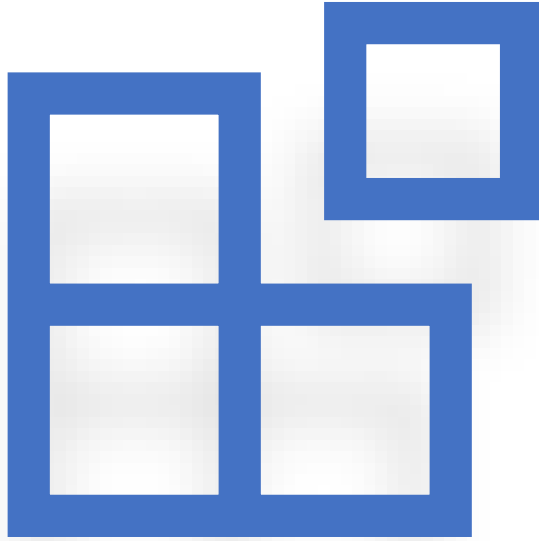


Banha University - Faculty of Arts  
English Department  
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Introduction to Criticism  
Lecture 6

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# Elements of Drama

# Plot

- Plot denotes the way events are arranged in a work of literature. Although the accepted conventions of drama require that the plot of a play be presented somewhat differently from the plot of a short story, the same components of plot are present in both. As in a short story, plot in a dramatic work presents conflicts that are revealed, intensified, and resolved during the course of the play.
- a play typically begins with exposition, which presents characters and setting and introduces the basic situation in which the characters are involved. Then, during the rising action, the action builds in intensity. Complications develop, conflicts emerge, suspense builds, and crises occur. The rising action culminates in a climax, at which point the plot's tension peaks. Finally, during the falling action, the intensity subsides, eventually winding down to a resolution, or denouement, in which all loose ends are tied up.

# Subplot

- While the main plot is developing, another, parallel plot, called a subplot, may be developing alongside it. This structural device is common in the works of Shakespeare, and it is used in many other plays as well. The subplot's function may not immediately be clear, so at first it may draw attention away from the main plot.

# Plot development

- In a dramatic work plot unfolds through action, what characters say and do. Generally, a play does not include a narrator whose commentary ensures that events will move along smoothly. Instead, exchanges of dialogue reveal what is happening-and, sometimes, indicate what has happened in the past or suggest what will happen in the future. Characters can recount past events to other characters, announce an intention to take some action in the future, or summarize events that are occurring offstage.

# On the printed page,

- stage directions chronicle entrances and exits and identify the play's structural divisions-acts and scenes-and their accompanying changes of setting. Such directions efficiently move readers from one location and time period to another. Certain staging techniques can also move the play's action along. A change in lighting, for instance, can efficiently shift viewer focus to another part of the stage-and thus to another place and time. Similarly, an adjustment of scenery or props-for instance, a breakfast table, complete with morning paper, replacing a bedtime setting-can indicate that the action has moved forward in time, as can a change of costumes.

# Flashbacks

- Unlike incidents related in short stories or novels, incidents presented in plays are presented in the order in which they occur. However, many plays-such as *The Glass Menagerie* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* -include flashbacks, which depict events that precede the play's main action. In addition, dialogue can overcome the limitations of the chronological action on stage by recounting events that occurred earlier.

# Foreshadowing

- In addition to revealing past events, dialogue can foreshadow, or look ahead to, future action. In many cases, seemingly unimportant comments have thematic significance that becomes clear as the play develops. Elements of staging can also suggest events to come. Various bits of stage business-gestures or movements designed to attract the audience's attention-may also foreshadow future events.



# Characters

- Plays, however, do not include narrators who present background. Instead, readers learn about characters from the characters' own words, comments by others about them, the characters' actions, and the playwright's stage directions. Viewers at a performance have the added advantage of learning from the actors' interpretations of the characters.

# Characters in plays,

- may be round or flat, static or dynamic. Generally speaking, major characters are likely to be round, while minor characters are apt to be flat. Through the play's language and the actions of the characters, readers learn whether the characters are multidimensional, skimpily developed, or perhaps merely foils, players whose main purpose is to shed light on more important characters. Readers also learn about the emotions, attitudes, and values that help to shape the characters—their hopes and fears, their strengths and weaknesses.

# Dialogue

- The dialogue reveals the most about the character his or her attitudes, feelings, beliefs, and values. For example, a monologue- an extended speech by one character- can reveal the character's feelings, communicating information to other characters and to the audience. In addition, dialogue-an exchange of words between two characters- can reveal misunderstanding or conflict between them, or it can show their agreement, their mutual support, or their similar beliefs. Character's words can convey information important to the play's action and to the development of its theme.

# Dialogue can be....

plain and unadorned, or it can be quite elaborate in style, with figurative language such as similes and other imaginative comparisons embellishing a character's words. Depending on the context of a speech and on the other characters' language, the complexity or lack of complexity can have different effects. A character whose language is simple and down-to-earth may seem to be unintelligent, unenlightened, gullible, or naive-especially if the character also uses slang, dialect, or colloquial expressions. Conversely, a character's plain language can convey common sense or intelligence. Plain language can also be quite emotionally powerful.

# elaborate language.....

- Like plain speech, elaborate language may have different effects in different contexts. Figurative language can add to a character's nobility, making him or her seem to have depth and insight and analytical skills absent in other characters. In the following excerpt from a soliloquy from Shakespeare's Hamlet view how complex language reveals Hamlet's tendency to engage in self-analysis.

# A soliloquy

- a speech revealing a character's thoughts and feelings, directed at the audience and presumed not to be heard by other characters-can also convey information about a character. Hamlet's well-known soliloquy that begins "To be or not to be" eloquently communicates his distraught mental state-his resentment toward his mother and uncle, his confusion about what kind of action to take, his suicidal thoughts.

# STAGING

- staging is a key element of drama, and details that are seen and heard-such as costumes, props, scenery, lighting, and music and sound effects-often reinforce the theme 'of the play or communicate important information about characters.



# In addition,

- stage directions may supply physical details about the characters, suggesting their age, appearance, movements, gestures, relative positions, and facial expressions. These details may in turn convey additional information about characters: Appearance may reveal social position or economic status; expressions may reveal attitudes, and so on. Stage directions may also indicate the manner in which a line of dialogue is to be delivered-haltingly, confidently, hesitantly, or loudly



# The concept of staging has changed markedly over the years.

- Like the ancient Greek theater, the Elizabethan theater used almost no scenery or props-although elaborate costumes were common. Occasionally, an actor carried a sword or a crown, or a painted tree, a table, or a decorative backdrop graced the stage, but the settings were neither as detailed nor as realistic as those of the contemporary theater. Settings in Elizabethan plays were commonly indicated by speeches. In *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, the physical location of the play is established in a prologue spoken before the action of the play begins.

# In the nineteenth century

- a device that used an ox hydrogen flame directed on a cylinder of lime created extremely bright illumination that could, with the aid of a lens, be concentrated into a spotlight. It is from this method of stage lighting that we get the expression to be in the limelight. Eventually, in the twentieth century, electric lights created a dependable and safe way of lighting the stage. Electric spotlights, footlights, and ceiling light bars made the actors clearly visible and enabled playwrights to create special effects.

# In the first decades of the twentieth century,

- some playwrights reacted against what they saw as the excesses of realism. Instead, they used surrealistic stage settings, in which color and scenery were designed to mirror the uncontrolled images of dreams, and expressionistic stage settings, in which costumes and scenery were exaggerated and distorted to reflect the workings of a troubled, even unbalanced mind. In addition, playwrights used lighting to create areas of light, shadow, and color that further reinforced the themes of the play or the mental state of the protagonist.

# Theme

- Like the text of a short story or a novel, the text of a play is open to interpretation. Readers' reactions are influenced by the language of the text, and audiences' reactions are affected by the performance on stage. Just as in fiction, each element of a play-its title, its conflicts, its dialogue, its characters, and its staging, for instance-can shed light on its themes.