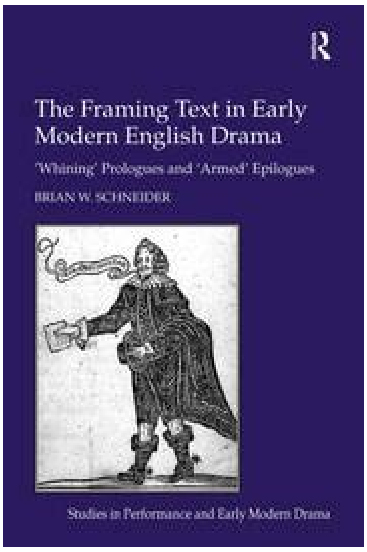
The Framing Text In Early Modern English Drama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The Framing Text in Early Modern English Drama
'Whining' Prologues and 'Armed' Epilogues
BRIAN W. SCHNEIDER
Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama

The Framing Text in Early Modern English Drama

The framing text in early modern English drama serves as a pivotal structural and thematic element that aids in the organization and interpretation of plays. During the late 16th and early 17th centuries, playwrights began to experiment with narrative techniques that not only enhanced the story but also engaged the audience in unique ways. Framing texts function to provide context, create a sense of distance, or deepen the emotional resonance of the primary narrative. This article will explore the role of framing texts in early modern English drama, examining their functions, notable examples, and the significance of this technique in shaping audience perception.

Understanding Framing Texts

Framing texts refer to any introductory or contextual material that surrounds the core narrative of a play. This can include prologues, epilogues, and even embedded narratives that provide a meta-theatrical commentary on the events unfolding on stage. The impact of these texts is multifaceted, serving to:

- Set the tone and establish expectations for the audience
- Offer commentary on the narrative or characters
- Enhance thematic depth and complexity
- Create a dialogue between the audience and the performance

By providing context, these framing devices not only guide the audience's understanding but also invite them to engage critically with the material.

Functions of Framing Texts

The use of framing texts in early modern English drama serves several critical functions:

1. **Contextualization**: Framing texts often situate the play within a particular historical or cultural framework. Prologues can outline the play's themes or historical events, grounding the audience in the narrative's context.

2. **Guidance**: Framing devices can serve as a guide for the audience, offering insights into character motivations or plot developments that might not be immediately apparent.

3. **Reflection**: By prompting the audience to consider the nature of the play they are about to watch, framing texts can encourage a reflective engagement with the themes presented.

4. **Meta-Theatricality**: Framing texts often draw attention to the artificiality of the theatrical experience, encouraging the audience to contemplate the relationship between reality and representation.

Through these functions, framing texts contribute significantly to the overall experience of early modern drama.

Notable Examples of Framing Texts in Early Modern English Drama

Several prominent plays from the early modern period incorporate framing texts effectively, demonstrating their diverse applications:

1. William Shakespeare's "Henry V"

In "Henry V," the Chorus serves as a framing device that comments on the action of the play. The Chorus introduces the audience to the historical context of the narrative, encouraging them to use their imagination to fill in the gaps left by the limitations of the stage. For example, the opening prologue invites the audience to envision the grandeur of the historical events depicted, asserting:

> "O, for a muse of fire, that would ascend
> The brightest heaven of invention!"

This framing not only sets the tone for the play but also highlights the contrast between the vastness of historical events and the physical limitations of the theatrical production.

2. Christopher Marlowe's "Doctor Faustus"

Marlowe's "Doctor Faustus" employs a prologue that establishes the character of Faustus and foreshadows his tragic downfall. The prologue serves to distill the essence of Faustus's ambitions and warns the audience of the consequences of hubris. This framing text enhances the central themes of knowledge, ambition, and morality, guiding the audience's interpretation of Faustus's character as they witness his inevitable decline.

3. "The Spanish Tragedy" by Thomas Kyd

Kyd’s "The Spanish Tragedy" features a character named Revenge, who serves as a meta-theatrical commentator throughout the play. His presence creates a framing narrative that reinforces the themes of revenge and justice. By interacting with other characters and the audience, Revenge complicates the narrative, prompting viewers to question the morality of the characters’ actions and the nature of justice itself.

4. "The Tempest" by William Shakespeare

In "The Tempest," Shakespeare uses the character of Prospero to provide a framing perspective on the events of the play. The narrative begins with a shipwreck, which serves as a catalyst for the unfolding drama. Prospero's manipulation of events and his eventual revelation of his identity and intentions create a reflective space for the audience. The epilogue, delivered by Prospero, serves as a meta-commentary on the play itself, inviting the audience to consider their role in the theatrical experience:

> "Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
> And what strength I have's mine own."

This closing statement encapsulates the themes of power, forgiveness, and the nature of art, reinforcing the connection between the audience and the narrative.

The Significance of Framing Texts in Audience Engagement

The incorporation of framing texts in early modern English drama is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it allows playwrights to engage their audiences more directly, creating a dynamic relationship between the performers and spectators. This interaction fosters a sense of shared experience and invites critical reflection on the themes presented in the play.

Secondly, framing texts can enhance the emotional impact of the narrative. By providing context and commentary, these texts guide the audience's emotional journey, deepening their investment in the characters and story. The effective use of framing can transform a passive viewing experience into an active engagement with the material.

Lastly, framing texts contribute to the overall richness of the theatrical experience. By blurring the lines between fiction and reality, these devices encourage audiences to reflect on their own experiences, beliefs, and values in relation to the themes explored within the play.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the framing text in early modern English drama plays a vital role in shaping the narrative and guiding audience interpretation. Through contextualization, guidance, reflection, and meta-theatricality, framing texts enhance the emotional and intellectual engagement of the audience. Notable examples from Shakespeare and his contemporaries illustrate the diverse applications of this technique, highlighting its significance in the evolution of drama during this period. As audiences continue to reflect on the complexities of human experience through the lens of early modern plays, the importance of framing texts remains a key area of exploration in the study of dramatic literature.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is framing text in early modern English drama?

Framing text refers to the narrative or structural elements in a play that provide context, setting, or commentary, often creating a 'frame' around the main action.

How does framing text influence the audience's perception of the play?

Framing text can shape the audience's understanding by establishing themes, guiding emotional responses, and offering insights into character motivations.

Can you give an example of framing text in a Shakespearean play?

In 'Hamlet', the play-within-a-play serves as framing text, reflecting Hamlet's inner conflict and enhancing the themes of appearance versus reality.

What role does the prologue play as a framing text in early modern drama?

The prologue sets the stage for the story, introduces key themes, and prepares the audience for the narrative that will unfold, often summarizing or foreshadowing events.

How does the use of framing text affect the structure of early modern English dramas?

Framing text often creates a layered structure, where the main narrative is interspersed with commentary or reflections, adding depth and complexity to the storytelling.

What is the significance of the epilogue in the context of framing text?

The epilogue serves as a concluding framing text that reflects on the events of the play, offers moral lessons, or connects the audience to the broader themes presented.

How does framing text contribute to the themes of identity and performance in early modern drama?

Framing text often highlights the performative aspects of identity, showing how characters navigate their roles within societal expectations and personal desires.

In what ways does framing text engage with the audience's expectations in early modern plays?

Framing text can play with audience expectations by subverting traditional narrative arcs or by directly addressing the audience, creating a more interactive experience.

What are some common forms of framing text found in early modern English drama?

Common forms include prologues, epilogues, soliloquies, dialogues with the audience, and the use of meta-theatrical elements like plays-within-plays.

How does the historical context of early modern England influence the use of framing text in drama?

The political, social, and religious contexts of early modern England often inform the framing text, reflecting contemporary issues and engaging with the audience's realities.

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在前景理论的研究中，其中有一个主线是框定效应（Framing Effect）。Tversky和Kahneman（1987）使用一个亚洲疾病问题，告知一组被试在美国可能有一次亚洲疾病的爆发，而且预计有600人因此丧命。

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“Framing /Shot Sizes 构图/镜头大小 What’s included and excluded in an individual shot. Master Shot 主镜头 A shot that takes in all the action of the scene, from beginning to end. It shows where all the actors are in relationship to the set. Long shot/wide shot (WS) 长镜头/远景 A shot in which figures appear small in the landscape. Often used at the beginning of a film or ...

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它能直接引导观众的视线到你希望观众看到的画面焦点的事物上去。2.框架（Framing）例如暗角或其他自然框架 3.几何形状（Geometry）例如长方形、三角形、圆形等等。人眼易被几何形状所吸引 构图法则（Structure） The organization of elements based on a rule.

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再举一个例子，如果对“框架效应”（framing effect）有所了解可以直接跳过。假如你是某市市长，市里爆发了传染病，有6百万人的生命受到威胁。

框架理论 - 知乎

框架的概念源自英国社会学者贝特森，由美国社会学者戈夫曼将这个概念引入文化社会学中，后来又被引入到大众传播学的研究中。戈夫曼认为，对一个人来说，真实的东西就是其对情景的定义，这种定义可分为条和框架。条是指活动的顺序，框架是指用来界定条的组织类型，也是人们将社 ...

Explore the significance of the framing text in early modern English drama and its impact on

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