


Module 4: Drama in American Literature

Topic 5 Content: Use of Irony in Building Climax

Introduction

Use of Irony in Building Climax

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Click the **NEXT** button on the bottom of the player to advance to the next event and read more about how different uses of irony help to build dramatic tension in *The Crucible*.

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Elizabeth Testifies

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Situational Irony

After John Proctor admits to his relationship with Abigail, Danforth brings in Elizabeth to confirm the story. If she answers "yes," then Abigail will be found to be a liar. If she lies and answers "no," then John will be looked upon as a liar. The pressure is really put on Elizabeth because John swears to the court she would never lie. You also know how honest Elizabeth is. When you meet her in Act Two, she convinces Reverend Hale that she is an upright, pious Puritan woman.

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When Elizabeth is brought in, she is not allowed to see the faces of either Abigail or John. Under questioning, she attempts to see her husband's face to "read" him, but she is refused by Danforth. At one point, Danforth "reaches out and holds her face" to prevent her from having silent communication with John. Under pressure to protect her husband's name, she states "no" to the question "Is your husband a lecher?"

This lie is the turning point for the play. John's credibility is lost, and only Hale seems to believe Elizabeth. Then, Abigail cries out, putting on quite an act to deflect Hale's protestations.

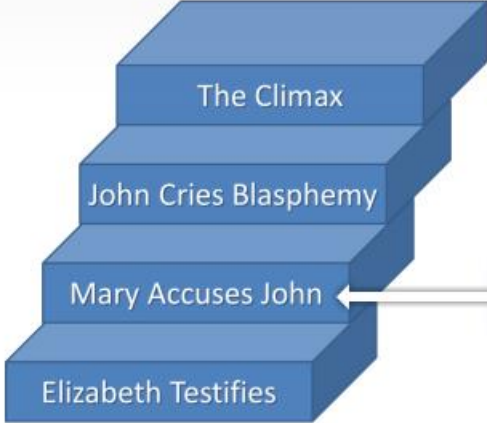
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Mary Accuses John

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Dramatic Irony

Staging Mary Warren is pivotal to creating the conflict leading to the climax in this act. She is a tortured soul who is stuck between what she knows to be true and the accusations of witchcraft. When she arrives, she must contradict the actions of all of the other girls, including the ring leader, Abigail. The first conflict Mary encounters is Judge Danforth. When she claims the girls are lying, she is met not with praise but criticism. She is alone confronting the highest magistrate who is telling her she will "go to jail."

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By the end of the act, after John confesses to adultery with Abigail and then Elizabeth lies, Mary is unable to stand alone and conforms back into the group of girls crying out against John Proctor. At this point in the play, hysteria has taken over Salem as the villagers focus on self-preservation. Mary must accuse John or she will be tried for sending her spirit out against the girls.


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John Cries Blasphemy

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John Cries Blasphemy



Verbal Irony

An example of verbal irony in this act occurs in the end after Mary betrays John and Danforth believes her accusations. Nearly insane from the unbelievable turn of events, John desperately screams out, "God is dead!" The judges and Parris interpret this to mean he has turned to the side of witchcraft, but you know that he means no god would allow this kind of chaos to reign in Salem.

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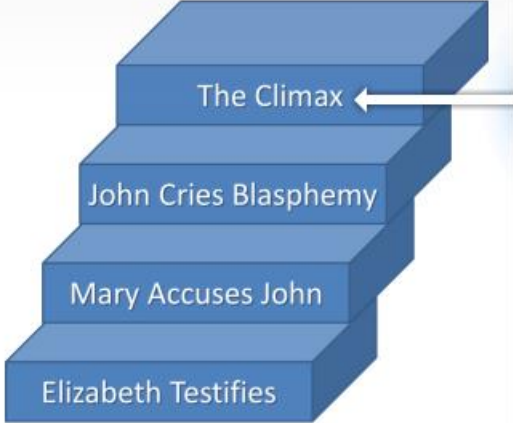
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The Climax

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