Stage Drama

Stage drama is written to be performed on stage. The abiding challenge in reading a script is to constantly frame all elements contained within this script in terms of PERFORMANCE. Most dramas follow similar conventions, or rules, in how they are presented. An understanding of basic dramatic conventions can help you imagine the staging of the performance as you read. You may recognize that drama and fiction share the conventions of plot, setting, character, and theme. However, these conventions can be realised differently in stage drama. They are conveyed in stage drama via verbal techniques and non-verbal techniques.

VERBAL TECHNIQUES

Essentially what we learn through the dialogue, what the characters say. In drama, the playwright develops the story line through the characters’ actions and dialogue. Dialogue, or conversation between characters, is the lifeblood of drama. Virtually everything of consequence—from the plot details to the character revelations—flows from dialogue. Other speech devices used by playwrights, in addition to dialogue, include

- the monologue: a long speech spoken by a single character to himself or herself, or to the audience
- the soliloquy: a monologue in which a character speaks his or her private thoughts aloud and appears to be unaware of the audience
- the aside: a short speech or comment that is delivered by a character to the audience, but that is beyond the hearing of other characters who are present.

NON-VERBAL TECHNIQUES

The non-verbal aspects of a text can be just as important as the words in shaping its meaning and effects.

STRUCTURE of the play - Acts and Scenes

- Dramatic plots are divided into acts and scenes, with each scene establishing a different time or place. As in fiction, the plot in a drama introduces interactions that produce a conflict, or struggle, between opposing forces. The action intensifies, reaches a peak, and is eventually resolved. The elements of plot in drama—exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution—parallel those in fiction.

DIRECTIONS of the playwright

- The italicized instructions in a play are written by the playwright, or author, and are called stage directions. Stage directions describe the setting of the play and suggest the use of props, lighting, scenery, sound effects, and costumes. Stage directions also describe the entrances and the exits of characters, and how the characters look, speak, and react to events or to others.

PROPS AND SETS

- All objects placed on the stage, pictures on walls and backdrops.
- Can help establish setting, mood and characterisation.
COSTUME AND THE CHARACTERS’ PHYSICAL APPEARANCES
- Costumes and personal accessories suggest aspects of a character’s personality.
- These aspects can be further highlighted by make-up and lighting.

MUSIC, SOUND AND LIGHTING
- Lighting can draw the audience’s attention to a character, can create mood or ambience, can indicate transitions from one scene to the next, and can have a symbolic function.
- Sound effects can heighten the sense of realism at dramatic moments. They also add the play’s construction of the illusion that the characters inhabit not merely the stage, but a larger ‘world’.
- Music can be part of a play’s action or it can be background or ‘incidental’ music. It can create mood, establish an historical period, reinforce aspects of the characters’ class or cultural context or enhance characterisation by showing an aspect of the character that they cannot express in words.

CHARACTER movement, gestures and body-language
- Character movement and positions are usually only given at key points in the narrative; such directions ensure that the characters’ words and their relationships with others are clearly conveyed to the audience.