experience from that of reading a story in our solitude comes to the mind and touches our sensation. Accordingly, while the curtain rises, we become members of a same community. It is in theater that the responses of other people result in affecting our own responses. Unlike any other literary form, in theater, we contribute to the response of other people around us. Thus, we laugh, sigh, applaud, murmur in surprise, or catch our breath in excitement.

In comparison, when we are alone and watch a movie or read a novel, we won't experience the same type of feeling when we are surrounded by a roaring crowd. Moreover, any kind of theatrical experience has its advantages, i.e. actors in a play on stage will also affect the audience. Thus, herein, we deal with a kind of give-and-take strategy between the skilled actors and the audience being perceptive. In this sense, it is worth mentioning that good actors and a good audience respond to each other and this can be regarded as one of the most significant differences between drama and other literary genres.

Moreover, a play is more than actors and audience: it also uses language to convey the message. This manipulation of words makes it very much like a short story or a poem, a play is a work of art made of words. When it is performed on stage by the help of a wide variety of people-actors, director, producer, stage designer, costumer, makeup artist, technicians-we may even forget that the play is literature, for its gestures, facial expressions, bodily stances, lighting, and special effects are as much a part of it as the playwright's written words, they are its bones. Thus, we have to notice that the whole play, the finished production, is the total of whatever we see, hear and sense on stage. As it was already

mentioned, the main difference lies in the word action, as the word drama when followed to its roots suggest: Drama means “action” or “deed” (from the Greek dran, “to do”). We use drama as a synonym for plays, but, as it was already mentioned, the word has several meanings.

Another thing which is also very significant is the fact that drama often means events that elicit high excitement. In this regard, whatever is “dramatic” signifies suspense, tension, or conflict. Plays regularly contain specific “dramatic” chains of events by which spectators/readers would be able to experience suspense or conflict. Accordingly, “Good drama,” as George Jean Nathan has stated, “is anything that interests an intelligently emotional group of persons assembled together in an illuminated hall (122).” Besides, the above statement can be regarded as what distinguishes drama from all other literary genres.



Chapter 2

Classical Drama and its Nature

2.1 The Origins of Drama

There are a wide variety of arguments on how and where drama began. There always has been uncertainty about the origins of drama. This is not really surprising, when we consider that almost every civilization since the beginning of the world has had some form of drama, just as it had some form of music, art, or literature.

We cannot say who wrote the first play, or where it was performed. We cannot say in which country it appeared, or in what year. Like every other human expression, drama developed slowly, from obscure primitive beginnings, until at last people could see that it had taken a definite shape, and could be written and talked about, and given a name.

The forms of expression which led to the birth of drama were probably music, magic, dancing and ceremony. They came before drama, and drama grew out of them. The history of western drama may begin at about the mid-sixth century at Athens. Moreover, the period in which Greek drama was so productive can be said to be around the sixth to the mid-third century. However, the origin of drama and its starting point, as it was stated before, is vague and the notions about it are uncertain. Perhaps the origins of drama go back to the celebrities, music, religious sects, ceremonies, etc... But, we can be sure of one thing, drama grew out of them.

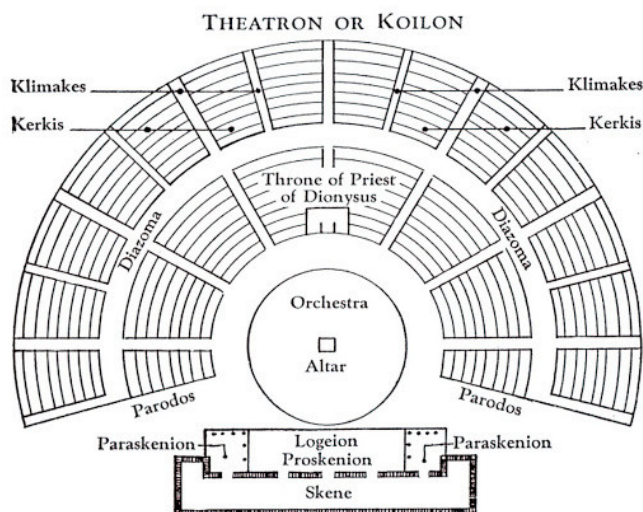
In addition, primitive people worshiped their gods and wanted them help having good harvest; all these were in the form of drama.

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Role playing activities in form of rituals or the like can be said to be part of every cultural activity in every civilization up to the present time. “But”, as Sommerstein claims, “we do not know how or where these performances metamorphosed into something that can truly be called *drama*-an enactment of a story in which each performer, or group of performers, represents a person or persons in the framework of the story, speaking or singing the words of a more or less fixed text” (1). Drama can be said to have its own history when the records of the dramatic contests were to be written down on stones. The same author states that.

The origins of drama were already disputed in Aristotle’s day. Our evidence suggests, however, that the crucial time was the sixth century BC, and the crucial area a strip of territory extending roughly east and west from Attica, through Megara and the Isthmus, to Sicyon and Phlius in the north-eastern Peloponnese (Ibid 1).

The earliest to a performance in any way close to our idea of drama was in Egypt, in the period 2000 or 3000 B.C. We hear of a play on the very common theme of a god being torn in pieces and then brought back to life, which in this case is commonly known as the Abydos Passion Play.



The ancient Greek Theatre

In Greece we are on a firmer ground, but even here the actual beginnings are very obscure. We do know that there was a god called Dionysus, to whom were sung and danced hymns of praise by a choir of fifty people.

This choir had a leader. At some point in time this leader began to step out from the rest of the choir and speak to them, so the hymn became dialogue, or conversation between the leader and his choir. Before long he began to represent more than one person, and then a man called Thespis in the sixth century B.C. introduced an actor, apart from the chorus and its leader, who took different parts by wearing masks to represent the person whose part he was playing. The chorus was still there, but instead of telling the whole story in their song, they now only filled in the story between the dialogue of the actor and the chorus leader. At last, drama as we understand it had arrived.

It is worth mentioning that, according to Storley and Allan, drama evolved from what can be said "choral performances" in which we can see a mixture of song and dance, "allegedly the dithyramb for tragedy, dancing satyrs for satyr-drama, and perhaps animal-choruses, ..., or padded dancers for comedy" (7).

2.2 Ancient Greece

It was in Greece that drama began and continued in the open air. Their actors and singers performed within a circle at the foot of a hill, while all the spectators sat around the sides of the hill to watch. The construction gradually became more elaborate, but the general idea never changed.

It began with festivals, days of great public rejoicing, at which groups of people danced and sang songs of praise to the gods in front of the whole population of the district, perhaps on account of a good harvest or victory over enemies. From these ceremonies the Greek drama developed, and for over two thousand years since then the drama of European civilization has been based on it. It is worth mentioning that as Ancient Greece developed a mighty civilization, the drama

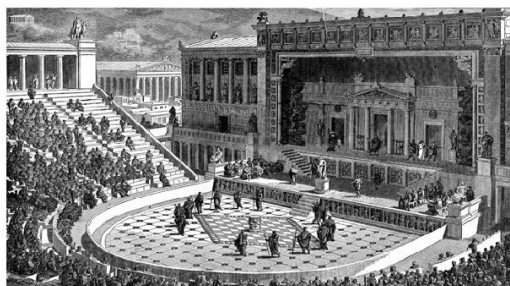
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developed with it. Then, later, as this civilization began to fall apart, so did the drama decline and fall.

It is clear that once drama had grown out of singing, dancing and ceremony and been recognized as a real new form of expression, festivals of drama were soon organized. These were competitions, probably similar to the drama festivals which are held today. It is worth mentioning that the works of four authors of this time have come down to us: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes.

At Athens, drama was mainly performed at two of the festivals honoring the god Dionysos, the City Dionysia and the Lenaia. The performances were mainly religious expressions. Moreover, "while the festivals honored the god Dionysos and the plays performed in a theater adjoining his sacred precinct, they were also state occasions run by the public officials of Athens, part of the communal life of the city (*polis*)" (Storey and Allan 14). In the Athenian month of Elaphebolion, the City Dionysia saw a five days festival: in the Preliminaries of the festival we have a *proagon* (or a precontest) on 8 Elaphebolion in which the poets, actors and the chorus talked to the people and gave information about their compositions. Then, the spectators are presented with the introduction of Dionysos on 9 Elaphebolion in which we have "the taking of Dionysos' status from the precinct of his temple to the academy on the north-west outskirts of Athens where the road from Eleutherai approached the city" (Ibid 15).

City Dionysia



The City Dionysia, ca. 430 BC

Preliminaries: 8 Elaphebolion Proagon

9 Elaphebolion "Introduction" of Dionysos

Events: 10 Elaphebolion Parade (pompe)

Dithyrambic contests (men & boys)

11 Elaphebolion Comic contest (5 poets, 1 play each)

12 Elaphebolion Tragedian A (3 tragedies, 1 satyr-drama)

13 Elaphebolion Tragedian B (3 tragedies, 1 satyr-drama)

14 Elaphebolion Tragedian C (3 tragedies, 1 satyr-drama)

Awarding of the prizes, parade of the victors

The physical form of ancient theatre and the ways of its performance were in extreme divergences from our modern theatre and performance. The ancient theaters were built at the foot of a hill in the open air and the spectators sat around the sides of the hill to watch. As it was already mentioned, the beginning of drama goes back to the days of festivals and celebrations to praise gods.

It is generally agreed that the basis Greek drama – on which the drama European civilization has been based for two thousand years – would have sprang out of such ceremonies. It is worth mentioning that the ancient Greek drama and philosophy have also influenced Europe's other modes of thinking and ways of life of which one of the literary movements in Europe called neoclassicism is directly related to.

Greek drama during its classical flourish was written in three distinct genres: tragedy or serious drama (534 BC), satyr-drama (ca. 500BC), and comedy (486 BC). Of dramatists, the works of four authors only survived, three wrote tragedies and one wrote comedy. For this reason, we, now, know more about Greek tragedy than we do about Greek comedy. Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides wrote tragedies while Aristophanes attempted to write comedies.