Drama as a literary genre
The features of a dramatic text
Drama as a literary genre

1. The structure

A play consists of a number of acts divided into scenes. All Shakespearian plays are made up of five acts:

- Act 1: introduction
- Act 2: development
- Act 3: crisis or turning point
- Act 4: complications
- Act 5: denouement = the resolving of all difficulties
1. The structure

**Elizabethan tragedies:**

- are generally introduced by a *prologue*, spoken by the *chorus*
  - provides information about the main character / the subject of the play

- often end with an *epilogue*
  - requests applause
  - is usually played by a central character
Stage directions are the instructions a playwright gives to the director and the actors about how a play should be staged.

They provide information about

1. the setting;
2. the characters’ actions and movements;
3. the style of acting.

_Exeunt all but TITANIA [and the sentinel]. Enter Oberon. He drops the juice on TITANIA’s eyelids._

(W. Shakespeare, _A Midsummer Night’s Dream_, Act 2, Sc II)
3. Characters

The number of characters, which in the past were called *Drámatis Personae*, may vary but always includes:

- a **hero**, the protagonist of the play who is not necessarily “heroic”, noble and brave;
- a **heroine**, the play’s main female character;
- an **antagonist**, who is the hero’s main opponent, usually the play’s **villain**.

Characters can be divided into *main* or *minor* according to how important they are for the story.
Drama as a literary genre

3. Characters

The character can be introduced through

- **dialogue**, that is, his interaction with other characters;
- **Soliloquies and monologues**, which reveal his thoughts, feelings and personality;
- **Asides** (short comments made to the audience);
- **stage directions**
Drama as a literary genre

4. Dramatic techniques

**Dialogue** is the main support of drama since:

- it creates the action;
- it provides details about the characters and their relationships;
- it contributes to theme development;
- it gives information about the past;
- it can foreshadow subsequent events;
- it may be built to cause specific reactions in the audience.
Drama as a literary genre

4. Dramatic techniques

**Soliloquy** and **monologue** are special conventions of Elizabethan drama.

- **Soliloquy**
  - the character is alone on the stage

- **Monologue**
  - there are other characters but the speaker ignores them

These devices enable the playwright to let the audience know:
- the character’s thoughts about a specific problem;
- the character’s plans for the future;
- the character’s feelings and reactions;
- the character’s explanation of what happens between scenes.
Asides are short comments made by a character for the audience alone, usually occurring in or between speeches.

Their purposes are:
- to reveal the nature of the speaker,
- to draw the attention of the audience to the importance of what has been said;
- to explain developments;
- to create humour by introducing the unexpected.