The Double Master-Frame:
Drama and Argument

Because all texts are consciously designed to produce an effect upon an audience, they are persuasive; hence all texts are arguments. Because all texts are “staged” within a social context—that is they involve intentional communication between a speaker and an audience in a given situation—they are dramas. The combination of these two frames, argument and drama, creates the “master-frame”—a frame encompassing all the questions a reader might ask about a text. Examining a text from the master frame gives the most comprehensive analysis possible.

→ Argument

For example, in the following speech from Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar, Marc Antony is arguing for a particular point of view on Caesar’s assassination. Previous to Antony’s speech, Brutus has just given his own speech attempting to justify Caesar’s murder. Here, Antony effectively refutes Brutus’s speech. Antony rouses the plebeian’s loyalty to Caesar and ignites their anger against his murderers.

_Ant_. Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears!
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him
The evil that men do lives after them,
The good is often interred with their bones;
So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus
Hath told you Caesar was ambitious;
If it were so, it was a grievous fault,
And grievously hath Caesar answer’d it.
Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest
(For Brutus is an honorable man,
So are they all, all honorable men),
Come I to speak in Caesar’s funeral.
He was my friend, faithful and just to me;
But Brutus says he was ambitious, and Brutus is an honorable man.
He hath brought many captives home to Rome,
Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill;
Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?
When the poor have cried

Ambition should be made of sterner stuff:
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious,
And Brutus is an honorable man.
You all did see that on the Lupercal
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuse. Was this ambition?
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious,
And sure he is an honorable man.
I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,
But here I am to speak what I do know.
You all did love him once, not without cause;
What cause withholds you then to mourn for him?
O judgment! thou [art] fled to brutish beasts,
And men have lost their reason. Bear with me,
My heart is in the coffin here with Caesar,
And I must pause till it come back to me.

1. _Pleb_. Methinks there is much reason in his sayings
2. _Pleb_. If thou consider rightly of the matter, Caesar has had great wrong.

From Antony’s repetition and emphasis on the words “honorable” and “ambitious,” Antony establishes his main proposition: ambition did not consume Caesar, but Brutus.

→ Drama

But Marc Antony is not only arguing; he is also “acting.” In order to persuade the Roman plebeians, he _performs a role_ while delivering this funeral address for Caesar. Through his acting, Antony reveals his character to the plebeians. In the honor, logic, emotion and loyalty he displays, Antony establishes himself as someone the Plebeians will want to believe.
Looking at the Author: A Second Level

Any literary work in which an author has characters speak must be read on two levels: 1. The argument and the drama in which the characters are a part and 2. the argument and the drama in which the author is a part. We must ask what is Shakespeare's argument to his theater audience and what kind of character role Shakespeare is playing as he makes this argument through his literary work. We address what the themes of Julius Caesar may be and how credible Shakespeare is as he argues those themes. In his characterization of Antony, we see that Shakespeare recognizes humanity's complexities. Antony's words may be honorable, but his intent to manipulate the plebeian crowds may not. We judge Shakespeare as an honest observer of humankind because he does not present characters as all good or all bad.

Fable

Stories can also be read as both drama and argument. Analyzing the modern fable, "The Rabbits who Caused all the Trouble," by James Thurber, provides an effective example.

Within the memory of the youngest child there was a family of rabbits who lived near a pack of wolves. The wolves announced that they did not like the way the rabbits were living. (The wolves were crazy about the way they themselves were living, because it was the only way to live.) One night several wolves were killed in an earthquake and this was blamed on the rabbits, for it is well known that rabbits pound on the ground with their hind legs and cause earthquakes. On another night one of the wolves was killed by a bolt of lightning and this was also blamed on the rabbits, for it is well known that lettuce-eaters cause lightning. The wolves threatened to civilize the rabbits if they didn't behave, and the rabbits decided to run away to a desert island. But the other animals, who lived at a great distance, shamed them, saying, "you must stay where you are and be brave. This is no world for escavists. If the wolves attack you, we will come to your aid, in all probability." So the rabbits continued to live near the wolves and one day there was a terrible flood which drowned a great many wolves. This was blamed on the rabbits, for it is well known that carrot-nibblers with long ears cause floods. The wolves descended on the rabbits, for their own good, and imprisoned them in a dark cave for their own protection.

When nothing was heard about the rabbits for some weeks, the other animals demanded to know what had happened to them. The wolves replied that the rabbits had been eaten and since they had been eaten the affair was a purely internal matter. But the other animals warned that they might possibly unite against the wolves unless some reason was given for the destruction of the rabbits. So the wolves gave them one. "They were trying to escape," said the wolves, "and, as you know, this is no world for escavists."

Moral: Run, don't walk, to the nearest desert island.

The crux of Thurber's purpose is to persuade his readers that those in danger of being destroyed by powerful rulers can't trust others to save them. We can see that this story could easily be imported into a speech to argue a point with any number of messages being emphasized: the negligence of the "other animals," the innocence of the "rabbits," or the cruelty of the "wolves." The fable also points back to Thurber—a story told by a particular character, revealing his values, wit, and judgment.

Essay

Bertrand Russell's "What I Have Lived For" is a personal essay that explains what attitudes have given Russell's life value. Even though he describes his own experience, his essay is an argument asserting that the three qualities of love, knowledge and pity bring life balance and fulfillment. But the essay can also be read as a drama—a speech of a character in the drama of life. If we insert Russell's name as the speaker, then we easily see how this text can be read beyond argument as drama.
Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind. Three passions, like great winds, have blown me hither and thither, in a wayward course, over a deep ocean of anguish, reaching to the verge of despair.

I have sought love first, because it brings ecstasy—ecstasy so great that I would often have sacrificed all the rest of life for a few hours of this joy. I have sought it, next, because it relieves loneliness—that terrible loneliness in which one shivering consciousness looks over the rim of the world into the cold unfathomable lifeless abyss. I have sought it, finally, because in the union of love I have seen, in a mystic miniature, the prefiguring vision of the heaven that saints and poets have imagined. This is what I sought, and though it might seem too good for human life, this is what—at last—I have found.

With equal passion I have sought knowledge. I have wished to understand the hearts of men. I have wished to know why the stars shine. And I have tried to apprehend the Pythagorean power by which number holds sway above the flux. A little of this, but not too much, I have achieved.

Love and knowledge, so far as they were possible, led upward toward the heavens. But always pity brought me back to earth. Echoes of cries of pain reverberate in my heart. Children in famine, victims tormented by oppressors, helpless old people a hated burden to their sons, and the whole world of loneliness, poverty and pain make mockery of what human life should be. I long to alleviate the evil, but I cannot, and I too suffer.

This has been my life. I have found it worth living, and would gladly live it again if the chance were offered to me.

When we see the text in the drama-argument frame, we know that argument-related questions alone will not give us the most thorough analysis of the text. We must consider its dramatic aspects by asking drama-related questions as well: What does this speech say about the speaker as a character? How does the speaker view his role in his social context? How does the speaker treat his audience? How would such a speech be performed for an audience?

→Poetry

The same principles that apply to analyzing dramas, stories, and essays, extend even to poetry. This first example, “Love,” by George Herbert, quickly impresses its readers with its dramatic qualities because it uses dialogue.

Dialogue Poem

Love (III) by George Herbert

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
If I lacked anything.

“Truth, Lord: but I have marred them; let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.”

“And know you not,” says Love, “who bore the blame?”

“My dear, then I will serve.”

“You must sit down,” says Love, “and taste my meat.”

So I did sit and eat.

“A guest,” I answered, “worthy to be here”:
Love said, “You shall be he.”

“I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
I cannot look on thee.”

Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,

“Who made the eyes but I?”
“Love” Analysis

**Level One:**
How is this poem a drama?

We have:
- **Characters:** a narrator (any man or woman) and Love (God)
- **Dialogue:** signaled by the quotation marks
- **Two Major events:** the narrator’s arrival at the “wedding feast” and then acceptance as guest of honor

How is it an argument?

We recognize:
- though the narrator feels unworthy to be with Love, he desperately wants that companionship
- Love has paid the price for man and redeemed him from his sins

**Level Two:**
What does Herbert argue to his audience?
- **Herbert’s point:** God’s love redeems all people from sin

What role or character does Herbert play in the drama of life?
- **Herbert’s character:** A man who has true faith in God and who believes that all people can be forgiven

**Lyric**

Of all genres, a lyric poem is probably the furthest from the traditional speech or argument. Lyrics are considered genres of personal expression, often private musings about moods or feelings.

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**The Tyger**

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

What the hammer? What the chain?  
In what furnace was thy brain?  
What the anvil? what dread grasp  
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

In what distant deeps or skies  
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?  
On what wings dare he aspire?  
What the hand dare seize the fire?

When the stars threw down their spears  
And water’d heaven with their tears,  
Did he smile his work to see?  
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

And what shoulder, & what art,  
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?  
And when thy heart began to beat,  
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?
“Tyger” Analysis

Level One:
How is this poem a drama?
We recognize:
Characters: a narrator and a tiger
Monologue: the narrator addresses and intensely questions the tiger
Major Event: the narrator’s inner conflict over the existence of evil

How is this poem an argument?
We have:
The narrator’s point: It is difficult to understand how a God who is good can have created destructive forces

Level Two:
What does the author argue?
Blake’s point: God can create both the beautiful and the terrible—both innocence and experience

What role or character does Blake play in the drama of life?
Blake’s character: A pensive man who searches for truth but feels confusion at the seeming paradox that God allows for both good and evil

Summary
Textual frames help readers know what questions to bring to a text during analysis. Readers can narrow their textual frame inward, or expand it outward. The largest frame from which a text can be analyzed is the master-frame which considers all aspects of both drama and argument. Learn to control textual frames and they will increase your ability to focus effectively, to analyze thoroughly and to perceive multiple perspectives.

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