

to Drama and Criticism

XEROX COLLEGE PUBLISHING

WALTHAM, MASSACHUSETTS | TORONTO

*Copyright © 1971 by Ginn and Company.
All rights reserved. No part of the material
covered by this copyright may be produced in
any form or by any means of reproduction.
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 74-136508
Printed in the United States of America.*

PREFACE

There are many approaches to the essentials of drama. The most obvious ones are delineated in the introduction. The more subtle ones remain to be discovered in class analysis. Unfortunately they are not as easy to present for understanding. The nuances of meaning, imagery, symbolism, and interpretation are best considered along with specific plays. Each play has most of the ingredients necessary for drama; however, some plays are better adapted to specific considerations than others. *Hamlet*, for example, may be used to illustrate everything. *Look Back in Anger*, on the other hand, is difficult to analyze if one is studying the conventional symbols.

After each play is a series of questions that will draw out the major concerns mentioned in the introduction. The glossary gives a handy, condensed review of the major terms used in the analysis of drama. Sometimes a target of opportunity is the most rewarding approach to the study of literature; such a target cannot be built in. Flexibility, then, is a prime virtue; the

text tries to give the instructor that opportunity to be flexible in his teaching. On the other hand, the instructor may allow the book to do the road work and reserve the interpretive pyrotechnics for himself. The apparatus is not meant to be stultifyingly inhibitive; it is a device to open as many ways as possible to a satisfactory introduction.

The experienced instructor will have his path chosen; the beginner may try several avenues, making a mental note of the successful ones and making resolutions to avoid the failures. *Introduction to Drama and Criticism* is an attempt to bring together the best plays available in an ambience that is conducive to pleasant learning. No esoteric subtlety is pretended; no pedantic parading of knowledge is presented for the benefit of impressing other scholars. This is a text designed for the student to whom the study of drama is still a fresh, interesting, and exciting experience.

EMIL HURTIK
ROBERT YARBER

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

"Riders to the Sea" by J. M. Synge, *Complete Works of J. M. Synge*. Copyright 1935 by The Modern Library, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc.

The Complete Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare. Copyright 1942 by William Allan Neilson and Charles Jarvis Hill. Reprinted by permission of the publisher, Houghton Mifflin Company.

Pygmalion by Bernard Shaw. Copyright 1913, 1914, 1916, 1930, 1941, 1944, George Bernard Shaw. Copyright 1957 by The Society of Authors as Executor of the Estate of George Bernard Shaw. Reprinted by permission of Dodd, Mead & Company, Inc., and The Society of Authors.

The Skin of Our Teeth by Thornton Wilder. Copyright 1942 by Thornton Wilder. Reprinted by permission of Harper & Row, Publishers. *Caution! The Skin of Our Teeth is the sole property of the author and is fully protected by copyright. It may not be acted by professionals or amateurs without formal permission and the payment of a royalty. All rights, including professional, amateur, stock, radio and television, broadcasting, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are reserved. All professional inquiries should be addressed to the author's agent: Harold Freedman, Brandt & Brandt Dramatic Department, Inc., 101 Park Avenue, New York 17, New York. All requests for amateur rights should be addressed to Samuel French, 25 West 45th Street, New York 19, New York.*

Look Back in Anger by John Osborne. Copyright © 1957 by S. G. Phillips, Inc.

The Night of the Iguana by Tennessee Williams. Copyright © 1961 by Two Rivers Enterprise, Inc. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corporation.

After the Fall by Arthur Miller. Copyright © 1964 by Arthur Miller. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of The Viking Press, Inc.

From Riders to the Sea by Donna Gerstenberg. Reprinted by permission of Twayne Publishers, Inc.

"Thonton Wilder Says 'Yes'." by Bernard Hewitt. Originally published in the *Tulane Drama Review*, 4:2, December, 1959. Copyright © 1959, *The Tulane Drama Review*. Copyright © 1967, *The Drama Review*. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

"Hamlet: Six Characters in Search of a Play" by Sanford Sternlicht. *College English*, December, 1961, pp. 225-226. Reprinted with permission of the National Council of Teachers of English and Sanford Sternlicht.

"The World of Hamlet" by Maynard Mack, *The Yale Review*. Copyright, Yale University Press.

"Poisoned Paradise: The Underside of POOH" by Myron Masterson" by Frederick C. Crews, *The POOH Perplex*. Copyright © 1963 by Frederick C. Crews. Reprinted by permission of E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.

CONTENTS

Preface

v

INTRODUCTION TO DRAMA

J. M. SYNGE	<i>Riders to the Sea</i>	10
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE	<i>Hamlet</i>	17
GEORGE BERNARD SHAW	<i>Pygmalion</i>	86
THORNTON WILDER	<i>The Skin of Our Teeth</i>	142
JOHN OSBORNE	<i>Look Back in Anger</i>	176
TENNESSEE WILLIAMS	<i>The Night of the Iguana</i>	218
ARTHUR MILLER	<i>After the Fall</i>	270

INTRODUCTION TO CRITICISM

DONNA GERSTENBERGER	<i>Analysis of Riders to the Sea</i>	321
BARNARD HEWITT	<i>Thornton Wilder Says "Yes"</i>	327
SANFORD STERNLICHT	<i>Hamlet: Six Characters in Search of a Play</i>	334
MAYNARD MACK	<i>The World of Hamlet</i>	338
STUDENT PAPER	<i>Hamlet's Contemporary Significance</i>	349
FREDERICK C. CREWS	<i>Poisoned Paradise: The Underside of Pooh</i>	352
	<i>Glossary</i>	357

INTRODUCTION

to Drama

Drama is a unique art form! The play is meant to be performed; much of its meaning and value may evolve from the transformation of printed words to speech and action, but it also exists solely as literature, to be read, analyzed, and judged in itself, independent of any considerations of performance. Because of the play's dual nature, there are inevitable differences between the methods and problems involved in creating, analyzing, and interpreting drama and those involved in the other literary forms. The dramatist is concerned not only with the impact of his play as it is read, but also with its suitability and adaptability for performance, with its stage impact. He strives to create a work which will function successfully on both these levels; similarly, he may attempt to achieve both immediate appeal and long-range durability, to make the play of specific interest and significance to his own era or society while at the same time endowing it with more universal application and appeal.

In achieving these ends, the dramatist must work within a set of limitations unknown to the novelist, short-story writer, or poet; the dramatist's task is in many ways more challenging, as he must express his ideas with clarity, power, and originality while remaining within specific boundaries and adhering to certain rules and restrictions unique to drama. First, with the ex-

ception of prologues, epilogues, and stage direction, the dramatist has only one means of expression: his dialogue. Unlike the novelist, who can make extensive use of description and discussion, who can present his ideas in a variety of ways from different points of view, who can employ a wide range of literary techniques, the dramatist must express all of his ideas through his characters' words (and of course through their physical actions, which usually relate so closely to the dialogue as to form one unified entity). The dialogue develops the characters and they in turn develop the plot. Thus dialogue is the crucial and controlling element to the playwright, while it may be of minor importance to the novelist.

Secondly, the dramatist must cope with limitations on time and setting; because a play is designed to be performed, its time scope is necessarily restricted; furthermore, it must cover more events more quickly than does the novel. Just as the play's structure limits lengthy description and explanation, it limits digression; the play requires unity, a singleness of focus not necessary in the novel. The dramatist is similarly restricted in terms of setting; though the scene can shift, both on stage and in the mind of the reader, the play is nevertheless more typically limited in range than is the novel. The play's action, for example, cannot take

place solely within the mind of a character (or if it does, it must be externally represented); this is in fact another of the dramatist's restrictions; he must translate thoughts, ideas, and psychological conditions, those of his characters, and ultimately, his own, into the concrete and tangible, into language and action. Unlike the novelist, he cannot simply explain or describe. The play reader or spectator, too, must work within a certain context. The spectator, of course, has the advantage of total impact; the play ceases to be merely printed words and becomes concrete, an extension of reality. Nevertheless, even a well-staged, well-acted play lies in the realm of make-believe; eventually the curtain falls and the audience is transported back to the reality of daily life. And because the play is in fact a representation, because the events on stage are not *really* happening, the audience must accept certain dramatic conventions, which will be discussed in detail.

The reader of plays has rather different limitations; because he has only the printed script to work with, he must make full use of his imagination, his perception, and his own experience in reading, analyzing, and interpreting the play. Thus, the reader generally has more work to do on his own than does the spectator or the reader of a novel. While the spectator has the advantage of seeing the play's action and dialogue unified and presented on stage, not just in his mind, and the novel reader is given more than just dialogue and stage directions (and is more likely to be directed to specific conclusions by the novelist) the play reader must often make more use of his own resources, must expend more individual effort in order to obtain maximum enjoyment and understanding. This limitation can also in a sense be an advantage, for the play's lack of description and authorial omniscience offers the reader greater opportunity to exercise his own judgment. Shakespeare never *tells* us what Hamlet thinks; we must determine this from his speeches, using our own perception, imagination, and experience. The dramatist is more likely to be in the background than is the novelist; hence, drama is often characterized by greater reader involvement.

Thus, we see that although drama shares

many of the qualities of the other literary forms, it has an excitement, an immediacy, it is necessarily fast-paced, direct, and unified, a "now" experience. To gain further insight into the nature of drama, to understand the role of the reader, and to reach a conclusion regarding dramatic meaning, it may be helpful to further examine the development, classifications, and various structural elements of drama.

Western drama as we know it is said to have begun in Greece, specifically, in the Greece of the fifth century B.C., of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. These dramatists gave shape to Western comedy and tragedy, providing a foundation for all who followed them. The next vitally important era in terms of dramatic development was the Elizabethan age in England; here, within the space of a few years flourished Webster, Marlowe, Jonson, and Shakespeare. A direct result of the Renaissance, Elizabethan drama is significant not only because of its role in the history of English literature, but because of its intrinsic worth. Like classical Greek drama, much of Elizabethan drama has universal application (conversely, it is through lack of universal application and appeal that Roman and medieval drama failed to transcend Roman and medieval times; the drama of these eras is mainly of an extrinsic historical interest). Shakespeare and his contemporaries gave new shape, new forms and conventions, new life to Western drama. The content of Elizabethan drama is perhaps most significant; its comedies, based on irony of situations, mistaken identity, reversal of fortunes, and caricature, and its tragedies, concerning the deeper questions and dilemmas of man's existence, have provided both a base and a source for much of the drama of other eras, including our own.

The Elizabethan age was followed by a Puritan-dominated era of dramatic inactivity which was in turn followed by the Restoration, signaling the beginning of neo-classicism. Toward the end of the eighteenth century neo-classical drama, characterized by emphasis on form, order, and conventions, gave way to romanticism which represented a triumph of the subjective, of feeling over form; one of its many variations was Gothic drama, which emphasized the mysterious and grotesque.

Another outgrowth of romanticism, melodrama, reached its peak of popularity in the mid-nineteenth century. By the latter part of that century, dramatic realism, basically formulated from the naturalism of Emile Zola and developed by dramatists such as Ibsen, Chekhov, and Shaw, began to replace romanticism. By the turn of the century, a reaction, or at least an alternative, to realism appeared; this was expressionism (similar forms were called surrealism, theatricalism, and more recently, the theater of the absurd) which stressed external representation of internal, subjective states of feelings or moods, contrasting with the objectivity of realism.

These two major schools or forces, then, have shaped twentieth-century drama; most dramatists belong to one of the two groups, though some have written plays of both types. Realism, represented by such plays as *Night of the Ig-uana* and *Look Back in Anger*, has generally been the more dominant and familiar of the two types, though the expressionistic trend has steadily gained strength; the mid-twentieth century saw popularized expressionism such as *The Skin of Our Teeth*, while during the fifties and sixties absurd and existentialist drama, most of which can be classified, at least loosely, as expressionistic, flourished. There are no longer invariable, clear-cut divisions between realism and expressionism; modern drama includes many variations and combinations of the two. With the trend toward a loosening of categories, a less rigid classification of drama, each modern play must define and explain itself; predetermined labels are no longer adequate, though they do provide a foundation from which the play reader can begin his analysis.

All drama, whether Greek, Elizabethan, neo-classical, or modern makes use of dramatic conventions; because the play is, after all, merely a representation of reality, the reader or audience must adopt a special attitude, must accept the world created by the dramatist as reality for a specified period of time. This involves acceptance of various elements which, through a breach of external reality, establish and determine reality within the play itself. Conventions involving time and space are inherent in all drama: events occurring over a period of weeks

or years may be presented in a matter of hours, time may be artificially divided into acts and scenes, or it may be temporarily suspended, most of the dialogue concerns the basic focus or subject of the play, avoiding extraneous and irrelevant material which would be present in real life; the characters, though ostensibly self-contained, are ultimately aware of an interaction with the audience, and so on. There may be a considerable amount of dramatic irony; the reader or audience may know more than the characters do; the outcome may be revealed to the reader halfway through the play. Other conventions are unique to specific modes or eras; the Greeks accepted masks, choruses, and *deus ex machina* (the interference of the gods); Elizabethans accepted soliloquies, asides, little scenery, and men in women's roles; neo-classical audiences accepted the Greek-devised convention of the three unities (that the play must be confined to a single plot, a single place, and a single day). While older conventions such as the use of the asides, ritualistic language, or dialogue in verse may seem artificial and unreal to the contemporary spectator, the conventions he willingly accepts may soon be outdated as new dramatic forms and concepts develop. Though necessarily present in all drama, dramatic conventions are never fixed or absolute; they vary with new styles and ideas; similarly, conventions of past eras may be rediscovered and readapted.

Contemporary drama of or derived from the realistic tradition is likely to embody conventions involving the assumption that events on stage are literal representations of reality, of actuality; while in drama belonging to or derived from the expressionistic tradition, drama concerned with the subjective rather than the objective, one finds conventions of distortion and abstraction, conventions designed to establish the reality of the inward state, to express this state externally.

The reader is somewhat less affected by the necessity of accepting dramatic conventions than is the spectator, for the reader's basic concern is with the use of his own imagination in staging the play mentally, not with perceiving and responding to action being presented before him; nevertheless, he still must be aware of

these conventions in order to understand fully and appreciate the play, to evaluate its cultural context; he will probably make use of them to some extent in the process of mental staging, and, ultimately, in his final analysis. Dramatic conventions serve as a link between the dramatist and the reader, as a reaffirmation of the reader's involvement. For, to derive the maximum value from reading the play, to grasp and appreciate its significance, the reader must make concessions; he must evaluate the play within a certain context, within a particular set of limitations which he implicitly accepts. Dramatic conventions provide these limitations, these boundaries within which external reality is compromised or sacrificed to the extent necessary to establish internal reality, to give tangibility to what is essentially an imaginary world.

The traditional categories of drama include comedy, tragedy, farce, and melodrama; each of these divisions, of course, includes a number of subdivisions: comedy may range from slapstick to biting satire, melodrama from the thriller to the serious problem play. Though these classifications are arbitrary and not always applicable to contemporary drama, they provide a basis for examining and classifying the majority of plays belonging to an era.

Though comedy may contain essentially serious subject matter, though it may deal with human or social failings and weaknesses, it is generally distinguished by its light treatment of these themes. Comedy's purpose varies greatly with its form; low comedy may often have no other purpose than to entertain, light comedy to exploit universal human foibles and resulting situations, thus provoking laughter of recognition and identification, intellectual or high comedy to expose irrationality, perhaps to present basically serious ideas and concepts in the form of wit, satire to mock, gently or harshly, various individual or social flaws. The unifying characteristic, the factor which explains the similarity of all of these forms is humor; the intent of the humor (its direction and manifestation, the type of message it carries) explains the differences.

Farce is closely related to comedy in that it is designed to provoke laughter, but, unlike com-

edy, farce almost always concentrates on the absurd and improbable; it is less likely to be concerned with making a point, less likely to have any deep implications, to extend beyond its surface level, than is comedy. This is not to suggest that all farce belongs to the realm of slapstick or mindless nonsense; again, the fine line between dramatic categories, the fluid nature of these classifications, is such that certain types of farce may closely resemble high comedy or satire. While farce is generally characterized by a dependence on situation rather than on characterization, on admitted unreality rather than on probability, there is great variety within the category, and consequently, two plays both labeled farce may differ from each other as much as do light comedy and biting satire.

Melodrama typically refers to plays involving exciting, dramatic events and strong emotions; like farce it generally depends on exploitation of situation rather than on character development. The characters tend to be stereotyped (the hero, the villain, etc.); events tend to be exaggerated: situations are overplayed: the basic emphasis is on external rather than internal problems and forces; there is often a lack of overall probability and reality. Again, this does not mean that melodrama is a necessarily inferior dramatic form; mysteries, thrillers, and certain soap-opera type dramas may be highly entertaining and absorbing, thus successfully fulfilling their purpose. One form of melodrama, the problem play, is a serious drama concerned with a social problem or condition in which melodramatic effects may be used to create an intended emotional and intellectual impact; some such plays approach the realm of tragedy. Thus, melodrama, like the other categories, is not simply or concretely defined; it includes many variations, many different levels of drama.

Tragedy, essentially, involves conflict between individual will and the forces against it. The protagonist, usually a noble but inevitably flawed individual, struggles against antagonists which may include other individuals, society as a whole, the physical world, fate, and his own desires and weaknesses. As he does so, the inevitability of disaster becomes increasingly clear; at the same time, the reader becomes in-

creasingly involved with, and strongly identifies with, the protagonist and shares his struggle and his ultimate fate. A significant element of tragedy is the combination of internal and external conflicts and challenges; Hamlet must face a vicious world and an unjust destiny. He must also cope with his own imperfections. He is the victim of circumstances and of the wickedness of others, but he is also the victim of his own vacillation, of his self-doubt, and of his desire to avoid commitment. Another vital element is the conflict between expediency and honor; the protagonist must strive to survive on the world's terms while maintaining his own integrity. Tragedy ends in the downfall and defeat of the protagonist, yet it does not always imply total failure or total despair; there is often, on a deeper level, a sense of victory as he yields to his fate, a sense of honor or peace in resolution, of moral triumph in physical defeat.

Thus, we see that tragedy, the most complex of dramatic forms, deals with the fundamental questions of man's existence: his relationship with his environment, his relationship with God or fate, his control over his own will and desires, over his own destiny, his struggles with death, power, love, and hate, and his ability to face and cope with reality. Tragedy deals with the unchanging realities inherent in all societies and individuals. This is its major point of difference from comedy, besides the obvious ones of tone and purpose; while comedy tends to be more representative of its particular era, of the condition of the society in which it is rooted, tragedy transcends time and place. Comedy, of course, deals with universal and unchanging human characteristics, but it often does so in terms of a specific social context, it tends to in a sense be bound to the era it reflects. We can analyze and evaluate Hamlet without a great deal of knowledge of his Denmark, or even of Shakespeare's England, but full appreciation of *Pygmalion* requires some understanding of the English social structure at the turn of the century.

Many contemporary plays cannot be rigidly classified into one of the four divisions; serious contemporary dramas such as *Night of the Iguana* and *Look Back in Anger* are neither tragedy, in the traditional sense, nor melodrama.

There is an increasing trend toward the blending and combining of styles: serious drama may contain elements of melodrama and farce; light comedy may mask a tragic message. The traditional classifications, however, are still valid in that they provide a guide for understanding the purpose of various types of drama.

All drama, regardless of type, style, or era, is composed of certain basic elements: story, plot, conflict, characters, dialogue, and action. In a well-constructed play, these are integrated to form a single entity, to produce one specific impact, but the reader, by separating them, by evaluating the relation of each part to the whole, can further understand and appreciate the skills and techniques which the dramatist uses to achieve unity within the play. The play story is the foundation, the basic outline of events which concern the characters; it includes those events occurring before the play begins which have a direct or indirect effect on the play's course of action. Similarly, the effect of the play's resolution on events occurring after the curtain falls is often implied, thus creating a sort of continuity of action.

Plot is the arrangement of events within the play, the connection and interaction of incidents to form a coherent whole; some plots are composed of a logical sequence of interdependent events, others of more loosely related scenes and incidents, but all drama contains some sort of organized pattern of action leading to a particular, predetermined conclusion. Every plot contains exposition, complication, climax, and denouement; these divisions provide a blueprint for plot analysis, but they are neither clear-cut nor stable; they more often than not overlap and blend. Exposition provides a background or at least a starting point for the reader; he is introduced to the present situation, and usually at least one of the major characters, given hints about the play's conflicts and problems, and perhaps given information about past events and foreshadowing of future ones. Obviously, the exposition seldom makes everything clear to the reader; characters have yet to be introduced, their natures, attitudes, and motives to be revealed, the conflicts to be fully developed, subplots to be presented, the bearing of past events on present action to be

fully determined. In some forms of modern drama, particularly in expressionistic-oriented plays, expositions may be nonexistent or designed merely to confuse; in older forms of drama, the reader usually is provided with some type of orientation or conditioning, often in the form of a prologue. The cast of characters, the setting, and the preliminary stage directions may function as a supplement to the exposition.

Complication, usually the major portion of the play, consists of rising action or challenge; it usually reveals the problems facing the protagonist, the forces opposing him, and his own course of action. It blends the fates, fortunes, and actions of the characters, sets forth the conflicts, and increases intensity until a critical point is reached. This is the climax (sometimes immediately preceded by the crisis, which makes some sort of choice necessary), the point at which the outcome is determined. The reversal, the point at which the outcome or resolution actually begins to take place, may be included in the climax or may immediately follow it. Once resolution is reached, there often follows denouement, which presents the consequences of the outcome, unites and concludes any subplots or loose ends, and initiates a new sense of stability, of equilibrium.

The plot of any type of drama must contain conflict, the element which creates suspense, which gives the play life and interest, and which determines the characters' actions. There may be a variety of conflicts, or perhaps a single, many-layered one; conflict may occur between characters, between a character and his environment, between a character's will and fate, or within a character himself. Hamlet is set in conflict with Claudius, with his seemingly inescapable and disastrous fate, and with his own weaknesses. Eliza Doolittle faces a conflict between her natural character and her desire to become a "lady," between her very human qualities and Professor Higgins' dispassionate coldness, and between herself and the highly structured, rigid society to which she belongs. These conflicts are facets of an overall struggle between the false surface values: the preoccupation with form and artificiality represented by society, and the genuine worth represented by

Eliza. In *Look Back in Anger*, Jimmy Porter is in conflict with the English Establishment, with the social structure of the 1950's, with the phoniness, snobbishness, and hypocrisy of the culture as it is embodied in his wife Allison's family and friends; yet, like Hamlet, his major conflict is within himself; he is torn and divided, not sure of what he wants or where he is going, as is Reverend Shannon in *Night of the Iguana*. The characters in *Riders of the Sea* clash with natural forces, and, on another level, with the mystical forces which rule their lives. In some plays, the primary plot and its conflicts are supplemented and enriched by one or more subplots, which may reflect or contrast with the main focus of the play. Conflict may be presented in numerous ways and may assume a variety of forms, but it is always present. The action of the play inevitably leads to a resolution of conflict; in this resolution, particularly in intellectual comedy and in serious drama, the dramatist expresses his own attitudes toward his subject, makes his statement about human values and about the nature of reality.

Dramatic characters are the agents of the plot; they are performers through whom the plot unfolds; their interaction with the events provides dramatic interest. Although they are merely one of the many elements of a play, it is with them that the reader identifies, and through them that he perceives and appreciates the pattern of dramatic action. As they reveal more and more about their own attitudes and natures, the reader becomes increasingly involved, not only with the characters themselves but with the total action of the play. Hence, the characters must be skillfully developed, for it is because of his identification with, sympathy for, admiration of, or perhaps distaste for the characters that the reader himself becomes part of the drama. Though in fact he never abandons his comfortable position of an outsider looking in, he can become interested and absorbed in the lives of the characters, who, for a specified period of time, become real.

The characters must appear to be acting on their own, to be a group of people following their own course of action to a conclusion, not merely puppets of the dramatist, though this is of course what they are. The dramatist strives

to create believable characters, to make them seem to be independent entities, often to endow them with qualities which make them interesting and memorable in themselves, apart from their role and function within the play; yet at the same time he must bind them to the plot and action, he must make their decisions, actions, and ultimate fates seem both probable and necessary.

The dramatist may characterize through appearance, language, and action; as he speaks and acts, each character classifies himself, as he interacts with and discusses the other characters, he gives us further insight into his own nature. As he is confronted with problems and obstacles, as he takes positions and follows certain courses, he simultaneously reveals his part in the play's plot and action and evokes response from the reader, thus drawing the reader into the action. Some drama, notably farce and melodrama, makes extensive use of stereotyped characters; in other forms of drama, tragedy, serious drama, and comedy, the major characters are generally more complex, a necessity if they are to successfully fulfill their function as developers of plot and action, as expressers of the dramatist's own attitudes and values. Minor characters, however, are often stereotyped or one-dimensional; they may have one function, to represent one human trait or flaw, to inadvertently bring about an important event or to influence a significant decision, to provide comic relief, to foreshadow, to provide a contrast with or complement or reflection of a major character, or to stress one of the dramatist's major points. Unimportant in themselves but vital to the plot, such characters are often effective as stereotypes; examples include the grave-diggers in *Hamlet*, the convention-goers in *The Skin of Our Teeth*, and almost all the minor characters in *Pygmalion*. Major characters, because they perform a number of functions, play many roles, and are intrinsically important, must express a variety of traits and facets.

Virtually all older drama and some contemporary drama make use of the traditional roles, the protagonist, the antagonist, the confidant, in whom the protagonist confides, and the foil, with whom he contrasts; these are not stereotypes but roles whose existence is justified by

the plot. Hamlet, Eliza Doolittle and Jimmy Porter in *Look Back in Anger* are examples of protagonists; Claudius and Helena of *Look Back in Anger* are antagonists. Often the antagonistic role is filled by an organization or force in addition to or instead of a single person; society fulfills this role in *Pygmalion*, and *Look Back in Anger*, nature in *Riders to the Sea*, the ironies of fate and the inherent weaknesses of man in *Night of the Iguana*, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, and *Hamlet*. Horatio and Colonel Pickering are confidants, Fortinbras and Critias (the treacherous governor of Athens under Spartan rule) are foils; Jimmy Porter's friend Cliff is a modern embodiment of both these roles. Most characters, particularly in contemporary drama, cannot be classified under these traditional roles, but they still exist to a greater or lesser extent, often greatly modified and varied.

Characters carry out the plot through dialogue; the dramatist not only must create believable and effective characters, but he must create dialogue which is at once natural and carefully planned; it must seem to be free flowing while actually being highly organized and structured to support and complement the plot. On stage, dialogue is combined with physical action to present a total effect, but the play reader has only the dialogue to work with, his imagination must help him to stage the play; thus, the dramatist must create dialogue which is complete in itself, which stands as literature, independent of the play's performance. The characters, developed and controlled by dialogue, use it to establish their positions in the plot. Dialogue contains all of the ideas, concepts, and values of the play; it is the dramatist's only means of communication and is therefore absolutely vital in determining the play's impact and value.

Dramatic action is the combination of plot and dialogue with the meaning they convey; it is the totality of the play, the blending of structural elements with their purpose. Comic action usually concerns man's follies and vices, presenting them in a humorous light and concluding on a note of resolution, of reaffirmation of man's basic decency and rationality, his ability to compromise, survive, and even to triumph.

Tragic action deals with the darker side of human nature and existence, with man's evil, depravity, suffering, and failure; it concludes with downfall and disaster. Comic action, particularly in the case of satire, may express bitterness, hopelessness, and futility, while tragic action, as discussed previously, often includes elements of hope or moral resolution. Dramatic action is not merely *what* happens but how and why; it is the play's surface appearance, its deeper levels of meaning, and its final significance.

The play reader must interpret and evaluate the play within a certain context, within a certain structure of limitations. Given these limitations, we turn to the question of analysis: what factors should be taken into account in the evaluation of a particular play? First, the reader should be aware of the functions and significance of the previously discussed structural elements; an understanding of how the play is put together, of the diverse parts which the dramatist shapes into a unified whole, provides a foundation for interpretation. Why do certain scenes occur? Why do they occur at one point in the play and not in another? Why are certain relationships, conflicts, and characters more significant than others? The reader must ask himself these and similar questions to determine why the play is structured as it is.

Secondly, the reader may need further knowledge about the cultural or social context in which the play is set. Extensive knowledge, of course, is not absolutely vital in all cases; some plays express universal situations and conflicts rather than the attitudes and values of one particular society or era, and, even in the latter type of play, the reader may be able to analyze and evaluate the plot and characters solely on the basis of the dialogue. But to gain insight into the causes of the events, the motives of the characters, to understand the values being questioned, defined, or expressed, it is often helpful to have some degree of cultural orientation, some acquaintance with the society and times in which the play's action occurs. For in most cases the external society or environment does have some impact, direct or indirect, on the internal action of the play. Awareness of the dramatist's feelings about the society in which

the play is set will aid the reader in grasping the dramatist's messages and in forming his own conclusions; successful interpretation of *Look Back in Anger*, for example, involves not only understanding of postwar English culture, but perception of Osborne's feelings about this culture. Similarly, the reader's perception of Shaw's attitudes toward Edwardian England and Wilder's views about America in the thirties will largely influence and determine his conclusions about *Pygmalion* and *The Skin of Our Teeth*.

Thus, we see the importance of the dramatist himself, of *his* particular cultural orientation; if he is writing about his own society, he may likely express his attitudes toward it at the same time as he relates his views about universal situations and problems. He may express his views obviously and clearly or very subtly, through one or more specific characters or through the course and nature of the events themselves. If he is writing about an era other than his own, about another society, the positions he assumes in relation to it often directly reflect his feeling and views about his own age; within the context of the problems and conflicts of another time and place, he makes implications or direct comments about current events; the dilemmas of democracy, individual freedom, and integrity not alien to the late twentieth century. On a more personal level, Shakespeare expressed his discontent with the state of Elizabethan theater, with various new trends, through the speeches of the players at Elsinore.

The dramatist defines and advocates his system or set of values through his characters; the reader, in his task of interpreting what values are being expressed, how they are expressed, and, most important, why they are expressed, is actually interpreting and analyzing the dramatist's positions and philosophy. Though he seems to be responding and relating to various characters, to their problems and forms of behavior, he is in reality responding to the values and opinions of one individual who has chosen to communicate through the medium of drama.

Finally, the reader must make extensive use of his own perception, imagination, and experience; he must combine the structural elements of the play, its cultural background, and its im-

plicit or explicit values with his own attitudes, his own judgments, for these will inevitably pattern his reactions to the play. In order to reach conclusions about the play's meaning, about its implications to himself, to his society, and to mankind as a whole, the reader must strive to be openminded, to consider each concept presented and to judge its merit in terms of his conception of reality. Simultaneously, he must maintain his position as a constant critic; he must realize that the dramatist does not necessarily have all the answers; hence, the ideas expressed in his work should be carefully examined, weighed, and analyzed before they are accepted.

The total meaning of a play is the combination of its structural parts, its total impact, and the reader's reactions; it is the entire presentation of the dramatist's ideas. In his evaluation, the reader must determine whether the dramatist justifies his assertions and attitudes within the context of the play, whether the conclusions implied by the play's outcome are supported by its action; he must understand the force behind the attitudes and values expressed, the dramatist's conception, in light of his own perception of the world around him. It is not enough merely to grasp the dramatist's meaning or message, the reader should determine its validity outside the specific context of the play. To whom and how does it apply? What is its significance, what are its implications for use here and now? These considerations separate the play's meaning from the immediate stage performance or the printed page. We not only need to understand the experiences of Hamlet

and Ophelia, of Eliza Doolittle, of the Antrobuses, of Jimmy and Alison Porter, we need to determine how they apply to us, how we can use them to further understand and evaluate ourselves, to improve and enrich our own existence.

All elements of drama, those inherent in any play and those which vary with style and era, combine to present a total image, and from them evolves the play's ultimate meaning. Drama is essentially the expression of ideas through a set of characters who come to life through plot and dialogue; though they may seem to achieve the status of independent beings, they are ultimately intermediaries between the dramatist and reader; the problems they face, their reactions and responses to them, and their resolutions, their final destinies reveal their creator's views about the nature of man and society. These views and attitudes may be explicit; more often they are implicit within the framework of dramatic action. Hence, the reader must work to interpret and evaluate; he must involve himself and his impressions and responses, both intellectual and emotional, to determine and appreciate the play's significance. Consideration of each of the play's component parts, examination of the unification of these parts, and, finally, evaluation of the play as a whole, of its purpose and execution, of the dramatist's message, will enable the reader to enjoy drama on various levels; as entertainment, as a communication of ideas and attitudes, as a statement about man's existence, and as a source which may aid him in his own search for truth.



John Millington Synge

RIDERS TO THE SEA

CHARACTERS

MAURYA, *an old woman*

BARTLEY, *her son*

CATHLEEN, *her daughter*

NORA, *a younger daughter*

MEN AND WOMEN

SCENE. *An Island off the West of Ireland.*

Cottage kitchen, with nets, oil-skins, spinning wheel, some new boards standing by the wall, etc. CATHLEEN, *a girl of about twenty, finishes kneading cake, and puts it down in the pot-oven by the fire; then wipes her hands, and begins to spin at the wheel.* NORA, *a young girl, puts her head in at the door.*

NORA [*in a low voice*]. Where is she?

CATHLEEN. She's lying down, God help her, and may be sleeping, if she's able.

[NORA *comes in softly, and takes a bundle from under her shawl.*]

CATHLEEN [*spinning the wheel rapidly*]. What it is you have?

NORA. The young priest is after bringing them. It's a shirt and a plain stocking were got off a drowned man in Donegal.

[CATHLEEN *stops her wheel with a sudden movement, and leans out to listen.*]

NORA. We're to find out if it's Michael's they are, some time herself will be down looking by the sea.

CATHLEEN. How would they be Michael's, Nora? How would he go to the length of that way to the far north?

NORA. The young priest says he's known the like of it. "If it's Michael's they are," says he, "you can tell herself he's got a clean burial by the grace of God, and if they're not his, let no one say a word about them, for she'll be getting her death," says he, "with crying and lamenting."

[*The door which NORA half closed is blown open by a gust of wind.*]

CATHLEEN [*looking out anxiously*]. Did you ask him would he stop Bartley going this day with the horses to the Galway fair?

NORA. "I won't stop him," says he, "but let you not be afraid. Himself does be saying prayers half through the night, and the Almighty God won't leave her destitute," says he, "with no son living."

CATHLEEN. Is the sea bad by the white rocks, Nora?

NORA. Middling bad, God help us. There's a great roaring in the west, and it's worse it'll be getting when the tide's turned to the wind.

[*She goes over to the table with the bundle.*]
Shall I open it now?

CATHLEEN. Maybe she'd wake up on us, and come in before we'd done. [*Coming to the table.*] It's a long time we'll be, and the two of us crying.

NORA [*goes to the inner door and listens*]. She's moving about on the bed. She'll be coming in a minute.

CATHLEEN. Give me the ladder, and I'll put them up in the turf-loft, the way she won't know of them at all, and maybe when the tide turns she'll be going down to see would he be floating from the east.

[*They put the ladder against the gable of the chimney; CATHLEEN goes up a few steps and hides the bundle in the turf-loft. MAURYA comes from the inner room.*]

MAURYA [*looking up at CATHLEEN and speaking querulously*]. Isn't it turf enough you have for this day and evening?

CATHLEEN. There's a cake baking at the fire for a short space [*throwing down the turf*] and Bartley will want it when the tide turns if he goes to Connemara.

[*NORA picks up the turf and puts it round the pot-oven.*]

MAURYA [*sitting down on a stool at the fire*]. He won't go this day with the wind rising from the south and west. He won't go this day, for the young priest will stop him surely.

NORA. He'll not stop him, mother, and I heard Eamon Simon and Stephen Pheety and Colum Shawn saying he would go.

MAURYA. Where is he itself?

NORA. He went down to see would there be another boat sailing on the week, and I'm thinking it won't be long till he's here now, for the tide's turning at the green head, and the hooker's tacking from the east.

CATHLEEN. I hear some one passing the big stones.

NORA [*looking out*]. He's coming now, and he in a hurry.

BARTLEY [*comes in and looks round the room. Speaking sadly and quietly*]. Where is the bit of new rope, Cathleen, was bought in Connemara?

CATHLEEN [*coming down*]. Give it to him, Nora; it's on a nail by the white boards. I hung it up this morning, for the pig with the black feet was eating it.

NORA [*giving him a rope*]. Is that it Bartley?

MAURYA. You'd do right to leave that rope, Bartley, hanging by the boards. [*BARTLEY takes the rope.*] It will be wanting in this place, I'm telling you, if Michael is washed up to-morrow morning, or the next morning, or any morning in the week, for it's a deep grave we'll make him by the grace of God.

BARTLEY [*beginning to work with the rope*]. I've no halter the way I can ride down on the mare, and I must go now quickly. This is the one boat going for two weeks or beyond it, and the fair will be a good fair for horses I heard them saying below.

MAURYA. It's a hard thing they'll be saying below if the body is washed up and there's no man in it to make the coffin, and I after giving a big price for the finest white boards you'd find in Connemara.

[*She looks round at the boards.*]

BARTLEY. How would it be washed up, and we after looking each day for nine days, and a strong wind blowing a while back from the west and south?

MAURYA. If it wasn't found itself, that wind is raising the sea, and there was a star up against the moon, and it rising in the night. If it was a hundred horses, or a thousand horses you had itself, what is the price of a thousand horses against a son where there is one son only?

BARTLEY [*working at the halter, to CATHLEEN*]. Let you go down each day, and see the sheep aren't jumping in on the rye, and if the jobber comes you can sell the pig with the black feet if there is a good price going.

MAURYA. How would the like of her get a good price for a pig?

BARTLEY [*to CATHLEEN*]. If the west wind holds with the last bit of the moon let you and Nora get up weed enough for another cock for the kelp. It's hard set we'll be from this day with no one in it but one man to work.

MAURYA. It's hard set we'll be surely the day