

book form. The first (undated) *cancionero de romances* was published in Antwerp; presumably before 1550 – the date of the second. Followed by *romanceros* (*q.v.*), beginning in 1551 with Sepúlveda's. There were also *silvas de romances* and *rosas de romances*.

ploce (Gk 'plaited, woven') A figurative device in which the same word (or words) is repeated. It also denotes the complication of a dramatic plot. See also INCREMENTAL REPETITION.

plot The plan, design, scheme or pattern of events in a play, poem or work of fiction; and, further, the organization of incident and character in such a way as to induce curiosity and suspense (*q.v.*) in the spectator or reader. In the space/time continuum of plot the continual question operates in three tenses: Why did that happen? Why is this happening? What is going to happen next – and why? (To which may be added: And – is *anything* going to happen?)

In *Poetics*, Aristotle includes plot as one of the six elements in tragedy (*q.v.*). For Aristotle it is the 'first principle' and 'the soul of a tragedy'. He calls plot 'the imitation of the action', as well as the arrangement of the incidents. He required a plot to be 'whole' (that is, to have a beginning, a middle and an end) and that it should have unity, namely 'imitate one action and that a whole, the structural union of the parts being such that, if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed.'

This is the ideal, well-knit plot which Aristotle distinguished from the episodic plot in which the acts succeed one another 'without probable or necessary sequence', and which he thought was inferior. Aristotle also distinguished between simple and complex plots: in the simple the change of fortune occurs without peripeteia (*q.v.*) and without anagnorisis (*q.v.*), whereas in the complex there is one or the other or both. Aristotle also emphasized the importance of plot as opposed to character.

His views will be adequate for some Greek tragedy, some Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy and some French Classical tragedy, and elements of the application of Aristotle's theories can be found in many plays – and novels.

However, a plot has come to denote something much more flexible than that envisaged by Aristotle. The decline of tragedy, the rise of comedy, the development of the novel – all have contributed to a much looser conception and many varied theories.

A more homely approach than Aristotle's is that of E. M. Forster. In *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) he provided a simple but very serviceable description of plot: 'We have defined a story as a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence. A plot is also a narrative of

events, the emphasis falling on causality. "The king died and the queen died," is a story. "The king died and then the queen died of grief," is a plot. The time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it. Or again: "The queen died, no one knew why, until it was discovered that it was through grief at the death of the king." This is a plot with a mystery in it, a form capable of high development. It suspends the time-sequence, it moves as far away from the story as its limitations will allow.'

Such a description will suffice to cover a very large number of plots, especially those in which causality among episodes is explicit or implied. It will certainly cover an enormous number of novels. On the other hand no theory or definition of plot can now cover adequately the variety of works by, say, Joyce, Bulgakov, Graham Greene, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Heinrich Böll, Michel Butor, William Burroughs, Robbe-Grillet and Len Deighton – to take a handful of very different writers at random; or, for that matter, Kafka, Arnold Bennett, Malcolm Lowry, Ivo Andrić, Eric Ambler, Nabokov, Saul Bellow, Grass, Bykov, Claude Simon and V. S. Naipaul. See SUB-PLOT.

Plough Monday play, the In English folk-festivals Plough Monday is the Monday after Twelfth Night. The play, which is related to the Mumming (or St George) Play, survives in a few fragmentary texts from the East Midlands. The play differs from the Mumming Play in several respects. The characters are Tom the Fool, a Recruiting Sergeant, a Ribboner or Recruit, three farm servants, a Doctor and Beelzebub; plus two women, the Young Lady and old Dame Jane. The play (like the St George play) in all probability symbolizes the death and resurrection of the year and may well be the survival of a fertility rite. See also MUMMING PLAY; PACE-EGGING PLAY; REVESBY PLAY.

pluralist criticism This entails a critical approach to literature by which a text is studied with an open mind and thus without any necessary or apparent commitment to an ideological position or stance. Most importantly it expresses the willingness to hold more than one position. Structuralist critics have expressed disapproval of this approach. Many Marxist critics – who tend to be committed to a position – would also disapprove. See MARXIST CRITICISM; STRUCTURALISM.

plurisignation A term (it means, literally, several or many signs or marks) used by Wheelwright in *The Burning Fountain* (1954) to indicate that a word, a passage or a whole work may have various levels and meanings of what is described as 'semantic thrust'. This instrument of critical jargon can be useful in the work of close analysis. See ALLEGORY; ALLUSION; AMBIGUITY; FOUR LEVELS OF MEANING.