

The plot can also contain an INSET or INTERPOLATED [ɪn'tɜ:pəʊleɪtɪd] play or story (a play or story within the main play or story). The terms EMBEDDING or FRAMING or NESTING are also used when a story or a sequence of events is inserted into another. Sometimes, a novel (then called a FRAME STORY) can be made up of a succession of FRAMED STORIES, as in Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1349-1351) for example, in which ten characters who find themselves together pass the time by telling stories. A similar structure is to be found in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (1387).

The effect of the subplot or of an embedded story can be of:

- COUNTERPOINT if it provides a contrasting idea, theme or plot which can set off the ideas, themes or plot of the main story;
- PARALLELISM or ANALOGY [ə'nælədʒɪ] if there are similarities between the subplot and the main plot so that the theme is enlarged.

Many works of fiction also contain long DIGRESSIONS [daɪ'ɡreɪʃn] (e.g. Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760-67)) which can, at least superficially, undermine the unity of the work. A very long digression is sometimes called an excursus.

GAP or ELLIPSIS in the narrative occurs when some elements (for example, a sequence in the action) are omitted.

3. THE PATTERN OF THE PLOT

THE PATTERN OF THE PLOT, that is to say the structure of the actions, can be:

- LINEAR or EPISODIC if it consists of a sequence of events following each other in what may seem a loose and haphazard way, without any sense of necessity, as in many picaresque novels;
- DRAMATIC if, as Aristotle advocated, there are strong causal links between events which move towards a CLIMAX, then towards the DENOUEMENT [deɪ'nu:mɑ:nt] (= the resolution of the plot, when the action comes to a conclusion and all the loose ends are finally tied up; e.g. when the villain is punished or the hero gets married).

In *Technik des Dramas* (1863), the German critic Freytag suggested the following structure in the form of a pyramid. Originally an outline of the structure of tragedy, the pyramid is often used to describe fiction as well.

