



KEY ELEMENTS OF DRAMA

Navbahor Iskandarova

UzSWLU 2nd Faculty. The department of Teaching English in Integrated Ways
iskandarovanavbahor@gmail.com

Abstract

This article illustrates the fundamental components, that are essential in creating drama, and changes in defining them.

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This article deals with defining the elements of drama and changes in defining them. Separating the elements of drama was first advanced by Aristotle. From the point of view of Aristotle there are five basic elements of drama which help to form a perfect drama. They are: Imitation, Plot, Action, Dialogue and Character.

First and foremost component of drama is imitation which helps to portray the actions true to life. Aristotle puts forward the view that people tend to have imitative characters. One can deny that animals also emulate to each other. In accordance with Aristotle's views people, as opposed to animals, are the most talented and artistically inclined creatures which might receive initial steps of living via imitation. Likewise, Martin Esslin also claims that imitation is the act of copying a subject or an object. "In simple terms, imitation means the act of copying somebody or something. It is an act of copying the way somebody talks and behaves, especially to entertain" [1976; 23]. On the other hand, there is a contradictory views in National Open University of Nigeria 'Elements of Drama' that drama is not literal reflection of real life since it is highly impossible to find exact details of everyday life in drama. According to John Dryden, literature may be copy of human actions but he also argues that drama cannot be a replica of human nature. In his views, imitation of an object should implicate the amplifying of its value to make it lovely. "Literature imitates human actions. However it should be noted that drama is not a reproduction or copy of human nature. It is an imitation which is true to nature in a broad sense. Imitation of a thing should involve the heightening of its quality to make it beautiful. In other words, the poet's creative efforts come into play to make a literary piece rise above the servile copy of reality." [2015; 2(2): 255-257]. In ancient times imitation was copying the reality, people's actions but modern drama does not coincide with ancient ones since postmodern era shows even serious issues playfully as in S. Becket's "Waiting for Godot" or John Osborne's "Look Back In Anger"

The second constituent of a drama is plot which is defined as a plan of actions. There are a lot of works that were created to define what is drama, its components and one of them is The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary describes plot as a "plan or line of events of a story especially of a novel or a story" but the first attempt to define a not only plot in general but also dramatic plot was made by Aristotle who claims that plot is the procedure of the events. Similarly, Martin Esslin also develops the claim that plot in drama is not presenting only actions but actors in action. Plot advances throughout the actions of characters, through their ways of saying and doing something or what is said and done to them.



Scholes R. and C. H. Klaus' view also coincides with M. Esslin's stating that plot is intentionally organized set of actions interrelated to each other for the purpose of bringing out a complex dramatic aims, it includes every action that may happen in a play. The whole of events must be a related replica of the reality "...a wholly interconnected system of events, deliberately selected and arranged, in order to fulfill a complex set of dramatic purposes and theatrical conditions... it comprises everything which takes place in the imaginative world of the play. And the totality of the events must create a coherent imitation of the world"[1971; 65]. The incidents should be well-arranged and there should be coherent relation between the actions. It should create an effect on the audience. Plot is divided into two types according to the theme: main plot which contains main conflict and sub-plot which is defined as minor conflicts that lead to a main conflict. Similarly, Abrahams also claims that sub plot is helpful to widen the audience's perception on the main plot. A good play should contain both types of plot because sub-plot helps to understand the play better. Aristotle divides plot into two types: unified and episodic. By unified plot he means logically well-arranged plot which any event cannot be easily removed. If some events are removed the play loses its logicity. The episodic plot is opposite to unified plot that some events can be dropped because it does not destroy the logicity of a play. In order to create an episodic plot all events should happen around one hero. "Death of a Salesman" by A. Miller is a best example for this kind of plot. Modern drama has another type of plot that is flashback plot. The beginning of such kind of dramas is different from others since it begins with the end or mid of the play then moves to the beginning of the conflict.

The third component of drama is action. Simply, action can be defined as movements like running, jumping but in drama it is a set of logically organized activities and its purpose is to evoke in the audience some kind of feelings. Oscar Brockett defines dramatic action like this "...series of incidents that are logically arranged by the playwright to achieve specific response like joy, pity, fear, indignation, ridicule, laughter, thoughtful contemplation, from the audience"[1976;68]. Likewise, National Open University of Nigeria in "Elements of Drama" assumes that dramatic action comprises facial expressions, mimes and all the actions of characters, so that drama, unlike narrative stories, story in actions. "In drama the dramatist presents the action through what the characters do or say. In fact it involves all the activities of all the characters in the play. Dramatic action includes facial expression, gestures and movements"[2013; 31]. There are three types of dramatic action: physical action, reported action and mental action. According to Aristotle physical action is in its turn divided into three types: movements/gestures, mimes and pantomimes. Movements include actions done by characters and moving positions, places. Movements and gestures should be frequently accompanied with dialogues. Oxford Dictionary defines mimes as the use of gestures to designate actions by sign language. Mimes are usually indicated in italics, in stage directions. Pantomimes are usually used as synonym to mimes but in ancient Rome it was a popular dramatic entertainment in which meanings were expressed by the help of gestures, facial expressions with music. Reported action is used when there is a difficult scene that cannot be performed on the stage. These kinds of scenes are usually reported. For instance in Medieval period scenes that portray violence were not performed but only reported. In 20th century "Arms and the Man", by G.B.Shaw, also includes reported action when the cavalry charge is reported



because it would be hard to show cavalry on the stage. Mental actions are actions that happen in characters' minds. These kinds of actions can only be expressed by the help of facial expressions. The next element is one of the important one- dialogue. In novels nature of characters are revealed through author's narrative description but in drama this duty lies on dialogues. The Oxford Dictionary explains that dialogue involves two or more people and could be in form of expression, conversation, talk, chat, *tete-a-tete*, *chit chat*, debate, and argument, exchange of views, discussion, conference, converse, interlocution, confabulation, gossip, parley, palaver, spoken part, script, and lines. Dialogue is not only conversation between two people but it may include character's monologue. Another view was made by Scholes R. and C. H. Klaus that dialogue is a specific type of conversation that helps to depict imaginative world of characters. It infers to totality of activities both physical and mental in order to show the nature of a particular play. "....dialogue is an extraordinary significant form of conversation because it is through it that every play implies the total make-up of its imaginative world. It is also important that dialogue imply the whole range of expressions, gestures, inflections, movements and sometimes information on the environment and the total atmosphere of the play" [1971]. Different from above given definitions, Iwuchukwu, Chinweike in his "Mastery of Literature" provides another characteristic of a dialogue. He pays attention to the tone of dialogue and its variations according to nationalities. He states that a play is more realistic as opposed to fiction because of dialogues. From above given definitions one may conclude that dialogue is helpful in recognizing the nature of characters and it forwards the actions. In ancient Roman and Greek dramas actions were in the center of attention but in modern period dialogue is the most important part of a play to advance the plot. The last and essential one is character and characterization. In "Poetics" Aristotle defines character as an example to which the audience may apply to learn some moral lessons and the character's main aim is to show the audience what is good or what is bad "Character is that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids" [2008; part 6; 9]. Abrams' "A Glossary of Literary Terms" suggests a definition for characterization claiming that it is playwright's imaginative composition of characters and events in the play are presented by the help of such characters that dramatize the plot "Characterization is the playwright's imaginative creation of characters that can effectively dramatize his story. The action of the play is presented through such characters." [1999 ; 54]. There are different types of characters but mainly they are divided into three types. The first one is protagonist who is the main hero of a story mainly a good character at the same time there can be antagonist who is opposite to protagonist. These kinds of characters are defined as good or bad characters by Aristotle. The next one is round or dynamic characters who change his/her behavior throughout the actions. The third one is flat characters who do not change his personality despite difficulties. Playwrights try to create characters that can be as the same or near to real people in life. Drama is the oldest genre of literature. The first critic to define drama was Aristotle. He defined it as imitation of real actions but the definition of drama a bit changed in medieval period and modern period. In medieval period J. Dryden defined drama as a feeling of humans and described it as a guideline for each person. In modern period B. Brecht argued that drama is not just copying the actions but it is a tool to show social and political situations. The components of drama were also first defined



by Aristotle. Imitation, according to Aristotle, is copying reality and imitating to reality but J. Dryden's view is a bit opposite to Aristotle's. He claimed that drama is not a replica of reality because imitation is the playwright's creation of reality. Similarly, National Open University of Nigeria 'Elements of Drama' claims that drama is not literal reflection of real life since it is highly impossible to find exact details of everyday life in drama. Dialogue in drama is also as essential as imitation. Ancient time's actions were given a great attention, but in modern plays dialogues are more important than an action that is why the way of presenting events a bit changed under some circumstances. So throughout the time types, manners of presenting drama changes and it will continue to change.

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