

PLAYMAKING: how to write a script



Insider's Guide to Being a Successful Playwright

**RE-DISCOVER the Art, Science, Rules, Conventions,
Rewards and Crafting surrounding**

DRAMA AND PLAYWRITING

Writing fundamentals to guide you to your own masterpiece...

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*Drama is life with the dull bits cut out.
Alfred Hitchcock (1899 - 1980)*

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***A dramatic critic is a man who leaves no turn unstoned.
George Bernard Shaw (1856 - 1950)***

***Has anybody ever seen a drama critic in the daytime? Of course not. They come out after dark, up to no good.
P. G. Wodehouse (1881 - 1975)***

1. The BEFORE – setting the stage, Prologue

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this guide is to provide would-be dramatists with some systematic advice and guidance in a plain and practical way. Many existing books are more aimed at guiding the judgment of the critic in writing review columns, rather than stimulating and developing the creative impulse of the playwright.

No absolute rules exist for writing a play – much of the writing guidelines are just common sense. It would be easier to make a list of dangers to avoid – some are obvious, and others are perhaps questionable, but doing so may be too much of a negative approach. For example, the play should not be too lengthy in duration, and characters should rather not be narrating their circumstances or expounding their motives in speeches addressed to the audience or to themselves. Some dramatic openings, however, remain so striking and timeless, like Richard Plantagenet limping down the empty stage to say:

"Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this sun of York;
And all the clouds that lour'd upon our house
In the deep bosom of the ocean buried"

Aristotle did draw some guidelines from the practices of the Attic dramatists, as did Horace from the Alexandrians. There seem to be a constant demand for textbooks on the subject of the art and craft of creating a drama. Ironically, many of the authors of such books have never written a play themselves, but are eager to tell others how. Stranger still, is that so many potential writers want to learn from

these authors since they are convinced that the fine art of dramatic fiction can and need to be taught.

Drama differs from novel writing in the sense that it needs to run through the highly complex mechanism of the theatre before it can have its intended impact on the audience. To fledgling playwrights this world represents a fascinating mystery. Fairly few had the privilege or opportunity to closely get to know or experiment with this new environment. The obvious solution to gain knowledge is to "read up" on the subject. They may feel an inward conviction of their ability to eventually master this mysterious world, but often has neither developed an instinctive sense about the theatre, nor an understanding of the technical difficulties, limitations or possibilities inherent to an on stage presentation. The functionality of theoretical instruction is often overrated, and the novice playwright may find him or herself in a confusing tug of war between theoretical pedantic principles that may be out of touch with the practical realities of today's theatre, and practices aimed solely at the benefit at the box-office, therefore sacrificing knowledge, quality and often cutting corners in many ways.

The challenge therefore is to expose the novice just enough to the practical theatre life to learn enough about the conditions, mechanisms and possibilities, but to avoid over exposure to the conventional theatrical trade in order to preserve his or her originality of vision, creativity and individuality of method.

Why don't the textbook writers write more dramatic plays themselves?

Isn't it better to write plays instead of writing about them? A person may have a great love for an art, and have some insight into its principles and methods, but lack the innate ability required to create

an original piece of art. On the other hand, some gifted and excellent playwrights often lack the ability or patience to guide and mentor novices. An accomplished dramatist may often not be the best guide for novice dramatists. He can't analyze his own performance, and through that discriminate between that in his performance which is of universal validity, and that which may be good for him, but would be bad for any one else.

If he happened to be a great man, he would inevitably, even if unconsciously, seek to expose those he mentors to his individual attitude towards life. If he were a lesser man, he would teach them only his tricks. But dramatists do not tend to take pupils or write handbooks. When they expound their principles of art, it is generally in answer to, or in anticipation of criticism. Their goal is not to help others, but to defend themselves. Beginners are therefore mostly dependent on critics, and not dramatists, to find any systematic guidance.

It is important to understand that if any part of the dramatist's art can be taught, it is only a comparatively mechanical and formal part: the art of structure. One may learn how to tell a story in good dramatic form, how to develop and direct it in such a way as best seize and retain the interest of a theatrical audience. But no teaching or study can enable a man to choose or invent a good story, and much less to do that which alone lends dignity to dramatic story-telling - to observe and portray human character, which is the aim and end of all serious drama.

Even the greatest genius needs competent craftsmanship to enable his creations to live and breathe upon the stage. The profoundest insight into human nature and destiny can't be validly expressed through the medium of the theatre without some understanding of the peculiar art of dramatic construction. Some people are born with such an instinct

for this art, and master it with little practice.

To tell a story with impact to a theatre audience is an art and is necessarily relative to the audience to whom the story is to be told. One must assume an audience with certain characteristics before one can rationally discuss the best methods of appealing to its intelligence and its sympathies.

Theatrical art owes much to voluntary organizations of playgoers, who have combined to provide themselves with forms of drama which specially interest them, and do not necessarily attract the great public. Molière was popular with the ordinary people of his day, and his plays have endured for over two centuries, and are still doing very well.

A playwright should be able to "disburden his soul" within the three hours' limit, which is imposed simply by the physical endurance and power of sustained attention that can be demanded of human beings assembled in a theatre. There is a large class of playgoers which is capable of appreciating work of a high intellectual order, if only the fundamental conditions of theatrical presentation are not ignored, as doing so will be to the detriment, not only of his popularity and profits, but of the artistic quality of his work. Why should the dramatist concern himself about his audience, if he is a true artist? If he declares his goal to be mere self-expression and he writes to please himself, without thinking to take into account the audience – intellectual or not – he may stultify himself in that very phrase. It is by obeying, not by ignoring, the fundamental conditions of his craft that the dramatist may hope to lead his audience upward to the highest intellectual level which he himself can attain. The painter may paint, the sculptor model, the lyric poet sing, simply to please himself, but drama has no meaning except in relation to an audience. It is a portrayal of life by means of a mechanism devised to bring it home in an immediate way to a considerable number of people assembled in a given place. The

public constitutes the theatre. The real difference between the dramatist and other artists, is that they can be their own audience, in a sense in which he can't.

This guide is aimed at students of play writing who sincerely desire to do sound, artistic work under the conditions and limitations of the actual, living playhouse. This does not mean, of course, that they ought always to be studying "what the public wants". The dramatist should give the public what he himself wants, but in such form as to make it comprehensible and interesting in a theatre.

1.2 To choose a theme

The word "theme" refers to the subject of a play, or to the story. For example, the theme of "Romeo and Juliet" is youthful love crossed by ancestral hate; the theme of "Othello" is jealousy; the theme of "Le Tartufe" is hypocrisy; the theme of "Caste" is fond hearts and coronets and the theme of "Getting Married" is getting married.

In some plays it is evident that there was no theme that could be expressed in abstract terms, present in the author's mind, but through a process of abstraction we can formulate a theme for plays like "As You Like It", "The Way of the World" or for "Hedda Gabler".

Should the dramatist first think of a theme and then build a story around it? This is a possible, but not a promising, method, since a story created to fit or illustrate a moral concept is always apt to advertise its origin, to the detriment of its illusive quality. It can work, if that intent is stated frankly – even in the title, and if it's witty and charming, and does not pretend to be what it's not. Examples are the French "Proverbe" and "A Pair of Spectacles", by Mr. Sydney Grundy. In this bright little English comedy every incident and situation bears upon the general theme, and is pleasing, not by its probability, but by

being ingeniously appropriate.

A theme of temporary interest will often have a great but no less temporary success, also if it is not universal enough, as in "An Englishman's Home", by Major du Maurier. Though there was a good deal of clever character drawing, the theme was so evidently the source and inspiration of the play that in America, where the theme was of no interest, the play failed.

Excellent plays in which the theme, in all probability, preceded both the story and the characters in the author's mind, are most of M. Brieux's as well as Mr. Galsworthy's "Strife" and "Justice".

The theme may sometimes be an environment, a social phenomenon of one sort or another and not an idea, an abstraction or a principle. The author's primary object in such a case is to transfer to the stage an animated picture of some broad aspect or phase of life, without concentrating the interest on any one figure or group or to portray any individual character or tell any definite story. Such tableau-plays are Ben Jonson's "Bartholomew Fair", Schiller's "Wallensteins Lager". More recent plays like Hauptmann's "Die Weber" and Gorky's "Nachasyt" are perhaps the best examples of the type. It needs an exceptional amount of knowledge and dramaturgic skill to handle them successfully. It is far easier to tell a story on the stage than to paint a picture, and few playwrights can resist the temptation to foist a story upon their picture, thus marring it by an inharmonious intrusion of melodrama or farce. James A. Herne inserted into a charming idyllic picture of rural life, by the name of "Shore Acres", a melodramatic scene in a lighthouse, which was hopelessly out of key with the rest of the play. This was done in the belief that no play can exist, or can attract playgoers, without a definite and more or less exciting plot. It seems to be better to give a tableau play just so much of story as may naturally and inevitably fall within its limits.

Whatever maybe the seed that started a play - whether it be an anecdote, a situation, or personal experience, a newspaper headline, an emotional adventure or an incident in the street - the play will be of small account as a work of art unless character, at a very early point, enters into its development. Mr. Henry Arthur Jones writes:

"Sometimes I start with a scene only, sometimes with a complete idea. Sometimes a play splits into two plays, sometimes two or three ideas combine into a concrete whole. Always the final play is altered out of all knowledge from its first idea." "My experience is," another dramatist wrote, "that you never deliberately choose a theme. You lie awake, or you go walking, and suddenly there flashes into your mind a contrast, a piece of spiritual irony, an old incident carrying some general significance. Round this your mind broods, and there is the germ of your play." He writes: "It is not advisable for a playwright to start out at all unless he has so felt or seen something, that he feels, as it matures in his mind, that he must express it, and in dramatic form."

The difference between a "live" play and a "dead" one is that in the former the characters control the plot, while in the latter the plot controls the characters. Which is not to say, of course, that there may not be clever and entertaining plays which are "dead" in this sense, and dull and unattractive plays which are "live."

Aristotle remarked that the action or "muthos", not the character or "ethos", is the essential element in drama. He views action to be the essential element in tragedy and not merely the necessary vehicle of character. "In a play," he says, "they do not act in order to portray the characters, they include the characters for the sake of the action. A play can exist without anything that can be called character, but not without some sort of action. A tragedy is impossible without action, but there may be one without character. This is implied in the very

word "drama," which means a doing, not a mere saying or existing. Deeds, not words, are the demonstration and test of character - therefore, historically it has been the recognized business of the theatre to exhibit character in action or the portrayal of an action ... some exploit or some calamity in the career of some demigod or hero. Story or plot is thus by definition, tradition, and practical reason, the fundamental element in drama. But action ought to exist for the sake of character.

Sometimes the impulse to write a play exists in the abstract, unassociated with any particular subject, and the would-be playwright proceeds, as he thinks, to set his imagination to work, and invent a story. Care needs to be taken here, since when we think we are choosing a plot out of the void, we are very prone to be ransacking the store-house of memory and it may not be as original as we thought. The plot "which chooses us" is much more dependable to be original ... the idea which comes when we least expect it, perhaps from the most unlikely quarter.

Whatever principles of conception and construction apply to the modern prose drama, apply with equal cogency to the poetic drama. For instance, we may find reason to think the soliloquy more excusable in verse than in prose. But fundamentally, the two forms are ruled by the same set of conditions, which the verse-poet, no less than the prose-poet, can't ignore. If, in the course of his legendary, romantic, or historical reading, some character should catch his imagination and demand to be interpreted, or some episode should startle him by putting on vivid dramatic form before his mind's eye, then let him by all means yield to the inspiration, and try to mould the theme into a drama. The real labor of creation will still lie before him, but he may face it with the hope of producing a live play.

1.3 Dramatic or not

The critic Ferdinand Brunetière said: "The theatre in general, is nothing but the place for the development of the human will, attacking the obstacles opposed to it by destiny, fortune, or circumstances." And again: "Drama is a representation of the will of man in conflict with the mysterious powers or natural forces which limit and belittle us; it is one of us thrown living upon the stage, there to struggle against fatality, against social law, against one of his fellow-mortals, against himself, if need be, against the ambitions, the interests, the prejudices, the folly, the malevolence of those who surround him." (Etudes Critiques, vol. vii, pp. 153 and 207) This definition describes the matter of many dramas, but it does not lay down any characteristic common to all drama, and possessed by no other form of fiction.

It seems to be true that conflict is one of the most dramatic elements in life, and that many dramas - perhaps most - do turn upon strife of one sort or another. But it is clearly an error to make conflict indispensable to drama, and especially to insist - as some of Brunetière's followers do - that the conflict must be between will and will. A stand-up fight between will and will -- such fights occur in the "Hippolytus" of Euripides, Racine's "Andromaque", Molière's "Tartufe", Ibsen's "Pretenders", Dumas's "Frauillon", Sudermann's "Heimat", Sir Arthur Pinero's "Gay Lord Quex", Mr. Shaw's "Candida", or Mr. Galsworthy's "Strife". Such stand-up fights are no doubt one of the most intense forms of drama. But it is comparatively rare as the formula of a whole play. The point of some other very dramatic scenes is not a clash, but an ecstatic concordance of wills, for example in the death scene of Cleopatra, the Banquet scene in "Macbeth" or the Balcony scene in "Romeo and Juliet".

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The essence of human personality is found in the will, and dramatic art shows human personality raised to its highest power. A simple psychological observation would be that human nature loves a fight, whether it be with clubs or with swords, with tongues or with brains. One of the earliest forms of mediaeval drama was the "estриф" or "flyting"- the scolding match between husband and wife, or between two rustic gossips. Certainly there is nothing more gripping in drama than a piece of "cut-and-thrust" dialogue after the fashion of the ancient "stichomythia. But a scene is not less dramatic merely because it has no room for a clash of warring wills.

Though far from being universally valid, the "No obstacle, no drama" theory has a certain practical usefulness, and is worth mentioning. Many a play would have remained unwritten if the author had asked himself, "Is there a sufficient obstacle between my two lovers?" or, in more general terms, "between my characters and the realization of their will?" There is nothing more futile than a play in which we feel that there is no real obstacle to the inevitable happy ending, and that the curtain might just as well fall in the middle of the first act as at the end of the third. The author might often do well ask himself whether he could not strengthen his obstacle, and so accentuate the struggle which forms the matter of his play.

Conflict may not be essential to drama, but when you set out to portray a struggle, you may as well make it as real and intense as possible. In William Vaughn Moody's drama, "The Great Divide", an inadequate obstacle portrayed causes the play to be not strong enough and thus it turned out to be less lasting. If there would have been a real disharmony of character to overcome, in addition to the sordid misadventure of a violent drunken husband, which is the sole barrier between them, the play would have been much stronger.

In a play by James Bernard Fagan, "The Prayer of the Sword", there is

a clear example of an inadequate obstacle. A youth named Andrea destined for the priesthood falls in love, and the tragedy ought to lie in the conflict between this earthly passion and his heavenly calling and election. The fact that he has as yet taken no irrevocable vow is not the essence of the matter. There would have been a tragic conflict if Andrea had felt absolutely certain of his calling to the priesthood, and had defied Heaven, and endangered his immortal soul because of his overwhelming passion. That would have been a tragic situation - but the author had carefully avoided it - unfortunately. From the outset it had been impressed upon the audience that he had no priestly vocation. There was no struggle in his soul between passion and duty. His struggles were all with external forces and influences. Therefore the play, which a real obstacle might have converted into a tragedy, remained a sentimental romance ... and was forgotten.

If *conflict* is not the essence of drama, what is? What would be the common quality of themes, scenes, and incidents, which we recognize as specifically dramatic? *Crisis*. Drama may be called the art of crisis. A play is a fairly rapid developing crisis in destiny or circumstance, and a dramatic scene is a crisis within a crisis, furthering the ultimate event. Drama deals with rapid and startling changes, "peripeties," as the Greeks called them, which actually occur in very brief spaces of time. Not every crisis is that dramatic. A serious illness, a law suit, a bankruptcy, even an ordinary prosaic marriage may be a crisis in a man's life, without being necessarily suitable material for drama. How do we distinguish a dramatic from a non-dramatic crisis? By the fact that it can be made to naturally develop through a series of minor crises, involving emotional excitement, and the vivid manifestation of character. A well used example could be bankruptcy, following a course of gambling, generally in stocks. Here is evident opportunity for a series of crises of somewhat violent and commonplace emotion.

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In American drama especially, the duels of Wall Street, the combats of bull and bear, form a very popular theme. Few American dramatists can resist the temptation of showing some masterful financier feverishly watching the "ticker" which proclaims him a millionaire or a beggar. Here the great crisis brings out vivid manifestations of character, not only in the bankrupt person himself, but in those around him, and naturally unfolding itself through a series of those lesser crises in interesting and moving scenes. Plays like "A bankruptcy" (Bjornson) and "La Doloureuse" (Maurice Donnay) pursue this theme.

Generally speaking, the dramatic way of presenting individual incidents could be described as crisp, staccato, shocking to the nerves and dealing with curiosity and surprise. People probably enjoy emotion more than pure apprehension. The most dramatic effect will therefore be created by handling an incident such as to extract the greatest variety of poignancy of emotion from it.

Secondary suspense or surprise is experienced in empathy with the characters, by a spectator who knows perfectly what is to follow. The dramatist should focus his main appeal on secondary suspense, for the longer his play endures, the larger will be the proportion of any given audience knowing it beforehand - in outline, if not in detail. A good example to extract the maximum effect from what might else have been an anti-climax, would be the death of Othello - no easy problem for Shakespeare. Desdemona was dead, Emilia dead, Iago wounded and doomed to torture. How was Othello's death to be made the culminating moment of the tragedy, and not a foregone conclusion or a mere conventional suicide? Shakespeare's dramatic genius shines unmistakably from Othello's address, as he is being led away:

"Soft you; a word or two, before you go.

I have done the state some service, and they know 't;

No more of that. I pray you, in your letters,

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When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice, then must you speak
Of one that loved not wisely but too well;
Of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought,
Perplex'd in the extreme; of one whose hand,
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes,
Albeit unused to the melting mood,
Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees
Their medicinal gum. Set you down this;
And say besides, that in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
I took by the throat the circumcised dog,
And smote him--thus!"

Here Shakespeare has thrown his audience off guard, just as Othello has done to his captors, and replaced the expected with a sudden shock of surprise. He re-invented the incident to be crisp instead of flaccid, thus giving it specific dramatic accent, a sudden thrill of novelty and unexpectedness. He succeeded in portraying "a given thing" in absolutely the most dramatic method conceivable.

The tendency of recent theory and practice, has been to widen the meaning of the word "dramatic", until it bursts the bonds of all definition. A movement developed in reaction against the traditional "dramatic", correcting conventional "theatricalism" in a valuable way. It has, at some points, positively enlarged the domain of dramatic art. It helped to free art from rigid rules and definitions. A very valid definition of the dramatic is: Any representation of imaginary personages which is capable of interesting an average audience assembled in a theatre. It is expected of original genius to override the

dictates of experience, and it should be encouraged. In a certain type of play - the broad picture of a social phenomenon or environment - it is preferable that no attempt should be made to depict a marked crisis. There should be just enough story to afford a plausible excuse for raising and for lowering the curtain. On the other hand, theatrical conditions often encourage a violent exaggeration of the characteristically dramatic elements in life.

If the essence of drama is crisis, it follows that nothing can be more dramatic than a momentous choice which may make or break the character as well as the fortune of the chooser and of others. There is an element of choice in all action which seems to be the product of free will; but there is a peculiar crispness of effect when two alternatives are clearly formulated, and the choice is made after a mental struggle, accentuated, perhaps, by impassioned advocacy of the conflicting interests. Those who have mastered the extremely delicate and difficult art of creating drama without the characteristically dramatic ingredients should do so by all means. Hopefully they fairly allow freedom to others for the judicious and dramatic use of these ingredients as they present themselves in life. The symbolical game of chess is also a well-worn dramatic tool.

1.4 The routine of composition

Valuable insight into the methods of a master is provided by the scenarios and drafts of plays published in Henrik Ibsen's "Efterladte Skrifter", some of which now have been translated under the title of "From Ibsen's Workshop" (Scribner), and well worth studying.

The great lesson to be learnt from Ibsen's practice is that the play should be kept fluid or plastic as long as possible, and not allowed to become fixed, either in the author's mind or on paper, before it has had time to grow and ripen. Many of Ibsen's greatest individual inspirations came to him as afterthoughts, after the play had

reached a point of development at which many authors would have considered the work of art ripe for birth.

A good work method for the playwright is to draw up a tentative scenario - a detailed scheme. In a dramatic structure of any considerable length, proportion, balance, and the interconnection of parts are so essential that a scenario is almost as indispensable to a dramatist as a set of plans to an architect. Bernard Shaw is thought to have sometimes worked without any definite scenario, and inventing as he goes along - to the detriment of plays like "Getting Married" or "Misalliance".

Composition-as-you-go may only be possible for the novelist or perhaps even for the writer of a one-act play, but hardly wise. Sardou wrote careful and detailed scenarios, Dumas felt it is a waste of time to do so. Pailleron wrote "enormous" scenarios, Meilhac very brief ones, or none at all. Galsworthy thought that a theme becomes lifeless when you put down its skeleton on paper. Alfred Sutro says: "Before I start writing the dialogue of a play, I make sure that I shall have an absolutely free hand over the entrances and exits: in other words, that there is ample and legitimate reason for each character appearing in any particular scene, and ample motive for his leaving it." Granville Barker says: "I plan the general scheme, and particularly the balance of the play, in my head". Henry Arthur Jones says: "I know the leading scenes, and the general course of action in each act, before I write a line. When I have got the whole story clear, and divided into acts, I very carefully construct the first act, as a series of scenes between such and such of the characters. When the first act is written I carefully construct the second act in the same way.... I sometimes draw up twenty scenarios for an act before I can get it to go straight."

In the transition from *extempore acting* regulated by a written scenario only the formal learning of parts falls within the historical

period of the German stage. It seems probable that the romantic playwrights of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, both in England and in Spain, may have adopted a method not unlike that of the drama of improvisation. They may have drawn out a scheme of entrances and exits, and then let their characters discourse (on paper) as their fancy prompted. Typical modern plays are much more close-knit, in which every word has to be weighed far more carefully than it was by playwrights during the days of improvisation. Until a play has been thought out very clearly in great detail, any scheme of entrances and exits is merely provisional and may be indefinitely modified. A close interdependence exists between action, character and dialogue, which forbids a playwright to tie his hands at an early stage with a fixed and unalterable outline. It may be a powerful, logical, well-knit piece of work, but may miss flexibility, vibrancy and life. Room should be left as long as possible for unexpected developments of character.

M. François de Curel, an accomplished psychologist, mentions that during the first few days of work at a play he is "clearly conscious of creating," but that gradually he gets "into the skin" of his characters, and appears to work by instinct. No doubt some artists are actually subject to a sort of hallucination, during which they seem rather to record than to invent the doings of their characters. Fitch was often astonished at the way in which his characters developed. He tried to make them do certain things: they did others. Sir Arthur Pinero says: "The beginning of a play to me is a little world of people. I live with them, get familiar with them, and "they" tell me the story." He meant that the story came to him as the characters took on life in his imagination.

H.A. Jones writes: "When you have a character or several characters you haven't a play. You may keep these in your mind and nurse them till they combine in a piece of action; but you haven't got your play till you have theme, characters, and action all fused. The process with me

is as purely automatic and spontaneous as dreaming; in fact it is really dreaming while you are awake." The apparent spontaneity of a character's proceedings is a pure illusion. It means no more than that the imagination, once set in motion along a given line, moves along that line with an ease and freedom which seems to its possessor preternatural and almost uncanny. Authors who are very gifted for character-creation probably experience this illusion, though they are sane enough and modest enough to realize that an illusion it is. Here flexibility is vital.

The playwright's scheme should not until the latest possible moment become so hard and fast as to allow his characters no elbow room for spontaneity, and afterthoughts about changes which may arise as the play develops. Re-adjustments may constantly have to be made if a play is shaping itself by a process of vital growth. That is why the playwright may be wise to keep his material fluid as long as he can. It is advisable to treat a dramatic theme like clay to be modeled and remodeled, rather than as wood or marble to be carved unalterably and once for all. There may be authors who can write vital plays, as Shakespeare is said to have done, without erasing a line, but the great playwright is more likely to be he who doesn't mind to cut or change an act or two.

The dramatist should aim at being logical without seeming so, so that the play have passion, not only precision, and command out enthusiasm, not only our respect. Very early in the scheming of his play, the playwright should assure himself that his theme is capable of a satisfactory ending - not implying a "happy ending," but one which satisfies the author as being artistic, effective, inevitable or "right." An obviously makeshift ending can never be desirable. Many excellent plays have been wrecked this way, because the "last act is weak". It is obvious when the author has clearly been at a loss for an ending, and has simply huddled his play up in a conventional and perfunctory

fashion. Some apparently promising themes are "blind-alley themes", since they are inherently incapable of a satisfactory ending. Early on the dramatist should clearly see the end for which he is aiming, and be sure that it is an end that he actively desires, not merely one which satisfies convention, or which "will have to do."

Some dramatists, after having mapped out the play, don't to start at the beginning and write it as a coherent whole, but make a dash first at the more salient and critical scenes, or those which specially attract their imagination. This can be good, since it certainly enhances plasticity.

Should the playwright be able to visualize the detailed scene of each act in his mind's eye? Today props are much more important than many years ago. Most modern dramatists pay great attention to the "topography" of their scenes, and the shifting "positions" of their characters. Again it is wise to wait till for a comparatively late stage to map out the stage-management. Even where a great deal turns on some individual object, the detailed arrangements of the scene may in most cases be taken for granted until a late stage in its working out. Make sure that the object fits well within the physical possibilities of the stage, and that the arrangement is optically possible and effective. Few things, indeed, are impossible to the modern stage, but there are many things that are wiser not to attempt, since it may distract the audience's attention such that they may miss the dialogue and the play may fail for them as result.

Sometimes "less is more". Before relying on any special effects, make sure that it is, not only possible, but convenient from the practical point of view.

It is a good general rule to avoid expressions which show that the author has a stage scene, and not an episode of real life, in his mind's

eye. People of the theatre are the last to be impressed by theatrical jargon. Using lots of abbreviations for stage management directions is just confusing. Stage layouts have changed much, and some older terms no longer apply. The common-sense rule as to stage directions is keep it short, clear and to the point, impersonal and professional. Visualize and describe the room, the garden, the sea-shore, or whatever the place of action may be, not as a stage-scene, but as a room, garden, or sea-shore in the real world. Cultivating this habit may bear excellent results and is a safeguard against theatricality.

1.5 Dramatis personae

Most dramatists draw up a provisional Dramatis Personae before beginning the serious work of constructing the play. Ibsen mostly did so, but then shortened the list later. Some saved up the characters rejected from one play, and used them in another. There are essential characters in every play, without whom the theme would be unthinkable, and auxiliary characters that are simply convenient for filling in the canvas and carrying on the action, but not indispensable to the theme. It depends upon how we define the theme whether a character is essential or auxiliary. The auxiliaries might all have been utterly different, or might never have existed at all, and yet the essence of the play would remain intact. The modern dramatist has a wide latitude of choice in the technical matter of working out his plot with the smallest possible number of characters, or he may introduce a crowd of auxiliary personages. The nature of his theme will be the guide to this. In a broad social study or a picturesque romance, many auxiliary figures are in order, but in a subtle comedy, or a psychological tragedy, the essential characters should have the stage as much as possible to themselves.

As to nomenclature, some peculiar names were regarded as acceptable

in "The Comedy of Manners," but may have become offensive today. The fashion of label-names came down from the Elizabethans, who borrowed it from the Medieval Moralities. Shakespeare gave us Master Slender and Justice Shallow. A slave might be called Onesimus, meaning "useful," or a soldier Polemon, to imply his warlike function. But it was in the Jonsonian comedy of types that the practice of advertising a "humour" or "passion" in a name (English or Italian) established itself. Examples are: Sir Epicure Mammon, Sir Amorous La Foole, Morose, Wellbred, Downright and Fastidius Brisk.

Names should be characteristic without eccentricity or punning. Farcical names are, within limits, admissible in farce, eccentric names in eccentric comedy, while soberly appropriate names are alone in place in serious plays. The appropriateness of some of Ibsen's names may be lost upon foreign audiences.

The absence of a list of "Dramatis Personae" in some printed plays adds to the difficulty which some readers experience in picking up the threads of a play and it deprives other readers of the pleasure of anticipation. It is charming to looking down a list of names, and thinking that very soon they and their hearts will be known and some of them may be our friends forever.

2. Beginning things right – the foundation and building blocks of drama

2.1 Where it all starts - the point of attack: Shakespeare and Ibsen

Aristotle required that a play should have a beginning, middle and end. A tendency exists to rebel against this requirement - as many plays do not end, but simply "leave off", for example Ibsen's "Ghosts".

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The playwright deals with short, sharp crises, not with protracted sequences of events. The question for him, is: At what moment of the crisis, or of its preceding development, would be the best place to begin? The answer depends on many things, but chiefly on the nature of the crisis and what impression the dramatist desires to make upon his audience. In a comedy, if his object is to gently and quietly interest and entertain, he may begin by showing us his personages in their normal state, concisely indicates their characters, circumstances and relations, and then lets the crisis develop from the outset before our eyes. If he wants to seize the spectator's attention firmly from the start, he will probably go straight at the crisis, to the very middle of it, and afterwards go back in order to explain to the audience the preceding circumstances.

In some plays of Ibsen, the curtain rises on a surface aspect of profound peace, which is soon found to be but a thin crust over an absolutely volcanic condition of affairs, the origin of which has to be traced backwards, maybe for many years.

Considering Shakespeare's openings - at what points does he attack his various themes? Most of his comedies begin with a simple, quiet conversation, with latent but rapid crisis development – but no plunging into it. In his fictitious plays it was Shakespeare's constant practice to bring the whole action within the frame of the picture, opening at such a point that no retrospect should be necessary, beyond what could be conveyed in a few casual words. Two notable exceptions are "The Tempest" and "Hamlet", where he plunged into the middle of the crisis because his object was to concentrate his effects and present the dramatic elements of his theme at their highest potency.

In the tragedies, Shakespeare mostly began with a picturesque, crisp and stirring episode of vehement action, calculated to arrest the

spectator's attention and spark the interest, while conveying little or no information, but appealing to the nerves and arousing anticipation in just the right measure. It is very import to discover just the right point at which to raise the curtain.

The dramatic effect of incidents is incalculably heightened when the emotions of the characters are peaked. The dramatic quality of an incident is proportionate to the variety and intensity of the emotions involved in it.

In Ibsen's work we find an extraordinary progress in the art of so unfolding the drama of the past as to make the gradual revelation an integral part of the drama of the present. The secret of the depth and richness of texture so characteristic of Ibsen's work, lay in his art of closely interweaving a drama of the present with a drama of the past. Ibsen perfected his peculiar gift of imparting tense dramatic interest to the unveiling of the past in "Ghosts".

There are masterpieces in which the whole crisis falls within the frame of the picture, and masterpieces in which the greater part of the crisis has to be conveyed to us in retrospect. One method is not better than the other.

2.1 Exposition

Each form has particular advantages. A retrospective play like "Rosmersholm" flows steady and full like a winding river. For light comedy and for romantic plays without in depth character-studies, it is undeniably attractive to have one brisk and continuous adventure, begun, developed, and ended before our eyes.

It's difficult to produce a play of very complex psychological, moral, or emotional substance, in which the whole crisis comes within the frame

of the picture. The method of attacking the crisis in the middle or towards the end is really a device for the relaxing, to some extent, the narrow bounds of theatrical representation, and enabling the playwright to deal with a larger segment of human experience. Shakespeare had really far more elbow room than the playwright of today with respect to the length of the play, but plays like *Othello* and *King Lear* are not very complex character studies, although projected with huge energy. Shakespeare had room as was allowed by the copious expression permitted by the rhetorical Elizabethian form. Today's playwright is hampered by often having to work in indirect suggestion than in direct expression.

One of the keenest forms of theatrical enjoyment is that of seeing the curtain go up on a picture of perfect tranquility, wondering from what quarter the drama is going to arise, and then watching the storm gather on the horizon, as in "*An enemy of the people*". Sometimes the atmosphere is already charged with electricity when the play opens, like in "*The Case of Rebellious Susan*" by Henry Arthur Jones. When an exposition can't be dramatized enough through the action from the characters primarily concerned, it is better to dismiss it in any natural and probable way. If all of a given subject cannot be covered within the limits of presentation, is there any means of determining how much should be left for retrospect? The curtain should be raised at the point where the crisis begins to move towards its solution, more or less rapidly and continually. Interest should be concentrated on one set of characters, and should not be fragmented away on subsidiary or preliminary personages.

When the attention of the audience is required for an exposition of any length, some attempt ought to be made to awaken in advance their general interest in the theme and characters. It is dangerous to plunge straight into narrative, or unemotional discussion, without having first made the audience actively desire the information to be conveyed to

them. It is essential that the audience should know clearly who are the subjects of the discussion or narrative - that they should not be mere names to them. Keen expectancy is the most desirable frame of mind in which an audience can be placed, so long as the expectancy does not ultimately disappoint.

Where it is desired to give to one character a special prominence and predominance, it should be the first figure on which the eye of the audience falls. Let the first ten minutes be crisp, arresting, stimulating, but don't cover any absolutely vital matter, which would leave the spectator in the dark as to the general design and purpose of the play.

2.2 The first act

There have been trends through the years to work against the division of a play into acts. Shakespeare used acts to give a rhythm to the action of his plays, although some students of the Elizabethan stage speculate that he did not "think in acts," but conceived his plays as continuous series of events, without any pause or intermission in their flow. In the Elizabethan theatre there was no need of long intervals for the change of scenes, but there is abundant evidence that the act division was sometimes marked on the Elizabethan stage, and that it was always more or less recognized, and was present to Shakespeare's mind.

Bernard Shaw did write some plays in one continuous gush of dialogue, in unity of time and place, a continuous mass or mass, e.g. "Getting Married" where he relies upon his virtuosity of dialogue to enable him to dispense with form. He claimed that he is thereby reviving the practice of the Greeks, a claim that can be shown to be unfounded. A typical example of Greek tragedy, "Oedipus", shows the unity of carefully calculated proportion, order, interrelation of parts ...

the unity of a fine piece of architecture, or of a living organism. Note the difference between the formless continuity of "Getting Married", and the precise ordering and balancing of clearly differentiated parts in the structure of a Greek tragedy. The division into acts remains a valuable means of marking the rhythm of the story. When there is no story to tell, the division into acts is probably superfluous.

A play with a well-marked, well-balanced act-structure is of a higher artistic order than a play with no act-structure. The dramatist analyze the crises with which he deals, and present them to the audience in their rhythm of growth, culmination and solution. The division into acts helps to mark that rhythm. Aristotle had the necessity for marking this rhythm in mind when he said that a dramatic action must have a beginning, a middle and an end.

Taken in its simplicity, this principle would indicate the three-act division as the ideal scheme for a play. Many of the best modern plays in all languages fall into three acts. The three-act division shouldn't be more made into an absolute rule than the five-act division. Many modern serious plays are in four acts. A play ought to consist of a great crisis, worked out through a series of minor crises. An act ought to consist either of a minor crisis carried to its temporary solution, or of a random number of such crises grouped together in the development of a given theme. Five acts may be regarded as the maximum because of the time-limit imposed by social custom on a performance.

"One act, one scene" is a golden rule, since a change of scene in the middle of an act tends to impair the particular order of illusion at which the modern drama aims and is physically challenging to execute. An act can be defined as any part of a given crisis which works itself out

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at one time and in one place. It is a segment of the action during which the author desires to hold the attention of his audience unbroken and spellbound. Acts mark the time-stages in the development of a given crisis and each act aim to embody a minor crisis of its own, with a culmination and a temporary solution. Each act is a little drama in itself and leads forward to the next - and marks a distinct phase in the development of the crisis. The act-division certainly enhances the amount of pleasurable emotion through which the audience passes.

It is not about how much or how little is conveyed to the audience in the first act, but whether their interest is aroused, and skillfully carried forward. When the curtain is down the action on the stage remains in suspense and the audience is quite willing to suppose that any reasonable space of time has elapsed since the previous act ended. Some playwrights, like Sir Arthur Pinero in "Iris", drop the curtain once or twice in the middle of an act, to indicate a time interval.

The first act should show us clearly who the characters are, what their relations and relationships are, and what the nature of the gathering crisis is. It is very important to keep the relationships simple, since intricacies will often prove to be mere useless encumbrances.

The good plays are those of which the story can be clearly summarized in ten lines, while it may take a column to give even a confused idea of the plot of a lesser play. A useful guideline is whether the core of the subject can be formulated in about a hundred words.

The first act should be placing the situation clearly before us, pointing and carrying the story line distinctly towards the heart of the play and the developing crisis, especially in three-act plays, to sustain the interest of the audience. Too much should not be told, so that the remaining acts be weakened, nor should any one scene be so intense

so it outshines all subsequent scenes and leave the rest of the play with an effect of an anti-climax. The point at which the drama enfolds – the germination of the crisis where the drama sets in, can be very functional if appearing in the first act. The playwright would be wise not to assume previous knowledge of plot or character on the part of the public.

2.3 "Curiosity" and "Interest"

In the world of drama the aim is to study how to awaken and to sustain the keen interest, or curiosity, which can be felt only by those who see the play for the first time. The challenge is that popular plays are subject to media scrutiny and criticism, with the effect that few in the audience attend in an unbiased mindset and completely open minded. The first-night audience determines in great measure a play's success or failure. Wisdom for the dramatist is to direct all thought and care towards conciliating and engaging an audience to which his theme is entirely unknown and so hopefully to succeed in the challenging first performance. Popular knowledge may impose new limitations on the playwright. In some cases he can rely on a general knowledge of the historic background of a given period, which may save him some exposition.

However well known a play may be, the playwright must assume that in every audience there will be a number of persons who know practically nothing about it, and whose enjoyment will depend, like that of the first-night audience, on the skill with which he develops his story. On the other hand, he can never rely on taking an audience by surprise at any particular point.

The dramatist has little option but to assume complete ignorance in his audience, but only the first-night audience will be entirely in this condition, since the more successful the play is, the more extensively

subsequent audiences will tend to have prior knowledge about it.

Experience shows that dramatic "interest" is entirely distinct from mere "curiosity", and survives when curiosity is dead. Though a skillfully told story is not of itself enough to secure long life for a play, it enhances the attractiveness of a play which has other and higher claims to longevity. The arousing and sustaining of curiosity should be a primary concern, but it is only a means to the more abiding forms of interest. With too little to foresee in the road ahead, the audience's particular interest may fade.

However well we may know a play beforehand, we seldom know it by heart or nearly by heart - so that, though we may anticipate a development in general outline, we do not clearly foresee the ordering of its details, which may give us almost the same sort of pleasure that it gave us when the story was new to us. A great play is like a great piece of music: we can hear it repeatedly and every time discover new subtle beauties and complex harmonies, enjoying the better and lesser merits of each time it is performed. In truly great drama, the foreknowledge possessed by the audience is not a disadvantage, but is the source of the highest pleasure that the theatre is capable of affording. "Curiosity" is the accidental enjoyment of a single night's performance, whereas the essential and abiding pleasure of the theatre lies in foreknowledge.

2.4 Foreshadowing versus forestalling

The dramatist's chief aim in the first act should be to arouse and carry forward the interest of the audience, by using an interesting theme. Each act as we have seen, should contain a subordinate crisis that contributes to the main crisis of the play. Each act should have an individuality and interest of its own and the first act should be an introduction in relation to the whole play and provide at least a

glimpse of something attractive beyond. The fostering of anticipation is very important to carry forward the interest. An interesting theme may be very helpful in this.

The challenge is to provide the audience's interest with a clearly-foreseen point in the next act towards which it can reach onwards, or with a definite enigma, the solution of which can be looked forward to with impatient excitement. Intromissions of the supernatural provided a convenient method for the playwright to point the audience to where he wants the play to: "foreshadowing without forestalling."

3 Middle

3.1 Tension and it's suspension

The first act may be regarded as the entrance providing access to the main hall of the actual drama ... be it solemn or joyous, fantastic or austere. There should be a carefully planned interdependence between all its parts and an inner law of harmony through selection, proportion and composition in a finely constructed drama. It should present a complete and rounded whole. "Construction" means dramatic architecture, a careful pre-arrangement of proportions and interdependencies.

The main object of the dramatist's craft is to create, maintain, suspend, heighten and resolve a state of "tension", wherein a great part of the secret of dramatic architecture lies. Tension refers to a stretching out or a stretching forward of the mind. That should be the characteristic mental attitude of the theatrical audience. If the mind is not captivated to stretch forward, the spectator may soon get uncomfortable in the restricted seating space. Being intent on what is to come, means there are people that are attentive to what is there and happening. "A scene of high tension" refers primarily to a scene

in which the actors undergo a great emotional strain, which is only a means towards heightening of the mental tension of the audience. In such a scene the mind stretches forward, to something instant and imminent. Once the tension has set in, the playwright must not allow it to relax until he deliberately resolves it just before the fall of the curtain. There are minor rhythms of tension and resolution, but the main tension, once initiated, must never be relaxed, else the play will be over.

Tension should be heightened or tightened from act to act. There are times when the tension may be suspended for a very short while to achieve a desired effect. It shouldn't be suspended for too long else it may harm the line of tension. The early part of the second act may be used to work up the same line of interest to a higher pitch, or the suspense may be held up while the playwright prepares some further development of the action. The audience has an instinctive desire for progress, so the act can never leave the action just where it was at the beginning and should not be experienced to have been empty, or irrelevant, or disappointing. Once a play has started to move, it should proceed continuously, gathering momentum. If it stands still for a while, the pause should be deliberate and have purpose. Acts should never seem motiveless and without result.

3.2 Preparation: The finger-post

Constructing a play is an art - in giving the mind of an audience something to look forward to through creating a captivating line of tension, and then not disappointing the audience by letting them feel they have stretched forward in vain. "How" may be more important than the "what." Dumas remarked: "The art of the theatre is the art of preparations." It is helping the audience to sense where the play is going and encouraging them to wonder how it's going to get to the solution. There should be a finger-post (road sign) to direct the

anticipation to the road it should go and the dramatist should place these "road signs" there. Forward momentum is important, as too much retrospect can be irritating and counteract the momentum of the play. Finger-posts that point backwards aren't too useful. Over-preparation, or too obtrusive preparation leading only to a small effect is the characteristic error of the so-called "well-made play," with too elaborate and ingenious intrigue, which may lead to its demise since few playwrights manage to be intricate, consistent, and clear at the same time. Misdirected ingenuity and too involved patterns confuse and fatigue the mind's eye and may cause the audience to feel sceptic, like in "The Degenerates" by Sydney Grundy.

When a situation is at once highly improbable in real life and exceedingly familiar on the stage, we cannot help mentally caricaturing it as it proceeds, and then the play loses the credence on which interest and emotion depend. In "Mrs. Dane's Defence", by Henry Arthur Jones, the first three acts of this play show dexterous preparation and development by which interest in the sequence of events is aroused, sustained, and skillfully worked up to a high tension. The action moves forwards with momentum, and the finger-posts are placed just where they are wanted. Good balance and proportion between preparation and result may be vital. The audience may enjoy & look forward to an event that has been "prepared" in the sense that it has been presented as desirable, and the spectators have wondered how it was going to happen. But an occurrence which could be foreseen and is too predictable often get resented in advance.

3.3 The obligatory scene

In an obligatory scene the audience foresees and desires a certain outcome, and if it does not happen, the audience may resent the omission.

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There are five ways in which a scene may become obligatory:

- by the inherent *logic* of the theme - only in plays to which a definite theme can be assigned, like those of Hervieu and Brieux, and Bernard Shaw in "Candida"
- to achieve specific *dramatic* effect - this may be instinctively expected by the author charging the scene with emotion, and working up the tension to a very high pitch. It may lead to frustration or disappointment if the author chooses a less dramatic way and "fail" to fulfill the obligation, like in "Agatha" by Ward and Parker.
- by the author having *structurally* created a lead up to it - scenes seeming to be indicated by deliberately-planted directional finger-posts, with the effect that the audience may feel misled, like in Jules Lemaître's play, "Révoltée"
- to justify some *psychological* change (or startling transformation) of character or will, too important to be taken for granted, like in the third act of "Othello" or Lord Tennyson's "Becket"
- to be imposed by *history* or legend - when the dramatist uses a strongly-marked historical character, he should give him a good opportunity of acting up to the character which legend assigns to him. When such a personage is presented to us, it ought to be at his highest strength. Where legend (historic or otherwise) associates a particular character with a particular scene that is presentable on the stage, that scene becomes obligatory in a drama of which he is the leading figure. Most well known historical figures are best presented briefly, so that the danger of anti-climax is diminished, like Napoleon in "L'Aiglon", by M.

Rostand.

The obligatory scene is necessary because of the strict concentration and economy required from the dramatist, and the high mental tension that is intrinsic to the theatrical audience and the effect which the stage alone can provide.

3.4 The peripety (change of fortune/circumstance)

The dramatic form of the "reversal of fortune" or the "turning of the tables" was a clearly defined and recognized part of the Greek theatre and was often associated with the "anagnorisis" or recognition. These forms apparently had their origin out of the ritual celebrating the death and resurrection of the season of "mellow fruitfulness."

The "peripeteia" was originally a change from sorrow to joy in the rebirth of the powers of nature, a change from despair to elation. Later it acquired a special association with a sudden decline from prosperity into adversity ... a fall from the pinnacle of happiness to the depth of misery. In the Middle Ages, this was considered to be the very essence and heart of tragedy.

Today a sudden change from gloom to exhilaration or the other way around, can be a popular and effective incident, irresistibly dramatic – an abrupt reversal of inward soul-state or of outward fortune. In some plays one scene may stand out markedly vivid and may contain a peripety.

In reality many people encounter such physical peripeties, like hearing about one's terminal illness from a doctor or crises in court cases, or moral peripety - the sudden evaporation of some dream or hope, or the crumbling of some illusion, an about-turn from "All's right with the world," to being crushed and desperate, like in the third act of

"Othello".

The most striking peripety in Ibsen, is Stockmann's fall from "jubilant self-confidence to defiant impotence" in the third act of "An Enemy of the People". In judicial peripeties some crushing cross-examinations occur, in which it is possible to combine the tension of the detective story with psychological issues, as is evident in Henry Arthur Jones' "Mrs. Dane's Defence".

A famous romantic peripety occurs in "H.M.S. Pinafore", where it was discovered that Captain Corcoran and Ralph Rackstraw have been changed at birth. Ralph instantly becomes captain of the ship, while the captain declines into an able-bodied seaman.

3.5 Probability, change and coincidence

Aristotle said that in drama, "the *probable impossible* is to be preferred to the *improbable possible*". Plausibility is more important on the stage than probability. If a thing seems plausible an audience will accept it, but if it seems incredible at face value, it may be impossible to overcome the prejudice against it. Therefore an improbable or unacceptable incident can't be validly defended on the plea that it actually happened or was published in the newspapers. The playwright can never recreate a situation on the stage as it actually happened. It may be historically factual and accurate, but the dramatist cannot restore the incident to its place of cause and effect, which is the essence and meaning of reality. He can only give his interpretation of the fact.

Probability or verisimilitude is the goal, since the stage is the realm of make-believe and appearance, not of reality or truth or literal faithfulness to recorded fact. As long as it is convincing in relation to human nature in general, it may be agreeable and entertaining without

being conspicuously false to human nature and will do no harm, since it makes no pretence to be historic truth. The artist must respect the conditions and limitations of the medium in which he works and try to keep out of his dialogue expressions that are too peculiar to a specific circle, and to use only what may be called the current "everybody's language".

Plausibility can be achieved on three different planes:

- *the purely external plane*: plausibility of costume, of manners, of dialect, of general environment.
- *Plausibility of uncharacteristic circumstance*: independent of the will or psychology of the characters, chance and accident, coincidence, and all "circumstances over which we have no control". Coincidence is a special and complex form of chance. Both terms come from the Latin "cadere,"- to fall. Chance is a falling-out, like dice, and coincidence is if all are sixes, (unless the dice were clogged). The playwright may let chance play its probable part in the affairs of his characters, but as soon as it gets too good to be true, the audience swallow the proceedings under protest. That the catastrophe of "Romeo and Juliet" should depend upon a series of chances, and especially on the miscarriage of the Friar's letter to Romeo, is criticized, but its validity is debatable. In "Oedipus Rex", an astonishing series of amazing coincidences mixed with fate happen. "Character is destiny," but if too many coincidences are invented to serve an artist's purposes, we feel that he is taking advantage and plunging into the improbable, and coincidence may have been abused. Most of the most outrageous coincidences occur in forgotten plays, some of which may have survived if the element of coincidence was limited to a more acceptable level, although they were intended to be realistic and aimed at a literal and sober representation of life, such as Arthur Pinero's "The

Profligate" and Walter Frith's "The Man of Forty".

- *psychological plausibility*, the plausibility of events dependent on character and truth.

Sarcey states that audiences would generally "swallow a camel, in the *past*, though they will strain at a gnat in the *present*". Events that were logical, plausible, and entertaining and supposed to have occurred before the rise of the curtain are easily accepted by the public, who are less apt to scrutinize things merely narrated to them than events which take place in front of their eyes.

Several classes of charming plays exist that are delightfully ingenious and improbable: romances, farces, some light comedies and semi-comic melodramas. Examples are Sir Arthur Pinero's farces, Carton's light comedies, "Lord and Lady Algy", "Wheels within Wheels", "Lady Huntworth's Experiment". Their charm lies in a subtle improbability and a delicate infusion of fantasy and humor so that the total effect is far more entertaining than that of any probable sequence of events in real life. The tendency to abuse coincidence was inherited by modern drama from the Latin comedy, which was founded on the Greek New Comedy.

3.6 Logic

The concept of logic is loved by French dramatists, but their over-emphasis lead writers such as M. Brieux and M. Hervieu to develop a stiff, formal and symmetrical style of dramatic logical argument, without the pulsing and diverse rhythms of life. Logic can easily be misapplied.

There is a place for logic in dramatic plays, and it is more conspicuous to the audience through it's absence than its presence.

If the dramatist develops a central underlying theme, it needs to be done in a logical way, to keep him from getting entangled in side issues and to enhance the logical flow of the play.

Defective logic is evident in the French play Sardou's "Spiritisme", where he revealed his belief in the ability of "disembodied intelligences" to communicate with the living. He has the spirits hover around the outskirts of the action, not assigning them parts to the drama, though the hero's belief in them brings about the conclusion. Some creepy events take place that tax the credulity of the audience to the limit, and leave them with the logical deduction that though spirit communications may exist, it is never of any practical use and the audience had been taken for a ride through illogical mysticism to no purpose. Sardou would have done better to avoid that theme, for the manifest failure of logic leaves the play neither good drama nor good argument.

Ibsen, like Hawthorne, suggests without affirming the potential action of supernatural beings. He shows us nothing that is not possible to be explained in a perfectly natural way, but he leaves us to imagine that there may be influences at work that are not yet formally recognized in physics and psychology. Ibsen is merely appealing to a mood that we all know, in which we wonder whether there may not be more things in creation than we recognize in our scientific formulas. In this there is nothing illogical.

A big mistake in logic is to hint at a problem and then illustrate it in such a way in terms of character that the problem is solved prematurely. Sometimes the matter is argued and laboriously discussed at great length, but the audience is longing, often in vain, for the one statement demanded by the logic of the situation. In both "The Liars"(Henry Arthur Jones) and "The ideal Husband" (Oscar Wilde) the authors have made the same error of logic - suggesting a

broad issue, and then stating such a set of circumstances that the issue does not really arise.

Two plays satirizing "yellow journalism" were produced almost at the same time in London: "The Earth" by James B. Fagan and "What the Public Wants" by Arnold Bennett. Because it dealt logically with the theme announced, instead of wandering away into all sorts of irrelevances, "The Earth" was considered the better play of the two. Fagan, working in broader outlines, never strayed from the logical line of development, and managed to get much nearer to the heart of his subject. All the detail Bennett went into is beside the real issue, and he missed the real point tragically, that being a Napoleon of the Press is not that he gives the public what it wants, but that he, in that influential position, have such power that he can make the public want what he wants, think what he thinks, believe what he wants them to believe, and do what he wants them to do.

In Clyde Fitch's last play, "The City", the author had failed to establish a logical connection between his theme and the incidents supposed to illustrate it, since the action is not really shaped by the influence of "the city."

Even fantasy plays, which assume to be more or less exempt from the limitations of physical reality, should be logically faithful to their own assumptions. In "Pygmalion and Galatea" the audience is forever shifting from one plane of convention to another - there is no fixed starting-point for the imagination and no logical development of a clearly-stated initial condition.

3.7 Keeping a secret

Good advice, often and authoritatively laid down, is that a dramatist must on no account keep a secret from his audience, because it is so

extremely difficult to keep, try as you may. From only one audience can a secret be fairly successfully hidden – the first-night audience.

A huge percentage of any subsequent audience will be certain to know all about it in advance. Surely, the more striking and successful the first-night effect of surprise is, the more rapidly the report of it will circulate through all strata of the theatrical public. A mystery play might make a great first-night success, but the more the playwright relies upon the mystery for effect, the more fatally would that effect be discounted at each successive repetition.

To actually keep a secret and appeal to the primary curiosity of actual ignorance may be ruled out as practically impossible, and not really worthy of serious art. But there is also the secondary curiosity of the audience that, knowing the facts more or less, judges the development of the play from an instinctive point of view of ignorance.

A play should be self-sufficient and not rely on previous knowledge of the audience, acquired from outside sources. The playwright must formally "assume" ignorance in his audience, though he must not practically "rely upon" it. It is really important to determine how long a secret may be kept from an audience, assumed to have no prior knowledge, and at what point it should be revealed. It is useless to keep a secret which, when revealed, is certain to disappoint the audience, and to make it feel underestimated.

In Bernard Shaw's "The Devil's Disciple", in the second act, an example of inartistic secrecy is found - an injudicious, purposeless and foolish, keeping of a secret. It may be argued that Bernard Shaw was forced to make Judith misunderstand her husband's motives in order to develop her character as he had conceived it. He was so bent on letting Judith continue to conduct herself idiotically, that he made her sensible husband act as idiotically, in order to throw dust in her eyes,

and in the eyes of the audience as well, even using phrases carefully calculated to deceive both her and the audience.

In "Whitewashing Julia", Henry Arthur Jones's light comedy, it is proved that it is safely possible to keep a secret throughout a play, and never reveal it at all. He pretends that there is some explanation of Mrs. Julia Wren's relations with the Duke of Savona, and keep the audience waiting for this "whitewashing" disclosure, while it was not really his plan. Julia says that "an explanation will be forthcoming at the right moment", which never arrives. Julia thinks that there was never anything degrading in her conduct and the audience is asked to accept this as sufficient. The play's success shows that in light comedy, keeping a secret can work well.

Keeping of a secret may diminish tension, and deprive the audience of that superior knowledge in which the irony of drama lies. In Walter Frith's play, "Her Advocate" the question to be considered is whether the author did right in reserving the revelation of the secret to the last possible moment. Would he have done better to have given the audience an earlier clue of the true state of affairs - that the client loves another man and not the attorney? To keep the secret placed the audience as well as the advocate on a goose chase, and deprived it of the sense of superiority it would have felt in seeing him marching confidently towards an illusory happiness.

It may be dangerous and even foolish for an author to keep a secret from the audience, but the dramatist should not just reveal his secrets at random. The art lies in knowing just how long to keep silent and when is just the right time to share it. In Arthur Pinero's "Letty" he gains a significant effect and proves that he knew perfectly well what he was doing by keeping a secret just long and carefully enough. He allowed the truth to slip out just in time to let the audience feel the whole force of irony during the last scene of the act and the greater

part of the second act where the tension is delicately graded.

When a reasonable expectation is aroused, it should be fulfilled by the author. If a riddle is put forward, its answer must be pleasing and smart. If a secret is to be kept at all, it must be worth keeping or the audience will resent it. A good balance should be kept between effort and effect, and between promise and performance. The playwright should never shy away from some objective he set out to do. The art is to arouse just the right measure of anticipation, and fulfill it at just the right time. A correct insight into the mind of the audience is a good indication of the skill of the dramatist.

4 End

4.1 Climax and Anticlimax

The biggest challenge for the playwright is to find a crisis with an ending which is acceptable to his artistic conscience and the dramatic effect he requires. It is more challenging to write a good last act as a good first one. Likewise it is easier to dramatize the moment of the birth of a crisis than to come to a definite and intensely dramatic conclusion for it. Lack of a good ending leaves the audience unsatisfied and disappointed. The dramatist's range of choice is unlimited, and the difficulty of wise choice has become infinitely greater, since the traditional fixed moulds or pre-ordained outcomes of tragedies and comedies have been broken. Comedies now tend much more to begin than to end with marriage, and death has come a "boring" way to escape from life or its troubles. The nearer the story is to reality, the greater the challenge becomes.

The higher the form of drama, the more truth and the dramatic effects may seem to clash. In melodrama, the curtain falls when the hero is rescued and the handcuffs are transferred to the villain's wrists. In an adventure play, farcical or romantic, the play is done when the adventure is over. In the higher order plays, the challenge is often inherent in the theme to be brought to a natural ending, to get the crisis to resolve decisively with dramatic crispness and avoiding mechanically forced endings.

The relaxed approach to Aristotle's form of "beginning, middle and end" may suggest a new intimate relation to life and sincerity of artistic experience. It is a natural development and doesn't imply a decline in craftsmanship. Themes should be judged in accordance with their inherent quality, and authors and critics alike should learn to

distinguish the themes that do call for a definite solution from the themes which do not. Endings should not be indecisive, careless, huddled up or makeshift. An "unemphatic" ending can be in the form of a deliberate anti-climax following a much elevated tension line in the penultimate act and it can be that the consequences of a great emotional or spiritual crisis cannot always be worked out within a short time of it's culmination.

A good example of an unemphatic ending is the last act of Arthur Pinero's "Letty". This justified anticlimax is not an artistic blemish or mistake. The play could have ended with Letty's awakening from her dream, and her flight from Letchmere's rooms. There is no indecisiveness here. But the author wanted to draw a character, and it was essential to our full appreciation of Letty's character that we should know what she made of her life.

An act of anticlimax should be treated as unpretentiously and with the least emphasis as possible. To make major scene changes is to emphasize the anticlimax by throwing it into unnecessary relief.

Some modern dramatists have gone to the other extreme in moving away from the conventional patterns, to that extreme of always dropping their curtain when the audience least expects it, and may experience it as very disconcerting. This is not a practice to be commended and the fall of the curtain should not take an audience entirely by surprise. The audience should feel the moment to be rightly chosen too. To let a play, or an act, drag on when the audience feels in its heart that it is really over, is very dangerous. A remarkable play, "The Madras House", was ruined on its first night by a too long final anticlimax, and disinterest in the final dialogue and the choice of leading characters for the last scene.

4.2 Conversion

In some plays there are frequent cases in which the end depends on something very like the straightening out of a tangled rope or the loosening of some knot in the mind of some of the characters, or "dénouement". For example, the obstinate guardian who for four acts and a half had stood between the lovers, suddenly changed his mind, and all was well for them.

Conversions fall into two classes: changes in volition, and changes in sentiment. Changes of will, on the modern stage, are not always adequately motivated, but that is because of individual lack of expertise and can show itself in action. Changes of sentiment are much more important and more difficult to handle, since it is very difficult to externalize convincingly a person's change of heart. When the outcome of a play depends on a conversion of this nature, it becomes priority that it should not merely be asserted, but proved. Many plays failed because this was disregarded.

Marshall wrote a "farcical romance" named "The Duke of Killiecrankie". The Duke's change of mind, his will to set the Lady Henrietta free, is visibly demonstrated by the actual opening of the prison gate, so that it becomes credible to the audience and they believe that she believes in it.

How to drive home to the audience a decisive change of heart is a constant challenge for the playwright's craft.

Haddon Chambers' play, "The Awakening", turns around on a sudden conversion of the villain to the error of his ways, but how to convince the heroine and the audience of his change of heart? In the end the audience remains skeptical and the desired effect is missed.

The challenge for the playwright to convince the audience of the radical change of mental attitude in a character, is part of the bigger problem of how to show such inward processes outwardly in an authentic and convincing way.

4.3 Blind-alley themes ... and others

As indicated by the name, a blind-alley theme is one from which there is no exit. It is a problem incapable of solution, or of which all possible solutions are equally unsatisfactory and undesirable. The dramatist should make very sure not to be caught in this situation of equally unacceptable alternatives. Such a play wears and bores the spirit and is an artistic blunder.

The end of a play should satisfy us inside – like our experience of truth, justice, humor, vanity of aspiration, etc. If it does not, it leaves one unfulfilled and without closure – and dissatisfied.

Two famous plays employ blind-alley themes – "Measure for Measure" (Shakespeare) and "Monna Vanna" (Maeterlinck). Shakespeare, confesses the problem insoluble in the fact that he leaves it unsolved - evading it by means of a mediaeval trick. Isabella is forced to choose between what can only be described as two detestable evils. What is the use of presenting it? What is the artistic profit of letting the imagination play around a problem which merely baffles and repels it? Though the play contains some wonderful poetry, and has been revived from time to time, it has never taken any real hold upon popular esteem – since it does not ultimately satisfy.

The challenge of these two themes is not merely that they are "unpleasant." It is that there is no possible way out of them that is not worse than unpleasant: humiliating and distressing. The playwright

should make sure that he has some sort of satisfaction to offer the audience at the end, before he chooses to embark on a blind-alley theme.

Examples of themes that are better to avoid:

- Marriage – over used and too conventional
- Revenge – an outworn passion of vindictiveness
- Heroic self-sacrifice – an outworn passion
- oath or promise of secrecy

4.4 The full close

There are themes in which tension can be maintained and heightened to the end. Tragedy has always been regarded as higher form than comedy. It may be due to the tradition to round off human destiny in death if, after all the crises that life could throw at him, the hero can look destiny in the face and "go home" honorably. Sophocles regarded it as "Call no man happy till his life be ended." As a form of art, maybe tragedy lets us appreciate "being alive" to a deeper extent, after having lived through this experience. Life may now seem more significant than ever before. The tragic ending is also prone to be misused. Great plays often end in the hero's death, but to kill your hero doesn't make the play great. Tension can be maintained with the presence of a threatening sword, gun or poison. Tragic endings were not always popular with audiences during some times in history – but it seemed to be the only way to avoid an anticlimax.

Before attempting to write a tragedy, the playwright should make sure that the theme lends itself to real tragedy, with all the dynamic angles you can place your hero in relation to life and death. The study of character must be profound before the author can justify any death sentences on his personages. We all need to die some day, but the hero must be large enough in life and studied in depth before death

could be considered a proportionate close. Aristotle thought that a tragic hero must be too good, or too bad, and death on the stage brings an inherent distinction that demands a sufficient cause. Today we look at the bigger picture of drama objectively and don't calculate to what degree a man has "deserved" an honorable death. To be able to believe in the character, we need to know him intimately and share his feelings – feel "with" him, and believe that he "dies because he can not live".

Ibsen never used death as a mere way to escape from problems. In five of thirteen plays, no one dies at all. Playwrights should guard against the temptation to use suicide as a way of untangling or cutting the knotted rope of life. Death by fatal accident is frowned upon in serious drama, and murder is more popular in melodrama. Suicide gets to be used, over used and sometimes abused. It ought to be the playwright's, as it is the man's, last resort. In most countries, suicide is greatly on the increase, and the motives driving people to it would be of a dramatic nature. But it remains a crude and insensitive departure from the entanglement of life and not to be used lightly by the dramatist. The characters need to be large enough, true enough, living enough and the play should probe deep enough into human experience to make the intervention of death seem less incongruous.

Sometimes the end is imposed upon the dramatist by the whole drift and direction of his action. Chance plays a large part in the way events unfold, for instance, if Leonard Ferris had not happened to live at the top of a very high building, Zoe would not have encountered the sudden temptation to jump, to which she yields in Sir Arthur Pinero's play. Zoe experiences her life to be miserable and a hopeless muddle. She has a good heart, but no interests and no ideals, apart from the personal satisfactions which have now been poisoned at their source. She has messed up other people's lives and intervened disastrously in their destinies. She is ill, her nerves are all on edge and she is

desperate enough to use this rapid, but not easy exit.

Another "justified" use of suicide may be found in Galsworthy's "Justice". The play is about all the forces of society hounding a luckless youth to his end, having gotten on the wrong side of the law.

Sometimes playwrights come across a theme for which there is no conceivable ending but suicide. If a theme does not force upon him a specific kind of last act, but enables him to sustain and increase the tension up to the very close without having to resort to death to help carry the tension, a playwright can feel happy. Such themes are not too common, but they do occur, like Dumas found in "Denise" and "Francillon", Shaw's "Candida" and "The Devil's Disciple" and Galsworthy's "Strife". In plays which do not end in death, it will generally be found that the culminating scene occurs in the penultimate act, and that, if anticlimax is avoided, it is by its skilful renewal and reinforcement in the last act and not by the maintenance of an unbroken tension. Of the most successful plays have been those in which the last act came as a pleasant surprise. An anticlimax had seemed inevitable, but the playwright had found a way out of it, like in "An Enemy of the People". In some modern plays a full close is achieved by altogether omitting the last act, or last scene, and leaving the end of the play to the imagination.

5. Epilogue

5.1 Character and psychology

The ability and power to observe, to penetrate, and to reproduce character accurately is an inherent gift. You have it, or not. It can't be acquired nor theoretically learned, but certain skills can be honed. The previous technical discussions may be helpful towards the effective presentment of character, which is the goal of construction in drama.

Should we always aim to develop character? Character, for the practical purposes of the dramatist, may be defined as a complex of intellectual, emotional, and nervous habits, of which some are innate and temperamental. If we complain that a certain character does not develop (remains the same throughout the play), we imply that he ought, within the limits of the play, to have altered the mental habits underlying his speech and actions - more of an unveiling or disclosure than change, since the time in drama is very limited. A dramatic crisis should disclose latent qualities in the persons concerned in it, and involve a thorough manifestation of character that may cause positive change. How does the character react to a series of crucial experiences? At the end of a play the audience should know more of the protagonist's character than he himself, or his most intimate friend, could know at the start, for the action should have exposed and put him to some searching and revealing tests. To study and paint a character can happen by placing him in a number of situations, to show how his principal motive force reacts, and what makes him tick. A character should be primarily seen as an individual, and only incidentally (if at all) classified under this type or that.

Is "psychology" the same as "character-drawing" or is there a distinction to be made? Character-drawing is to present human nature in its commonly recognized, understood and accepted aspects. Psychology is the exploration of character while bringing uncharted territory within the circle of our knowledge and comprehension. In other words, character-drawing is synthetic, psychology is analytic.

The dramatist Granville Barker excels in psychology. It is his instinct to venture into uncharted fields of character, or to probe deeply into phenomena that others have noted only superficially, if at all. So does William Vaughn Moody in "The Faith Healer".

Questions to raise are: "Are we getting beneath the surface of this character's nature? Are we plucking the heart out of his or her mystery? Can't we make the specific processes of a murderer's mind clearer to ourselves and to our audiences?" Every serious dramatist should not all the time be aiming at psychological exploration. The character-drawer's appeal to common knowledge and intuitive recognition is very valuable and often sufficient. There are also occasions when the dramatist misses opportunities if he does not at least attempt to bring unrecorded phases of character within the scope of our understanding and our sympathies.

5.2 Dialogue and details

The average quality of modern dialogue bears witness to the extraordinary progress made by drama in the English language. The playwright realizes that it is possible to combine naturalness with vivacity, vigor and verbal wit, and get away from the labored, flowery dramatic writing that English plays suffered under for ages. Language then was a newly discovered and irresistibly fascinating playground for the fancy and had to be thick-strewn with verbal quibbles, similes, figures, and flourishes of every description, else it was deemed unworthy to be spoken on the stage. Shakespeare freely yielded to this convention, and so helped to establish it. His genius helped him to present it delightfully, but in most of the Elizabethans it is an extremely tedious mannerism. After the Restoration, when modern light talk came into being in the coffee houses, it became fashionable to strain after wit, and the dramatists did the same. There was a keen desire to write brilliantly – if it wasn't successful, then it was for lack of talent.

Goldsmith, Farquhar and Steele, realized the superiority of humor to wit. With Byron it degenerated into mere punning and verbal horse

play. In the early plays of Sir Arthur Pinero there was a great deal of extrinsic ornament, especially metaphor-hunting. Some of the later Elizabethans, notably Webster and Ford, cultivated a way of abrupt utterance, whereby an immensity of spiritual significance, generally tragic, was supposed to be concentrated into a few brief words. This did not last – and the plays also not. No play of which the dialogue places a constant strain on the intellectual abilities of the audience ever has held a place in living dramatic literature. It remains a constant challenge to the dramatist to keep his dialogue necessarily concentrated, but also plausibly near to the everyday language of life, and to achieve style in the process. Style, in prose drama, is the sifting of common speech to achieve a beauty of cadence and phrasing. To be really dramatic, every speech must have some bearing, direct or indirect, upon individual human destinies in future, the present or the past. Where the audience doesn't perceive this connection, the play, scene or speech may be experienced as dull.

To use blank verse as a medium rather than prose can be problematic, difficult and dangerous. Shakespeare "chose" verse as his medium, in the same sense in which Ibsen chose prose. They accepted it just as they accepted the other traditions of the theatre of their time. The history of the blank verse play proves that this medium is thoroughly dead and so incompatible to modern life and living language. If verse has any function on the stage, it is that of imparting lyric beauty to passionate speech. For the mere rhetorical "elevation" of blank verse we have no use whatever. It consists of saying simple things with pomposity. The idea that the poetry of drama should be sought specifically in verse has long ago been exploded by Ibsen and Maeterlinck and D'Annunzio and Synge.

Israel Zangwill, in his symbolic play, "The War-God", has put blank verse to a new use, with noteworthy success. He writes in very strict measure, but without the least inversion or inflation, without a touch

of Elizabethan, or conventionally poetic, diction. He managed to use modern expressions, and even slang, without incongruity, while at the same time he is able to give rhetorical movement to the speeches of his symbolic personages. In passages of argument, he can achieve that clash of measured phrase against measured phrase which the Greeks called "stichomythy," and which the French dramatists sometimes produce in rapid rapier play with the Alexandrine. Zangwill's practice suggested that blank verse, to be justified in drama, should be lyrical. His verse is a product of pure intellect and wit, without a single lyric accent. It is measured prose and if it ever tries to be more, it fails. He has shown a new use for blank verse, in rhetorico-symbolic drama - no small literary feat.

There is nothing more irritating on the modern stage than a play which keeps on changing from verse to prose and back again. It gives the verse-passages an air of pompous self-consciousness. It is most destructive for a dramatist to pass, in the same work of art, from one plane of convention to another.

A drama with "soliloquies" and "asides" is like a picture with inscribed labels hanging from the mouths of the figures. The challenge of the playwright is to make his characters reveal the inmost workings of their souls without saying or doing anything that they would not say or do in the real world. In serious modern drama the "aside" is now practically obsolete, such that actors are puzzled how to handle it, and audiences what to make of it. To read a letter aloud has validity, but a soliloquy has no real right of existence. It is a purely artificial unraveling of motive or emotion.

As absurd is the "one room one door" rule - the stage scene should provide a probable locality for whatever action is to take place in it, and doors in practical places where they are deemed functional. The prejudice that exists in some fields against the use of any form of

written document on stage is as absurd. Letters play a gigantic part in the economy of modern life. Why banish them from the stage?

Bernard Shaw, in an article celebrating the advent of the new technique, once wrote, "Nowadays an actor cannot open a letter or toss off somebody else's glass of poison without having to face a brutal outburst of jeering." The playwright's sole and sufficient safeguard is to use his good intellect and common sense, and not to be intimidated with absurd ideas, and use whatever tools are needed on stage to deliver a good job.

Conclusion

There will always be lots of 'cooks' in the kitchen, or is that playwrights in the theater, then there are also the critics, the academics, the audience, seasoned theater-goers and writers, newbies and wanna-be's. For all of us there is something to learn and appreciate, experience that promises mystery, intrigue, enjoyment and shared moments. That is drama, that is live-theatre. There are just as many opinions as to what makes for GREAT theatre and drama.

People and playwrights make up rules about the theatre, drama and plays as they go along, learn and master new things, find the groove and/or style that works for them and so on. There are no formulas and rules really to hold as the 'ideal'. It is what it is! Do not get so caught up in the nitty-gritty or mechanics of play-writing that it loses some of its fun, enjoyment and true core.

Drama-writers have lots to learn and discover, each separately and collectively, to unearth the beauty and art, refined craftsmanship that is play-writing! Good luck on your learning, journey of self-discovery into the wonderful arenas and universe that is theater and drama.

YOU TOO CAN MAKE THE MOST OF PLAY-WRITING, in its truest form,

"PLAYMAKING: HOW TO WRITE A SCRIPT"

an art-form based and practices, on the interpretation of dramatic literature combining, playwriting, acting, directing, and stagecraft. Welcome to the world of riches that are plays or other dramatic performances!

Here are some great additional sources for your use and reference

THEATRE AND PLAYWRITING GLOSSARY and Links

Theatre Glossary Links

[Amateur Dramatics](#)

[Playwriting 101](#)

[Stage Specs](#)

[Theatre crafts.](#)

[Weber State University](#)

Acting. The process of creating roles and characters in dramatic context.

Aesthetic Qualities. Those characteristics of a work that place it somewhere on the scale of beautiful to ugly.

Aesthetic Response. A person's reaction to the emotional values and cognitive meanings of a work of art (e.g., a theatre experience).

Artistic Discipline. Adherence to beliefs, values, and behaviors deemed accepted in the artistic field.

Audience. One or more persons who observe actors in a scene or play in a classroom or a theatre. In theatre education, audience is sometimes loosely used to mean the reflective performer as well as classmates, other students, faulty, or the public.

Character. A person, animal, or entity in a story, scene, or play with specific distinguishing physical, mental, and attitudinal attributes.

Character Dimensions. Physical aspects (e.g., sex, age, external traits), social aspects (e.g., family, occupation), and psychological aspects (e.g.,

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attitudes, motivation, values) of a character.

Characterization. The process of exploring the physical, social, and psychological aspects of a role in order to create a believable character. (see Acting)

Communication. Verbal or nonverbal interaction between persons to share meaning.

Concentration. The ability to focus and maintain attention upon an object, image, idea, action, or experiences while excluding distracting factors.

Concept (Design). The designer's interpretation of the director's vision in scenery, properties, lighting, sound, costumes, and makeup.

Concept (Production). The unified, physical expression that fulfills the director's vision.

Dialogue. Words spoken by the characters in a play to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Drama. A piece of writing intended for stage presentation. Drama refers to an improvisational process-centered form of theatre in which participants are guided by a leader to imagine, enact, and reflect upon human experience. The primary purpose of drama in the classroom is to facilitate learning by the participants, rather than to create a performance for an audience. The essences of this definition is known variously as creative drama, improvisational drama, developmental drama, classroom or educational drama.

Theatre refers to the study of art form through performance-centered activities involving an audience. As an academic discipline, theatre traditionally includes the study of acting techniques, scene study, dramatic literature, theatre history, technical design and stagecraft, playwriting, play production, theatre attendance, aesthetics and criticism.

Dramatic Activities. Such activities as pantomime, creative movement, improvisation, creative drama, storytelling, choral speaking, story dramatization, theme oriented drama, story theatre, readers' theatre, role playing, theatre games, and puppetry.

Dramatic Experiences. Dramatic play, dramatic activities, movement, and processes involved in personal expression through creative drama as well as attendance at, observation of, and participation in theatrical performances.

Dramatic Literature. Compositions in prose or verse presenting in dialogue or pantomime a story involving conflict or contrast of character and intended to be acted on the stage; a play.

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Dramatic Play. Spontaneous free play in which children explore their universe, imitating the actions and character traits of others. Make-believe and fantasy may be part of the experience. Considered educationally valuable for the child as a natural way of exploring and expressing thoughts and feelings, it is play for the child's own enjoyment and not for performance.

Elements of Drama. Six major elements of drama according to Aristotle: plot, character, theme, dialogue, music, and spectacle.

Emotional Perception. The detection and apprehension of emotional states, feelings and reactions both in oneself and others.

Emotional Recall and Expression. Emotional perceptions elicited from past experiences which can be used in understanding, portraying, and reflecting on the human condition and human behavior.

Empathy. Ability to feel with another person or to put oneself in another's position; to vicariously experience the sensual and emotional state of another person. To empathize is to "walk in the shoes" of another. Empathy feels with a character; sympathy feels for a character.

Enact. The process and fulfillment of creating a believable being outside oneself.

Ensemble. The dynamic interaction and harmonious blending of the efforts of the many artists involved in a dramatic activity or theatrical production.

Evaluation. Analysis and appraisal of personal efforts and the efforts of others.

Exercises. Individual and group activities designed by the drama/theatre leader to teach process, skills, and concepts.

Fantasy. The use of imagination to create strange, unusual, or nonrealistic characters or settings.

5 W's. Who refers to roles and characterizations. Where refers to setting, locale, environment. What refers to dramatic action. When refers to time of day, year. Why refers to motivation.

Focus. The concept of guiding the attention of the players and audience to a particular place or person at a given moment.

Formal Drama. Dramatic activity designed for presentation with the focus on the final production and audience reception.

Guided Dramatic Play. Imaginative play stimulated by a trained leader.

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Image. The sensory record of a object or experience that remains in the mind's eye in the absence of the actual object or experience.

Imagery. The mental reconstruction of an experience without the original sensory stimulation.

Imagination. The ability to develop original or novel images by relating one image to another, altering or combining images from previous experience.

Improvisation. The spontaneous use of movement and speech to create a character or object in a particular situation.

Informal Drama. Dramatic activity of any sort that is not designed for presentation.

Interpersonal Skills. The development of the individual through interaction with others and self enhancement while participating in, observing, and studying drama/theatre. (see Ensemble)

Language. The use of vocal sounds in meaningful patterns and corresponding written symbols to form, express, and communicate thoughts and feelings.

Lighting. The illumination of the stage by means of artificial light.

Makeup. Cosmetics used to change the appearance of the face and other exposed surfaces on the body in order to emphasize characteristics appropriate to a role.

Metaphor. A symbolic comparison where one thing stands for another thing: an image which synthesizes two meanings.

Motivation. The actor's justification for doing or saying something.

Movement. A flow of action combined with an awareness of space, time, and direction. Movement includes gross and fine motor skills employed in nonverbal communication.

Multicultural. Composed of many different cultures and nationalities.

Music. Vocal and instrumental rhythmic sound used in a play. Any rhythmic or melodic element such as a patterned arrangement of words.

Narrative Pantomime. An activity in which the group pantomimes a story as it is narrated by the drama/theatre leader.

Nonverbal Communication. Communication without words using facial

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expression, gestures, and body language.

Oral Expression. The ability to communicate with words.

Pantomime. Action without words; nonverbal communication through body movement, gesture, and facial expression.

Perception. The process by which people receive, recognize, integrate, and interpret sensory stimuli.

Performance. The imitation of life in front of at least one other person. In a broad sense, performance refers to the presentation of any kind of entertainment--from play to rock concert, from solo presentation to ensemble collaboration.

Peripeteia or peripety. A sudden change in fortune or circumstance experienced by a character in the play.

Playing. Improvising or acting out characters in a scene or story.

Playing in Role. A technique used by the creative drama leader during the playing, in which the leader enacts a role that allows for some authority and control, to heighten and advance the playing.

Playing Space and Audience Space. An area for dramatic activities. This may be simply the space surrounding a student's desk or a cleared space in a classroom without a designated place for observation by an audience. Theatrical production clearly establishes an acting area, or stage, and a designated audience area: proscenium (one side), thrust (three sides), area (four sides).

Playmaking. Playmaking is a term used to describe dramatic activities that lead to improvised drama with a beginning, middle, and end employing the general form and some of the elements of theatre. The product may or may not be shared with others.

Playwriting. Playwriting is the act of creating the plot, theme, characters, dialogue, spectacle, and structure of a play and organizing it into a playscript form. It involves the ability to imagine the entire production scene by scene and to put it into written form so that others may interpret it for the stage.

Plot. Plot is the structure of the action of the play; it is the arrangement of incidents that take place on the stage as revealed through the action and dialogue of the characters. Plot structure usually includes a beginning, a middle, and end with a problem, complications, and a resolution.

Portray. The process of representing a character.

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Props. Properties; objects used by actors on stage (e.g., fan, wallet) or objects necessary to complete the set (e.g., furniture, plants, books).

Puppetry. The animation of objects, ranging from hands and paper bags to dolls, creating characters in dramatic situations.

Receptive Language. The ability to understand word concepts.

Replaying. Enacting a scene or play again while attending to improvement noted in the evaluation; roles are sometimes exchanged so students have the opportunity to play more than one character.

Response. Reaction to stimulus presented by character, event, or environment.

Role. The characteristic and expected social behavior of an individual in a given position (e.g., mother, employer). Role portrayal is likely to be more predictable and one-dimensional than character portrayal.

Role-Playing. Enacting a person other than oneself in an improvisation based on a given dramatic situation.

Rubric. An established set of standards used for the purpose of evaluation.

Scene. Set; the arrangement of scenic elements (e.g., curtains, flats, drops, platforms), properties, and lights to represent the locale in a dramatic performance.

Script. The written dialogue, description, and directions provided by the playwright.

Self-Concept. A sense of knowing and appreciating oneself; an awareness of one's potential, values, strengths, and weaknesses; an understanding of one's image as perceived by others.

Sensory Perception. Heightened awareness of physical sensations and emotional states.

Sensory Recall. Sensory perceptions elicited from past experiences.

Setting. The time and place in which the dramatic action occurs.

Social Discipline. Adherence to those beliefs, values, and behaviors deemed acceptable by the group.

Spectacle. All visual elements of production (scenery, properties, lighting, costumes, makeup, physical movement, dance).

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Spontaneity. A free, direct, immediate response to an experience.

Story Dramatization. The process of improvisationally making an informal play based on a story. Young children are often guided by a leader who tells or reads a story while the children take on all the roles, working in their own spaces. Older children generally assume specific roles and collaborate to dramatize a story, often interchanging roles and experimenting with ideas.

Story Theatre. This form of theatre combines the art of storytelling with improvisational acting. Using stories from the oral tradition (folk and fairy tales, myths, and legends), story theatre allows the characters to narrate in the third person, speak the dialogue in the first person, and carry out physical actions called forth in the story.

Style. The characteristic manner of speaking, writing, designing, performing, or directing, Style is a relative term that encompasses literary movements (e.g., romanticism, realism, naturalism), the method of individual playwrights, or anything that displays unique, definable properties in construction or execution. Stylized usually means anything which deviates from whatever is considered realistic at a given time. It is possible to have a dramatic style (provided by the playwright) and a theatrical style (provided by the director and collaborators).

Subtext. The unspoken meaning or intention behind the actions and dialogue of a text or performance which is implied largely by nonverbal behavior and subtleties in vocal qualities.

Teaching in Role. A technique used by the drama leader during the playing of a scene in which the leader enacts a role with the students in order to heighten or advance the playing.

Technical Elements. The aspects of theatre involved in the creation of spectacle (scenery, properties, lighting, sound, costumes, and makeup).

Text. The basis of dramatic activity and performance. Text can be a written script or an agreed-upon structure and content (as in improvisational work or a theatrical piece which uses planned, set, disparate components).

Theatre. An art form based on the interpretation of dramatic literature combining, playwriting, acting, directing, and stagecraft. A building intended for the presentation of plays or other dramatic performances. (see Drama/Theatre)

Theatre Arts. An umbrella term used to embrace all aspects of the discipline of theatre.

Theme. The central thought, idea, or significance of action with which a play deals.

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Theme-Oriented Drama. An improvised drama developed around a problem, issue or theme to be explored. Participants are led to identify with a common concern of a group of people (e.g., slaves and the underground railway, chivalry and medieval knights, the responsibilities of citizenship).

Transformation. The internal or external changing of a person or object into another through imagination.

Vocal Characteristics. Those traits which determine one's voice: pitch, volume, rate, quality.

Vocal Qualities. The characteristics of tones which distinguish them from all others. In voice, qualities are most closely associated with mood and feeling.

Voice. Sounds produced by the expiration of air through vibrating vocal cords and resonance within the throat and head cavities.

Warm-up. An activity in which the student focuses attention on limbering up the body, voice, imagination, or intellect.