

Analyzing Modern Drama

Contents

This chapter addresses steps to analyze dramatic works: conducting close reading and finding an idea; collecting evidence and composing draft; and composing comprehensive analysis. Related tasks are composed in pre- and post-reading activities.

Objectives

Finishing this chapter you are expected to:

1. know the steps to analyze dramatic works
2. understand how to carefully read and find an idea in a dramatic text; to collect evidence and compose draft; and eventually to compose comprehensive analysis
3. be able to apply the steps to a modern dramatic text: George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*

Meeting 5

4.1. Pre-reading Activity

Previous semester you were assigned to analyze literary works intrinsically, including drama.

1. What were the steps you took to analyze those works? Mention and explain the steps.
2. What was the significance of the steps for your process of analysis?

4.2. Reading Activity

Conducting Close Reading and Finding Ideas

Analyzing is different from retelling. Instead of paraphrasing the whole story of a work in general sense, an analysis focuses on specific issues taken from the story. Birkerts (1996:1569) argues that in order to address particular aspect of a dramatic work, that is a specific focus or problem as the object of analysis, we need know the entire work or the full context of the drama.

Drama, unlike prose or poetry, mainly relies on the dialogue to achieve its effects on the readers. The messages of a drama are carried out by series of conversation. Therefore, to analyze a drama we pay more attention on the dialogue between characters. According to Birkerts (1996:1569-1570) words and statements in the dialogue can have very different meaning depending on who is speaking and in what context. In this case we have to be attentive, to read closely the dialogue. In addition, awareness of both the context "within" the text (for example, the situation between characters and their personalities) and "outside" the text (for example, the historical context of the drama) is needed to get better understanding of the drama. In other words, it is important to look at who are speaking, their motivation, and their words' importance in signifying historical time and place.

The importance of close reading is like foundations which support a building. It is a technique to scrutinize specific parts of a dramatic text. It regards the relationship between the form and structure of the drama and its content. In order to do a close reading of a dramatic text, we can do the following steps.

- a. Read each act and/or scene of the drama carefully from the very first one until the very last one.
- b. Pay attention on the diction and the structural elements of the drama.
- c. Respond to the drama by giving our opinion. Our opinion is our first impression coming from our observation. The more carefully we observe the more authentic and precise our opinion will be.

After drawing the first impression in close reading activity, we need to ask some questions to ourselves about elements in the drama that have impressed us. These questions function as "research questions" that enhance the idea which is going to be elaborated. The following table 4.1 contains examples of questions arranged in categories. These categories and questions serve as guideline to elicit our critical response. It is free to add, modify, change, or combine them accordingly.

No.	Categories	No.	Example of Questions
1.	Dialogue	1.1.	What kind of language used in the dialogue?
		1.2.	What are the patterns of language used in the dialogue?
		1.3.	What are the key words, key phrases, and/or key expressions in the drama and their significance in delivering the message of the drama?
		1.4.	What function does chorus, soliloquy, and aside serve to the overall meaning of the drama?
		1.5.	How does the dialogue help characters' development?

No.	Categories	No.	Example of Questions
2.	Plot	2.1.	What kind of plot used in the drama?
		2.2.	What are the patterns of the plot used in the drama?
		2.3.	What are the major events in the drama and their significance in delivering the message of the drama?
		2.4.	In what ways do subplots enhance the main plot of the drama?
		2.5.	How do acts and/or scenes in the drama develop?
3.	Character	3.1.	Who is/are the major character/s in the drama?
		3.2.	What kind of conflicts experienced by the character?
		3.3.	How does the character deal with their conflicts?
		3.4.	Does the character's personality change throughout the drama?
		3.5.	How does character's personality develop throughout the story?
4.	Setting	4.1.	Does the setting in the drama have symbolic meaning?
		4.2.	To what extent does the setting contribute to the atmosphere of the drama?
		4.3.	To what extent does the setting contribute to the characterization in the drama?
		4.4.	To what extent does the setting contribute to the plot of the drama?
		4.5.	In what ways does the setting present temporal, spatial, and social aspect?
5.	Subject/ Theme	5.1.	What is the central underlying subject/theme of the drama?
		5.2.	In what ways is the subject/theme presented in the drama?
		5.3.	To what extent is the universality of the subject/theme in the drama?
		5.4.	What specific part(s) of the drama that support(s) the formulation of the subject/theme?
		5.5.	How does the subject/theme influence characters' action, plot, setting, and dialogue of the drama?

Table 4.1

The questions in table 4.1 may overlap each other since one type of question can be applied to different categories and might be answered by considering different categories too. For example, if we are impressed or interested in the subject/theme of a drama and intend to focus on identifying its central message and how it is presented, we need to take into account the other intrinsic elements. In doing so, the questions that belong to the category of character, plot, setting, and dialogue can also be employed.

4.3. Post-reading Activity

4.3.1. Group Discussion

The following excerpts are selected from George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* (1894). The focus of your attention is directed to a character named Raina and her conversation with other characters, Sergius and Catherine. After reading closely, what is your impression of Raina? Try to formulate questions that will lead to the elaboration of your idea!

ARMS AND THE MAN

Excerpt 1:

(Taken from Act II - when Sergius has just returned from the war as a hero. He has come to visit Raina's house. They chat for the first time since Sergius left for the war.)

RAINA. *(Placing her hands on his shoulder as she looks up at him with admiration and worship)* My hero! My king.

SERGIUS. My queen! *(He kisses her on the forehead with holy awe.)*

RAINA. How I have envied you, Sergius! You have been out in the world, on the field of battle, able to prove yourself there worthy of any woman in the world; whilst I have had to sit at home inactive,—dreaming—useless—doing nothing that could give me the right to call myself worthy of any man.

SERGIUS. Dearest, all my deeds have been yours. You inspired me. I have gone through the war like a knight in a tournament with his lady looking on at him!

And you have never been absent from my thoughts for a moment. *(Very solemnly.)* Sergius: I think we two have found the higher love. When I think of you, I feel that I could never do a base deed, or think an ignoble thought.

Ekserpt 2:

(Taken from Act II – when Sergius has left Raina with her mother, Catherine. Catherine warns Raina that there would be a scandal if anyone found out Raina sheltered a strange man in her room.)

CATHERINE. You think! Oh, Raina, Raina! Will anything ever make you straight forward? If Sergius finds out, it is all over between you.

RAINA. *(With cool impertinence)*. Oh, I know Sergius is your pet. I sometimes wish you could marry him instead of me. You would just suit him. You would pet him, and spoil him, and mother him to perfection.

CATHERINE. *(Opening her eyes very widely indeed)*. Well, upon my word!

RAINA. *(Capriciously—half to herself)*. I always feel a longing to do or say something dreadful to him—to shock his propriety—to scandalize the five senses out of him! *(To Catherine perversely)*. I don't care whether he finds out about the chocolate cream soldier or not. I half hope he may. *(She again turns flippantly away and strolls up the path to the corner of the house.)*

CATHERINE. And what should I be able to say to your father, pray?

RAINA. *(Over her shoulder, from the top of the two steps)*. Oh, poor father! As if he could help himself! *(She turns the corner and passes out of sight.)*

Taken from George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man – The Electronic Classics Series Publication* (2013:36-37&42-43) edited by Jim Manis

4.3.2. Individual Assignment

After reading and conducting discussion about the steps to do close reading and to find ideas, do the following tasks.

1. Read carefully George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* and formulate a specific idea based on interesting aspects of the drama by employing the guideline in table 4.1. Remember, you are free to add, modify, change, or combine the categories and/or the questions in accordance with your focus of attention.
2. Consult your lecturer about the idea that you have formulated.

Meeting 6**4.4. Pre-reading Activity**

Look at the following figures.

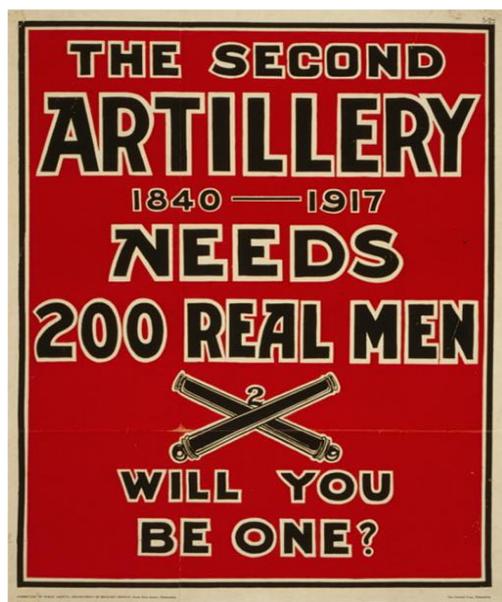


Figure 4.1¹³

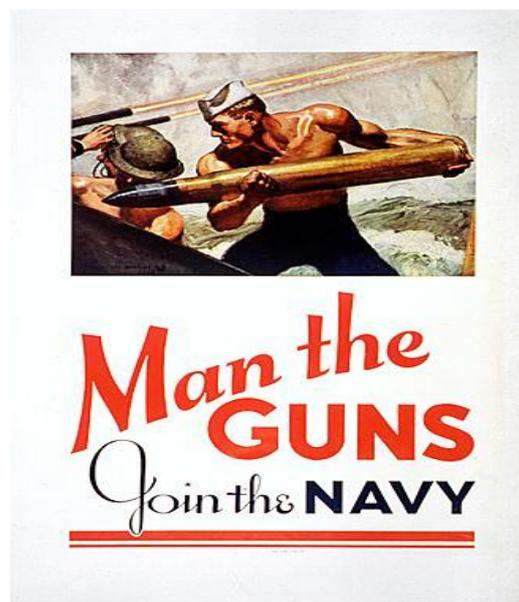


Figure 4.2¹⁴

The above figures are early 20th century posters aimed to provoke people to join the armies.

1. Which part of the posters that is provocative?
2. What do you think about someone who joins the army in a war to defend his country's independence; is it glorious or foolish?

4.5. Reading Activity**Collecting Evidence and Composing Rough Draft**

After formulating ideas, which are represented by questions, the next step is to answer those questions by collecting as many as possible relevant and reliable evidence. We need to make notes for acts, scenes, lines, pages, symbols, etc. that deal with our ideas. Then the notes are sorted accordingly and connected each other. Eventually, this connected evidence is a starting point to our rough draft. For example, if we try to identify the image of war as expressed in George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*, we need to note characters' opinions as well as attitude towards war. We write down the key dialogue complete with the information of act and/or scene and page. We also need to jot down the setting and the key moments in the drama that will support our analysis.

¹³ Taken from Shaw Festival 2014: *Arms and the Man* Study Guide (2014:3)

¹⁴ Taken from The Orlando-UCF Shakespeare Festival: *George Bernard Shaw's Arms and the Man* Study Guide (2005:13)

In order to strengthen the analysis, we can take extrinsic elements as additional data. Those are aspects which are outside the dramatic text but related to it. In this case, in accordance with Klarer's premise (2004:77-78), we can employ author-oriented, reader-oriented, and context-oriented approaches. Author-oriented approaches put the main emphasis on the author, trying to establish connections between the work of art and the biography of its creator. Reader-oriented approaches focus on the reception of texts by their audiences and the texts' general impact on the reading public. Contextual approaches try to place literary texts against the background of historical, social, or political developments while at the same time attempting to classify texts according to genres as well as historical periods. Therefore, it is legitimate to take out-of-the-text data as long as it remains in the context. For example, we can relate the atmosphere of war experienced by the characters in George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* with historical facts of Serbo-Bulgarian war (a war between Serbia and Bulgaria) in around 1885. Then, we can connect it with situation faced by a character named Captain Bluntschli, a Swiss mercenary with the Serbian army, who are trapped behind enemy line, in a Bulgarian house and has complicated relationship with a Bulgarian woman, Raina Petkoff.

The notes and evidence that have been collected are developed into free-writing. This free-writing contains outlines of elaborated ideas without worrying formal patterns and dictions of an essay. The significance of free-writing is to map out arguments in a clear sequence. After it is all set, a rough draft is ready to be written. In a rough draft, analysis is already presented in paragraphs. The quotations to select and their page numbers as well as the sequence to follow in making points are composed in the draft.

4.6. Post-reading Activity

Individual Assignment

After reading the steps to collect evidence and to compose rough draft, do the following tasks.

1. Develop the ideas that you have formulated in previous meeting into rough draft by employing the steps explained in today's meeting.
2. Consult your lecturer about the rough draft that you have composed.

Meeting 7

4.7. Reading Activity

Composing Comprehensive Analysis

The final step in analyzing dramatic text is to perfect the rough draft. Thus, a comprehensive analysis is ready to be presented. According to Birkerts (1996:1581), an analysis requires that we select a scene or passage of dialogue in order to examine its function in the play as a whole. We have to isolate the dynamics of the scene and show how the words and actions of the characters reflect the larger pattern of the drama. In this case, we have to balance the big picture – the unfolding of the whole drama – with the details. The selected dialogue must clearly illustrate our point. We need to avoid quoting long passages that are only generally relevant. In addition, when quoting exchange of dialogue, we need to include the name of the speakers as well as any stage direction that may be part of the passage.

A formal and standard analysis presentation consists of introduction, content of analysis, and conclusion. Introduction persuades the readers and leads them to know what to expect. Content contains elaboration of topic sentences leading the readers to the discussed issue and the strong points or arguments related to it. Conclusion summarizes the result analysis and provides clues about the broader implications of the discussed issue.

4.8. Post-reading Activity

Individual Assignment

After reading the steps to compose comprehensive analysis, do the following tasks.

1. Develop the rough draft that you have made in previous meeting into a literary essay by employing the steps explained in today's meeting.
2. Present the essay that you have composed.