

## Questions to Ask of the Recalcitrant Scene Form and Function

Any given scene will perform a variety of functions. We must look at how the scene fits into the play as a FUNCTIONAL WHOLE.

The "levels" of function described below will all be operative at once in a scene, and, while we can choose to focus on one or another of them, we will find that the best analysis is the one that can account for their *interrelationship*.

**NARRATIVE:** what and what and what. What new information does the scene give us? What conditions are illuminated (war, love, daylight, setting, mistaken identity, coincidence)? What "backstory" does the scene offer? What events take place that drive the scene forward? Retard it? Create hiatus? What is the effect of change of pace?

**THEMATIC:** What broad concerns, problems or questions (philosophical, psychological, political etc.) does the scene address? Does it show us a new side of the question? Do the views represented here support or problematize the statements of other scenes? What is the cumulative effect? Does the play as a whole make a unified statement? If not, what is the effect of ambiguity/multiple perspectives?

**STYLISTIC:** What is the form of address in the scene (poetry, prose, parable, pageantry/spectacle, heroic/epic, self-reflexive, declamatory)? What is the different goal of each form of address in terms of characterization, thematic concern, manipulation of audience sympathy? What patterns of figurative language (metaphor, imagery, motif) does the scene establish, modify, further, undermine? Does a modulation in imagery (from light to dark, from health to disease) or variation in a pattern of metaphors (gardens and wilderness, fortresses and the human body, death and love) reflect a shift in the narrative?

**DRAMATIC/STRUCTURAL:** How does the scene *relate to the rest of the play*?

i) Is it a reprise of an earlier scene in either the order of events, speeches, blocking, imagery? If so, is it an identical repetition? What in the test scene is different from the scene it reflects, and what is the effect of this similarity/difference on our understanding of theme, characterization etc.?

ii) Is there a juxtaposition of opposites (the orderly Athens and the wild forest; poetry and prose; "high" and "low")?

iii) Is it ironic? Dramatic irony, parallelism, satire, parody?

iv) Is it foreshadowing? To what scene does it refer? Is the outcome figured as inevitable?

v) Is it pivotal? Does the tenor of the play shift here (eg. From comic to tragic)? Does a character fall or rise on Fortune's wheel? What occurs that irrevocably alters the conditions of the interior or exterior world? Is what comes after different in terms of imagery, setting, character? Why? To what effect?

Further structural questions:

i) Why does this scene occur HERE, at this moment of our experience of the play, framed by these scenes?

ii) Who is on stage? Who is significantly missing and for how long? Who speaks the most? The least? To what effect? (eg. Henry VI does not appear until Act 3 of the play that bears his name and speaks only 6% of the play's lines. What's the significance of this in the context of the play's interrogation of the notion of Divine Right? Hamlet and Claudius speak only 100 lines directly to each other, although the entire play is about their relationship to one another? What does this tell us about the nature of their world, and how the play structures suspense?)

iii) What is new here? What have we seen before? Why is this information introduced at this juncture? Why are these events being repeated at this juncture?

iv) How long is the scene? How does it compare to other scenes? (eg. Battle scenes that are short can indicate swift rise or fall or Providential intervention. Or they may be a satiric commentary on the interchangeability of ruling factions. Or, from Romeo's first sight of Juliet to their first kiss is only 62 lines, indicating the thunderbolt pace of their relationship that leads to disaster)

v) How does the scene use the stage? Entrances and exits, positioning of characters "above" in the gallery, indicated props? (eg. Richard II descends to meet Bolingbroke below, indicating his fall from kingship; Juliet's bed remains on stage while the wedding preparations take place, commenting ironically on the nature and quality of her intended marriage.)