

Harrison, *Platonism in English Poetry of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1903); Paul Shorey, *Platonism Ancient and Modern* (1938); George Santayana, "Platonic Love in Some Italian Poets," *Selected Critical Writings*, ed. Norman Henfrey (2 vols.; 1968), I, 41–59.

**Plot.** The plot in a dramatic or narrative work is the structure of its actions, as these are ordered and rendered toward achieving particular emotional and artistic effects. This definition is deceptively simple, because the actions (including verbal as well as physical actions) are performed by particular characters in a work, and are the means by which they exhibit their moral and dispositional qualities. Plot and *Character* are therefore interdependent critical concepts—as Henry James has said, "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?" Notice also that there is a difference between the plot and the "story"—that is, a mere synopsis of the temporal order of the events incorporated in a work of literature. As we usually summarize a work, we say that first this happens, then that, then that. . . . It is only when we say how this is related to that, and in what ways all these matters are rendered and organized so as to achieve their particular effects, that a synopsis begins to be adequate to the actual plot. (For the distinction between story and plot, see *Fiction*.)

There are a great variety of plot forms. For example, some plots are designed to achieve tragic effects, and others to achieve the effects of comedy, romance, or satire (see *Genre*). Each of these types in turn exhibits an indefinite variety of plot patterns, and may be represented in the mode of drama or of narrative, and in verse or in prose. The following terms, widely current in criticism, are useful in analyzing the component elements of plots and in helping to discriminate among types of plots in traditional forms of narrative and dramatic literature.

The chief character in a work, on whom our interest centers, is called the **protagonist** or **hero**, and if he is pitted against an important opponent, that character is called an **antagonist**. Hamlet is the protagonist and King Claudius the antagonist in Shakespeare's play, and the relation between them is one of **conflict**. Many, but far from all, plots deal with a conflict (Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, for example, does not). In addition to the conflict between individuals, there may be the conflict of a protagonist against fate, or against the circumstances that stand between him and a goal he has set himself; and in some works, the conflict is between opposing desires or values in a character's own mind.

If a character sets up a scheme which depends for its success on the ignorance or gullibility of the person or persons against whom it is directed, it is called an **intrigue**. Iago intrigues against Othello and Cassio in Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello*. A number of comedies, including Ben Jonson's *Volpone* and many Restoration plays (for example, Congreve's *The Way of the World* and Wycherley's *The Country Wife*), have plots which turn largely on the success or failure of an intrigue.