

The Three Unities - Drama

the Aristotelian rules

The **classical unities** or **three unities** in drama are:

- The *unity of action*: a play should have one main action that it follows, with no or few subplots.
- The *unity of place*: a play should cover a single physical space and should not attempt to compress geography, nor should the stage represent more than one place.
- The *unity of time*: the action in a play should take place over no more than 24 hours.

The unity of time

- The unity of time limits the supposed action to the duration, roughly, of a single day; unity of place limits it to one general locality; and the unity of action limits it to a single set of incidents which are related as cause and effect, "having a beginning, a middle, and an end." Concerning the unity of time, Aristotle noted that all the plays since Aeschylus, except two, did illustrate such unity, but he did not lay down such a precept as obligatory.

The unity of place

- Perhaps tacitly he assumed that the observance of the unity of place would be the practice of good playwrights, since the chorus was present during the whole performance, and it would indeed be awkward always to devise an excuse for moving fifteen persons about from place to place.

The unity of action

The third unity, that of action, is bound up with the nature not only of Greek but of all drama.

Examples of the Classical Plays

Sophocles'

- *Oedipus the King*
- *Antigone*