

Chapter 3: The Play

- The *Play* is:
 - Starting point for theatrical production
 - Entity that remains intact after production
 - Blueprint for production or for reader's imagination


The play may serve as the basis for numerous productions, which may or may not be similar in style.

The Play

- While the *Play* and the *Production* are connected closely, they are separate entities.
- Plays:
 - considered *Dramatic Literature*
 - often taught separately from *Theatre*
 - most fully experienced during *Production*



On Reading a Play

- How does reading a play differ from reading other types of literature?
 - Requires reader to *envision* the action
 - Requires reader to *synthesize* information from a variety of sources, including:
 - *Stage Directions*
 - *Dialogue*
 - *Character Interaction*
 - *What is Unspoken*
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Dramatic Action

According to Aristotle

- *Play* = a representation of human beings in **action**
- *Action* = **what** characters do and **why** they do it

According to Francis Fergusson

- Dramatic Action builds through 3 steps:
 1. *Purpose*: awareness of desire or goal
 2. *Passion*: strength of desire or passion to fulfill goal
 3. *Perception*: understanding that comes from struggle

Dramatic Action


Characteristics of Effective Dramatic Action

- Complete and Self-Contained: beginning, middle, end
- Deliberate Shape or Organization that reveals Purpose
- Variety
- Engages and Maintains Interest
- Internal Consistency



Methods of Organizing Dramatic Action

A play is composed of incidents organized to accomplish a purpose.



Methods of Organizing Dramatic Action

Most Common Sources of Unity:

- *Cause-to-Effect*: logical progression of actions/events
- *Character*: all events focus on one character
- *Thought*: scenes linked by central theme or idea

Other Sources of Unity:

- Dominant *Mood*
- Visual *Style*
- Distinctive Use of *Language*

Methods of Organizing Dramatic Action

The 6 Parts of Drama, defined by Aristotle:

- *Plot*
- *Character*
- *Thought*
- *Diction*
- *Music*
- *Spectacle*

Plot

- Summary of a play's incidents
- Organization of all elements into a meaningful pattern
- Overall structure of play

Two Most Common Plot Structures:

- *Episodic*: jumps from scene to scene, early point of attack, treats character or concern, creates a broad perspective
- *Climactic*: cause-to-effect action, late point of attack, creates sense of compression or dramatic tension

Plot


The Beginning

- Establishes:
 - place, occasion, characters, mood, theme, internal logic
- *Exposition*
 - The setting forth of information about earlier events, identity, relationships, etc.
- *Point of Attack*
 - The moment at which the story is taken up
 - Earlier point of attack = need less exposition
 - Later point of attack = need more exposition



Plot

The Beginning

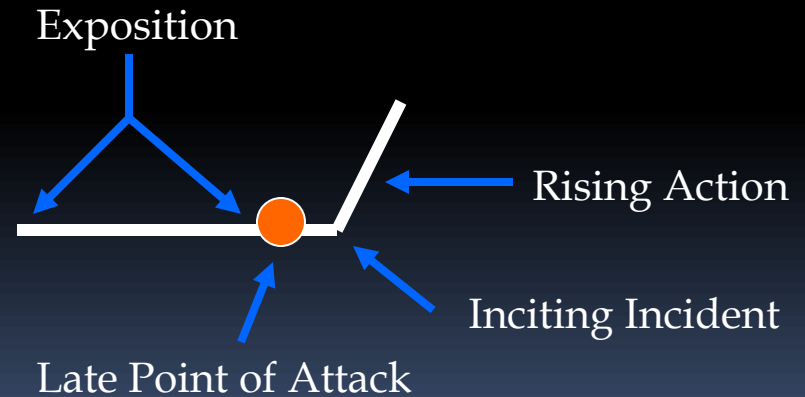
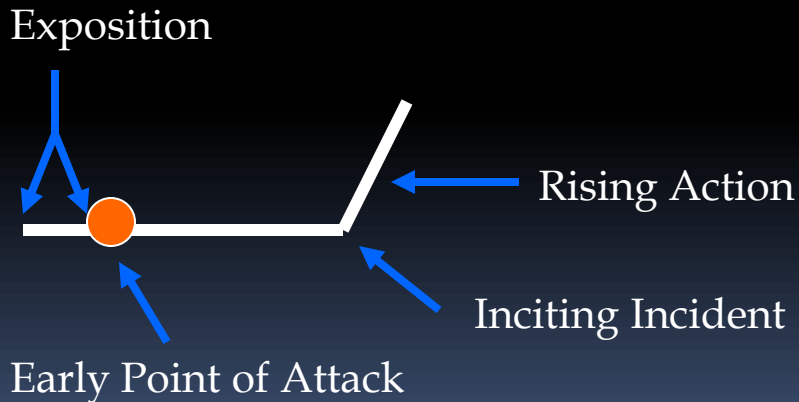
- *Inciting Incident*
 - An occurrence that sets the main action in motion and leads to:
 - *Major Dramatic Question*
 - A central question that drives the action forward
 - Example: “What will the character do now?”
 - Question may change as action progresses
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Plot

The Beginning

- *Exposition*

- The amount of exposition is determined by the relationship between the *Point of Attack* and the *Inciting Incident*



Plot

The Middle

- *Complication*

- Any new element that changes the direction of the action
- Series of Complications = *Rising Action*


- *Discovery*

- Any new information of sufficient importance to alter the direction of action
- Substance of most Complications



Plot

The Middle

- *Climax*
 - Rising Action culminates in Climax
 - Highest point of interest or suspense
 - Climax often accompanied or preceded by Crisis
 - *Crisis*
 - Discovery or event that leads to the climax and determines the outcome of the action
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Plot

The End

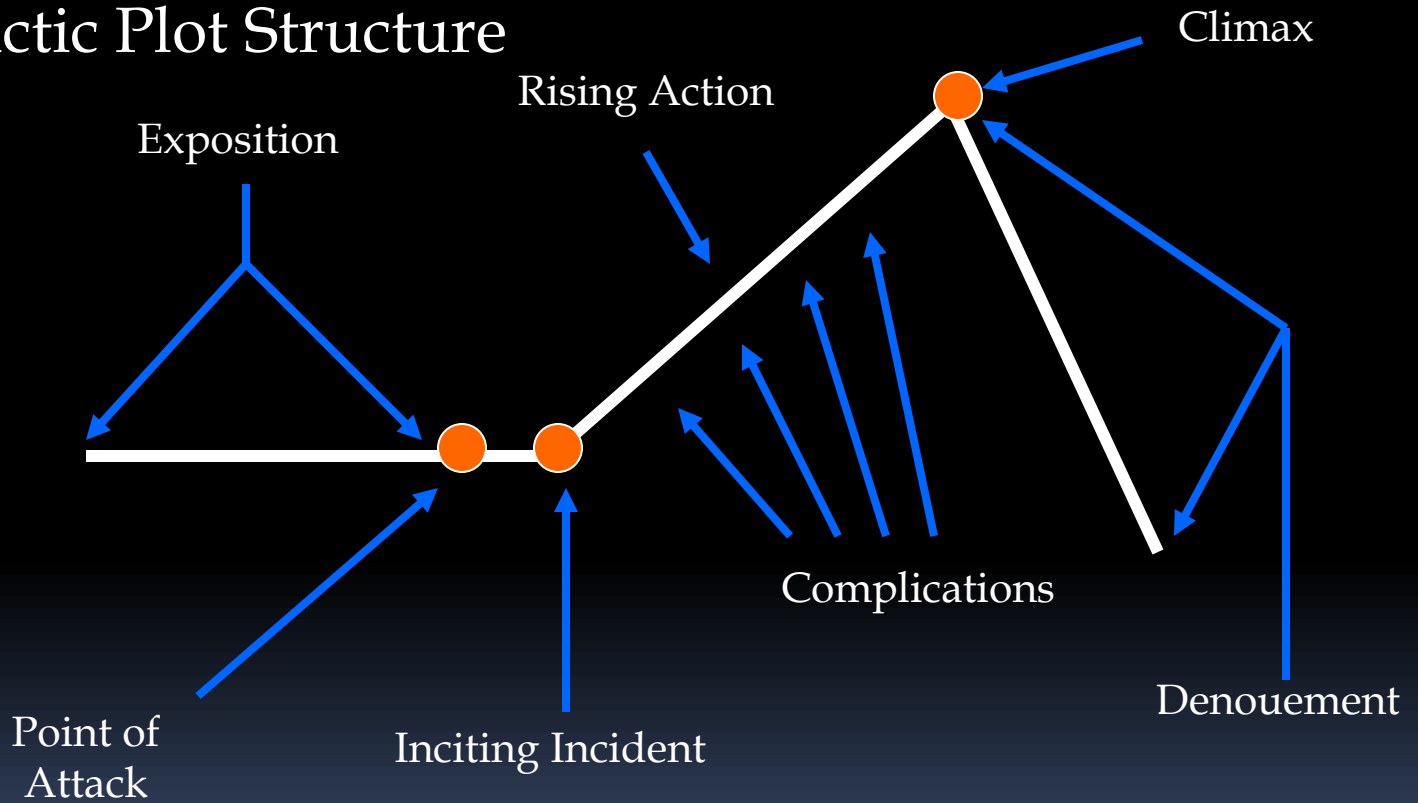
- *Resolution or Denouement*
 - Unraveling or untying
 - The dramatic question has been resolved

Other Attributes of Plot

- 
- *Subplots*
 - Events or actions of secondary interest

Plot

Climactic Plot Structure



Character

- *Characterization*

- Anything that delineates a person or differentiates that person from others

- *Four Levels of Characterization*

1. Physical or Biological: gender, age, size, race, appearance
2. Societal: economic status, religion, relationships
3. Psychological: habitual responses, desires, motivations
4. Moral: morals as reflected by choices and decisions

Character

- How is *Character* Revealed?
 1. Through *Stage Directions*, Prefaces, Other Materials
 2. Through what the Character *Says*
 3. Through what *Others Say* about the Character
 4. Through what the Character *Does*

- **Something to Think About:** Imagine that you are playing the role of Yourself. How is your character revealed by the 4 elements listed above?

Thought

Thought includes:

- Themes, arguments, overall *meaning* of the action
- *Meaning* is suggested by:
 - Relationships among characters
 - Ideas associated with unsympathetic and sympathetic characters
 - Conflicts and their resolution
 - Devices such as spectacle, music, song

Meaning in drama is usually implied rather than stated directly.




Thought

- Although a play implies or states *Meaning*, this does not mean that there is a single correct interpretation for the play.
- Most plays permit *multiple interpretations*.
- Each interpretation should be supported by evidence within the script.



Sound and Spectacle


To convey *Plot, Character, and Thought* playwrights have at their disposal two means:

- *Sound*
 - All aural element of a production
 - *Spectacle*
 - All visual elements of a production
- 



Sound


Diction = Language

- The playwright's primary tool for communication
 - Purposes of *Diction*:
 - to impart information
 - to characterize
 - to direct attention to important plot elements
 - to reveal themes and ideas of the play
 - to establish tone or mood
 - to establish internal logic
 - to establish tempo and rhythm
- 



Sound


How is effective diction judged?

- Appropriateness to:
 - Characters
 - Situation
 - Internal Logic
 - Type of Play
- 



Sound


Music (as used here) = all patterned sound

- Includes the *Sounds of the Actors' Voices*:
 - Pitch
 - Stress
 - Volume
 - Tempo
 - Duration
 - Quality
- 




Sound

Music (as used here) = all patterned sound

- Includes *Music*:
 - Incidental songs
 - Background music
 - Integrated song
 - Integrated instrumental accompaniment
- 




Sound

- Purposes of *Music*:
 - to establish mood
 - to characterize
 - to suggest ideas
 - to compress characterization
 - to compress exposition
 - to lend variety
 - to add pleasure
- 



Spectacle

- *Spectacle* = all visual elements of production
 - Includes:
 - Movement of characters
 - Spatial Relationships of characters
 - Lighting
 - Settings
 - Costumes
 - Properties
 - Special Effects
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Form in Drama

Form = the shape given to something for a particular purpose

▪ *Some Forms of Drama:*

- Tragedy
- Comedy
- Tragicomedy
- Melodrama
- Farce

▪ The 2 most basic forms


- *Tragedy*
- *Comedy*

Plays are classified into *Forms*
based on:

- types of action
- overall tone
- basic emotional appeals



Tragedy


- Oldest form of Drama
 - Presents genuinely serious action
 - Maintains serious tone
 - May contain moments of comic relief
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Tragedy

- Raises significant issues about:
 - Human existence
 - Morality
 - Human relationships
- *Protagonist* (leading character) arouses audience's sympathy or admiration but encounters disaster in pursuit of goal
- Associated especially with:
 - *Ancient Greece*
 - *Elizabethan England*



Comedy

- Origins in Ancient Greece
 - Based on a deviation from normality in action, character, or thought
 - Maintains tone of “in fun”
 - Requires audience to view situation and events objectively
 - Any subject can be the topic of a Comedy if the audience can distance itself sufficiently from serious implications of the action
- 




Other Forms

Tragicomedy

- A serious play that ends happily

Farce

- A light dramatic work in which highly improbable plot situations, exaggerated characters, and often slapstick elements are used for humorous effect
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Other Forms

Melodrama


- A mixed form
- Develops a temporarily serious action that is initiated by villain
- Depicts world with clear differentiation of good and evil
- Audience desires to see good win over evil
- Destroying the villain's power results in happy resolution
- Most popular form of Theatre in the 19th century

Concern for giving formal labels to Plays has diminished considerably, as many contemporary plays mix formal elements and characteristics.



Style in Drama


Style

- Results from a distinctive mode of expression or method of presentation
 - May stem from traits connected with:
 - Period
 - Nation
 - Esthetic Movement
 - Author
- 



Style in Theatre

Style

- Results from 3 Basic Influences:
 - Assumptions about Truth and Value
 - Manner of Expression
 - Production Style
- 



Making Connections:

Part I presents some basic issues of theatre, including: its nature and function; its relationship to other forms of art; criteria for judging theatrical performances; and how plays are structured

Consider the materials covered so far as you address the following questions:

1. Why do people create Theatre?
 2. What attracts audiences to Theatre performances?
 3. What makes one production seem better to us than another?
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