



# Lecture № 2

- **Theme: Plot**

**Aim:** to present arrangement and interplay of elements in the story in order to visualize the plot of any story

**Problem:** Is "plot" very important in the story?

# Key words:

conventional plot;

exposition;

conflict;

climax;

resolution;

combustion;

internal/external conflicts.

# Plan:

1. Introduction. What is a plot?
2. The sequence of events or actions to illustrate a plot.
3. Gustav Frey tag's diagram.
4. Artificial and formulaic plots.

Plot is the planned arrangement of actions and events in a narrative; actions and events are causally related, and they progress through a variety of conflicts and opposing forces to a climax and resolution. Because the events in a story are planned, they differ from the myriad random and casual events of real life. Henry James once declared that life is splendid waste, "all in conclusion and confusion." By contrast, life embedded in narrative art is splendid economy—what James termed "all discrimination and selection," a fine focusing of life. Similarly, Edith Wharton, speaking of Russian and French short story writers, found in their handling of plot "a shaft driven straight into the heart of human experience." What happens in a narrative as lives and events unfold is not wasteful, but rather selected, arranged, and patterned according to an author's purpose in creating plot.

Plot might be an artificial arrangement of life, but it is plot that gives a narrative its power, uniqueness, and excellence. It is the basis of narrative art: the shaping of human experience so that we can understand it; the reflection of the author's perceptions and powers of invention; the vehicle through which the artist offers his or her vision of life and the world. And it is plot that gives a story its charm and beauty, as E. M. Forster stressed in his discussion of plot in ***Aspects of the Novel***:

The plot-maker expects us to remember: we expect him to leave no loose ends. Every action or word ought to count; it ought to be economical and spare; even when complicated it should be organic and free from dead matter. And over it, as it unfolds, will hover the memory of the reader (that dull glow of the mind of which intelligence is the bright advancing edge) and will constantly rearrange and reconsider, seeing new clues, new chains of cause and effect, and the final sense (if the plot has been a fine one) will not be of clues or chains, but of something which might have been shown by the novelist right away, only, if he had shown it straight away it would never have become beautiful.

Forster's assessment, which applies to both the novel and short fiction, suggests the subtle ordering and interplay of elements and the meticulous artistry involved in the writer's shaping of plot.

The arrangement and interplay of elements to form plot may assume numerous patterns in fiction, but modern critics have focused on a five-part sequence of events or actions to illustrate a conventional plot. This sequence includes (1) the *beginning* or *exposition*, which among other things introduces an unstable element that sets the plot in motion; (2) *rising action*, a series of events—each event causing the one that follows—which heighten the conflict; (3) the *climax*, the critical or most intense moment in the narrative; [A] *falling action*, a typically brief period in which there is less intensity of effect and an unraveling (what the French term *denouement*) of the conflict; and (5) the ending, or *resolution*, of the conflict.

We can visualize this conventional plot pattern in terms of the accompanying pyramid—a diagram first proposed by the nineteenth-century German critic Gustav Freytag. Freytag used this diagram to analyze five-part dramatic tragedy, but the scheme has had widespread utility in the analysis of plot in fiction. In fact, a great part of the pleasure that we experience in the reading of fiction derives from our perception of the rhythm of the narrative as it moves from stage to stage in the plot. We delight in discovering how conflicts arise and develop; how one event causes another in a heightening series of conflicts; how characters caught in these conflicts engage in choices that make the climax and resolution seem almost inevitable. Finally, if the ending is a successful one, we gain satisfaction from the stable situation that emerges—whether it is happy, tragic, mysterious, or whatever—at the conclusion of the tale.

Central to this overview of plot is *conflict*, the opposition of forces. The contemporary American poet, novelist, and critic Robert Penn Warren has put the matter bluntly: "No conflict, no story." Elizabeth Bowen, a modern English short ' story Writer and novelist, is more figurative than Warren, terming conflict a type of combustion. "There must be combustion. Plot depends for its movement on internal combustion." Conflict is at the root of the unstable situation at the start of the plot. Plot itself will pattern this conflict, but it is conflict that translates character and ideas into action. Without conflict, plot cannot exist.

We normally view conflict as the struggle of forces in relation to characters, for conflict at least in part is embodied in characters. When the main character (the protagonist) is fighting or struggling against someone (the antagonist) or something (a nonhuman force can also be the antagonist) outside himself or herself, we term this variety of conflict *external*. When the struggle, or opposition of forces, takes place inside the minds of characters, this type of conflict is *internal*. Thus characters may be involved in a variety of struggles: against other people; against society; against nature; against opposing forces within themselves; against fate or destiny. Seldom do we find a single type of conflict in a good short story. Conflict in short fiction is often subtle and complex composed of various forces in opposition. To appreciate a complex tale, we have to locate the dramatic center of conflict, from which all other internal and external conflicts—indeed the very contours of plot—seem to radiate. By focusing on a central conflict, we can detect interrelationships among other struggles and elements in the story.

- From the viewpoint of the author, plot can be artificial and formulaic or aesthetically valuable, one of fiction's "finer growths," as Forster termed it. Writers of detective stories, mysteries, romances, and espionage thrillers tend to work off standard varieties of plot formulas. Plot can also be exceedingly improbable, melodramatic, or coincidental—as with Bharati Mukherjee in *Jasmine*, or Gabriel Garcia Marquez in much of his fiction. Yet at its best, plot is, as Thomas Hardy declared, an organism: "to a masterpiece in story there appertains a beauty of shape, no less than to a masterpiece in pictorial or plastic art, capable of giving to the trained mind an equal pleasure." Plot involves not just mechanical workmanship but also serious and imaginative artistic response, a distinguished effort to creatively impose form on content. George Eliot might have lamented "the vulgar coercion of conventional plot" on her fiction. Nevertheless, Eliot and other great writers move beyond conventional plot to discover new varieties and to discover and reveal what the conflicts inherent in their plots might mean—what personal, psychological, social and political, and philosophical revelations they can make about life.

- Let us imagine—as Yasunari Kawabata, William Faulkner, and Alice Munro must have in the fiction appearing in this section—that the author wants to write a story about boys and girls, men and women. Part of the process of writing such a story would involve the discovery of conflicts and determination of their interrelationship. How to begin these conflicts and end them are always twin agonies, as George Eliot admitted: "Beginnings are always troublesome. Conclusions are the weak points of most authors, but some of the fault lies in the very nature of conclusion, which is at best a negation." And between the beginning and conclusion there is the very large business of organizing and resolving main and minor conflicts, placing protagonists and antagonists in correct relationships, selecting episodes and scenes to dramatize the conflicts, and much more. In developing plot, the author must also select from well-established plotting techniques and occasionally invent new ones: the use of foreshadowing (suggesting or hinting at the resolution beforehand); flashback (creating earlier episodes within the overall progression of action in the plot); and subplots, double plots, and multiple plots. The process whereby authors invent, select, and design all these elements is rarely known to us. What we can perceive is the shape of the narrative—the synthesized product of creativity and craft—the final story itself. And embedded in the story is a plot, the structure of the tale, which permits us to evaluate the quality of the writer's work, the unity of effect, and the

- In the stories\* in this section, we discover meaning through an identification and understanding of the conflicts raised by the narrative. These writers do not categorically state the meaning of these conflicts, but instead reveal it through plot. They develop their subject in unique ways, creating plots that offer brilliantly structured impressions of characters in conflict, but struggling always toward that perfect resolution that is more attainable in fiction, perhaps, than in real life.



Questions:

1. According to Frey tag's diagram of which parts a conventional plot consists within sequence of events?
2. Can there be a story without any conflict?
3. Are there any types of plot?

