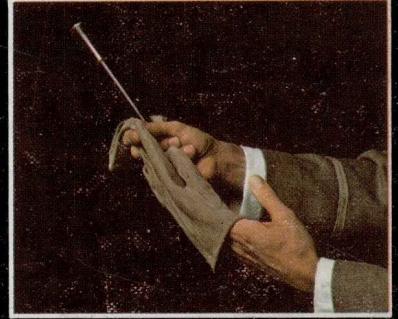
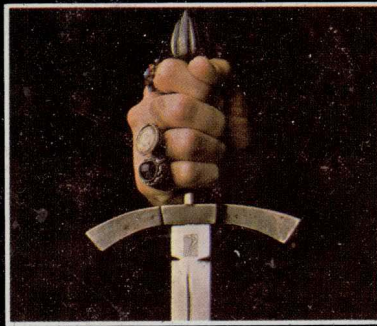


# *Classic Theatre* *the Humanities in Drama*

edited by Sylvan Barnet / Morton Berman / William Burto



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*Edited by*

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# Preface

This book contains thirteen plays, and we hesitate to add any words that will delay you from reading them. Still, a few remarks on the organization of the book may be useful.

In the Foreword, Joan Sullivan—producer of the television series called *Classic Theatre: The Humanities in Drama*—explains the aims of the series and the basis on which she chose these thirteen plays. On television each play is preceded by a thirty-minute preview with a distinguished scholar and with actors who performed in the production. The scholars who participate in the previews have generously contributed short, readable, and highly informative introductions to each play in this book. (There is one exception: Miss Eva Le Gallienne participated in the television preview to Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, but because her schedule did not allow her to write the introduction the editors have filled the gap.) These thirteen introductions, along with whatever footnotes are necessary, should increase the reader's understanding and enjoyment of the plays.

Perhaps it should be mentioned here too that the plays, covering more than three hundred years, are printed in the order in which they are shown on television. This order is nearly chronological; the few exceptions were made to serve the balance of television programming. Thus, because the producers wished the series to begin with a well-known play, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (written about 1605–1606) precedes Marlowe's *Edward II* (written in the early 1590s). Similarly, the series concludes with Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession* (written in 1893), although Pinero's *Trelawny of the "Wells"*, Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, and Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* were all written a few years later. No play, however, is very far out of its chronological place.

In addition to a short introduction to each play there is a long introduction to the entire book. It is divided into three parts: The Language of Drama, The Language of Television, and The Classic Theatre and Its Successor. The first part discusses the nature of

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drama—the playwright's ways of communicating a story through actors moving on a stage. The second part helps the television viewer to see the ways in which plays can be transformed by a new medium. The third part, of less immediate practical use to the reader or viewer, indicates some of the differences between “the classic theatre”—that is, the great dramatic tradition of the past—and the drama of our own time. The introduction as a whole, then, helps the reader of this book, the viewer of television plays, and the viewer of live plays of the past and of the present.

## Foreword

The thirteen plays in this anthology are reprinted to complement the television series for Public Broadcasting. With ardent if not modest conviction I believe this series is the most significant presentation of theatre on any network in the history of American television.

You may ask, along with the conscientious editors of this book, "Why these particular thirteen dramas?" Since the conception of the series almost three years ago, I had a major criterion as I screened nearly one hundred dramas available for acquisition and produced over several seasons by the British Broadcasting Corporation. I endeavored to base my choices on the degree to which the intent of the dramatic literature was fulfilled through exceptional excellence of performance and presentation.

I had no preconceived idea of choosing "classic" plays which for me are simply the very best that survive. But as the choices narrowed down on the basis of merit to dramas not considered "contemporary," I also saw the opportunity to make some contribution to the revival—for a larger public than is reached by "live" theatre in this country—of a tradition of literature that eloquently and powerfully speaks to the guts and minds of humanity in any age. Thus the series became a significant, if in combination unusual, sampling of the most extraordinary dramatic literature conceived in the preceding four centuries of western culture.

Originally I hoped that all the programs would be derived from plays written for the theatre. The obvious choice to represent seventeenth-century drama was Molière, but there was no available production to consider. Thus it was I chose the television dramatization of the later years of John Milton; *Paradise Restored* is a fine period drama, and since it is set in the seventeenth century it afforded the link in continuity for the presentation of social and theatrical history.

*Candide*, the other deviation from theatrical literature, was originally of course a satiric tale. It provided some French representation



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and seemed especially important because it is the work of the man whose thought dominated eighteenth-century Europe. The other, and equally important, justification for its inclusion was that the translation and adaptation to the medium of television by its director, the late James McTaggart, are singularly brilliant.

I would like to share with you many of my experiences in developing this series, but, in Shakespeare's words, "the play's the thing." However, I invite you to watch the television previews that precede each drama; the previews, I trust, reflect the fruits of those experiences. These half-hour programs were designed to complete the theatre experience for the television viewer; they are your theatre playbill. Each program offers an intimate conversation with one of the eminent scholars who introduce the plays in this anthology. This conversation, with brief illustrative excerpts from the productions and short pictorial essays about the playwright and the social and theatrical history of his time, are the footnotes for your further enjoyment of the drama. You will also share conversations with leading players in the productions, videotaped in London settings that are historically associated with the play.

I have a strong personal commitment to good drama on television. In the pre-television rural Midwest where I grew up there was little opportunity to see performances of plays. Occasionally I would contrive to sleep over at a friend's house in the village and with a great sense of wickedness sneak off to the dilapidated town hall to see a traveling group of down-and-out ex-vaudevillian players (who would make the Telfers in *Trelawny of the Wells* look like superstars) stagger through a totally forgettable domestic comedy. The most adept part of their evening's performance was the selling of chinaware and boxes of cheap candy between the acts.

Today the hunger for compelling entertainment is not a result of a dearth of choices but of a saturation of repetitive, predictable, inarticulate formula dramas. I don't believe that that is an elitist remark because I don't believe writers like Shakespeare, Goldsmith, Chekhov, and Synge are playwrights who attract only elite audiences—when their plays are well-performed. But I do think a second-rate presentation is worse than none at all. This is partially so because television has caused audiences to demand sophisticated standards from any form of entertainment. And because I believe that a larger proportion of the population than is realized is looking for new alternative programming, I support the acquisition of foreign productions until we can match their quality.

There is a groundswell of distress among my colleagues (which is soon communicated to the professional critics and thus shortly to the public at large) regarding the importation of dramatic television material. I can only think that this may hasten the day when they rise to the challenge of their competition. And I can only further hope

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that your response as audience—in vast and vociferous numbers—will contribute to generating the consistent creation and financial support of exciting television theatre in this country.

Of all forms of communication or show business, television is the most unpredictable, gigantic, and complex *collaboration*. It's not really magic, but when it finally gets on that piece of master two-inch tape it sometimes feels like magic. The people who participated in making this series number in the hundreds: dozens of production crews, designers, editors, actors, producers, and directors across the water who produced the dramas; in Boston my very precious immediate staff—David Atwood, Elizabeth Deane, Monia Joblin, and Sarah Payne, other designers, composers, musicians, production crews, and consultants who contributed to the preview programs and the series presentation. And of great significance was the collaboration of the National Endowment For The Humanities, which on the basis of a list of the dramas and a proposal of intent accepted the request for the funding of this project, and with which the Mobil Oil Corporation joined in financing the acquisition of the plays.

We proudly offer you this feast of endeavor; this anthology is your “Encore” that you can call and recall long after the tube is dark.

Joan Sullivan  
Producer, *Classic Theatre: The Humanities in Drama*  
WGBH/Boston

April 1975



# General Introduction

## The Language of Drama

In ordinary speech, when we say that something is “dramatic” we usually mean one of two things. We may mean that it is striking, vivid: “she made a dramatic entrance.” Or we may mean that there is a strong element of conflict, as when we speak of the drama of the courtroom, or the drama of a baseball game when a strong batter faces a strong pitcher in the second half of the ninth inning, with a tie score, two out, and a man on second base.

Both of these qualities—vividness and conflict—are normally present in the kind of artistic work that is known as drama. We should notice first, however, that a drama is basically a story that is intended to be performed by actors who play parts. “Drama” comes from a Greek word meaning “to do” or “to act,” and a drama shows us people doing things—talking, walking, fighting, and so forth. But behind all these hundreds of actions that take about two hours on the stage, there is some unifying idea, one large action or doing. All of the bits of talking, walking, and fighting somehow hang together to tell a story, and the gist of this story can be called the “action” of the play. In this sense, our lives—though full of actions—rarely have *an* action. Every day we do many things, of course, but most of these doings are unconnected: for example, on the way to work we may happen to meet a friend on the street; this meeting may have no connection with anything that comes later in the day or in our life. In a play, however, there is, in the vocabulary of drama critics, *an* action—a unified story that is presented to us through all of the details. The parts all add up. The action of a play may be, for example, *Boy Gets Girl*, or it may be *Man Makes a Tragic Mistake*, or it may be *Couple at Last Gets to Understand Each Other*. Perhaps we can clarify the nature of this sort of action—a story that holds together the hundreds of little actions that the actors perform—by contrasting it with *All in the Family*. In this television program we notice two things. First, in any given

thirty-minute program there is a basic situation—say the Bunkers' anniversary—but much of the program consists of conversations and happenings that really have no bearing on the end of the program. The anniversary is a sort of pretext for assembling people in the Bunkers' living room; then we get lots of funny remarks, some perhaps related to the occasion but others not; finally, the evening comes to an end, as evenings always do, but the ending is not the outcome of everything that has come in the previous twenty-nine minutes. In a sense, although there are plenty of laughs, nothing really happens in most episodes of *All in the Family*. Second, we notice that from one week to another there is no progress; each episode is independent, and the characters do not develop. Archie remains a bigot, Edith remains a dingbat. Three of these episodes do not make a three-act play, for the third episode has no relation to the first two. There is good entertainment in *All in the Family*, but from a dramatist's point of view there is no *action*.

Let us return now to drama as an action or story with a conflict. There is much to be said in favor of the old formula for writing plays: In the first act, get your hero up a tree; in the second act, throw stones at him; in the third act, get him down. (To say "get him down" does not necessarily imply a happy ending. It implies only that the story must come to an inevitable end; it does not just stop, but it comes to a completion, and of course one common kind of story—tragedy—usually ends with the death of the tragic hero. Such a hero is at last out of the tree, but at the cost of his life.) The formula, then, is this: establish a conflict and then settle it. The conflict is usually expressed on the stage by people opposed to other people, but of course an individual can also be in conflict with fate, God, the laws of society, and even with himself.

A playwright tells his story chiefly through speeches. But a playwright does not simply write speeches. A *wright* is a maker, and as a wheelwright made wheels and a shipwright made ships, so a playwright makes plays. Though we may slip into thinking that a play is simply words when we read it in a book, the stuff of a playwright's trade is not simply words. Like a novelist, he tells a story; but unlike a novelist, he does not rely on words alone, for the words are spoken by actors moving on a stage; he relies on sights as well as sounds.

### Setting

Let's begin with the stage and the setting. Because Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, of the plays in this book, is the best known and the first to be televised in *Classic Theatre: The Humanities in Drama*, we will draw most of our examples from *Macbeth*, though we will occasionally glance at other plays as well. When a production of *Macbeth* begins, we see three Witches moving about, amidst flashes of lightning, in some unattractive place. Since the Witches speak of the "fog and filthy

air," we probably see them through a mist or dim light. And so from the start—even before a word is spoken—we see (from the lightning and mist) that these creatures live in violence, darkness, and contagion. What the Witches *say* is important, but at first we cannot really make much out of it, for we do not yet know who this Macbeth is whom they plan to meet. What we *see* tells us, more clearly than their words, that the Witches are forces of disorder. As the play progresses, we may note also that many scenes are set in darkness (often indicated by the presence of torches): the heath is foggy, King Duncan arrives in the evening, Macbeth murders Duncan at night and arranges to have his friend Banquo murdered at night, Lady Macbeth (holding a candle) walks in her sleep. But the last act, except for the sleepwalking scene, is set in daylight, and this visual effect—daylight instead of darkness—tells us at least as clearly as can words that at last the forces of good are displacing the forces of evil. In short, many of the settings *say* a good deal. The fog is fog and night is night and daylight is daylight, but these things are also symbolic: the dramatist shows us things (here, visual effects) that stand for something else.

Finally, before we leave this matter of symbolic settings we should mention that they are not confined only to poetic plays but are even found in relatively realistic ones. Ibsen, for example, in a letter to a theatre director, explained that the lighting in *The Wild Duck* "has its significance; it differs from act to act and is calculated to correspond to the basic mood that characterizes each of the five acts." In the fourth act, for example, the light "begins to grow dark"; the fifth act, which completes the shattering of illusions, takes place in "a cold, gray morning light."

### Costumes

Let us continue for a moment to talk about the ways in which drama says things even without words. Costumes tell us a good deal, on the stage as in life. They do not necessarily tell the truth about their wearers, but they tell us what the wearers want us to believe. If, on a street, we see someone who is wearing workman's clothes, we conclude either that he is a workman or that for some reason (say, political or sexual) he wants us to think that he is a workman; in any case the clothes make a statement, conscious or not. (In *Hedda Gabler* Ibsen tells us that Judge Brack wears clothes "which are elegant but a little too youthful for him.") In *Macbeth* the hero changes his garments from those of a warrior to those of a king, but we are often reminded that the king's clothing is not rightfully his. Late in the play one of the characters says what we have seen, or half seen:

Now does he feel his title  
Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe  
Upon a dwarfish thief.

(V.ii.20-22)

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Near the end of the play, when Macbeth fights to defend his own life, we see him again in armor and perhaps half-consciously remember the armed heroic Macbeth of the early part of the play, the valiant soldier who, by putting on "borrowed robes" (I.iii.109), unintentionally destroyed his own life. Yet another example of a costume that speaks to us is Lady Macbeth's nightgown in the sleepwalking scene (V.i.6), where she reveals her tortured thoughts; again we see the reality rather than the deceptive show of stolen royal garments. In the television production, notice how the untied laces dangling from the nightgown's cuffs help to convey a sense of Lady Macbeth's loss of self-control.

This use of symbolic costumes—costumes that are, of course, clothing, but that also speak to the audience—can be found as well in later plays. In the televised *Hedda Gabler*, Hedda at first wears a yellow-gold dress; then, from the first time that we see her brandishing a pistol, she wears a rich but smoldering grayish-brown dress trimmed with maroon; in the latter part of the play (after burning the manuscript of the man she wishes to control), she wears a low-cut black dress (Ibsen specifies black in the stage directions), which helps to convey her character as a beautiful but destructive woman. Similarly, in the televised version of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, at the start we see Masha, one of the sisters, in a black dress. Bored and restless, she soon says that she is leaving and she puts on her hat. But then she hears Colonel Vershinin speak, and, attracted, she says that she will stay for lunch. She not only takes off her hat, but she also takes off the black jacket she has worn up to now: she is (so to speak) opening her protective shell. Still later, when her passion for Colonel Vershinin has increased, we see her dressed in scarlet; but toward the end of the play, on the day that he and the other soldiers are leaving the town and she is therefore back where she was at the start of the play, she is again dressed in black.

## Gestures

Gestures, too, are part of the language of drama. Movements of the face, limbs, or body ("body language" is the new term), though silent, are eloquent. On the stage, as in real life, if we silently nod or shake our heads, we are saying something. In fact, if, for example, we hand someone money in silence, we may be expressing something (for example, resentment) more eloquently than if words accompany our gesture. Or if we sit on a couch and put our feet up on the coffee table, we are saying something very different from what we are saying if we sit upright on the couch with our feet on the floor, our ankles crossed. Dramatists—since they communicate not merely through words but through actors moving on a stage—often specify (in stage directions or in dialogue) significant gestures. When the Witches hail

Macbeth as king, his friend Banquo sees him "start" or react with a brief involuntary movement:

Good sir, why do you start, and seem to fear  
Things that do sound so fair?

(I.iii.51-52)

So, in a gesture, "brave Macbeth" (I.ii.16), "valiant Macbeth" (I.ii.24), conveys an inner state of surprise and perhaps fear. Most often, of course, gestures accompany and reinforce speech. When Lady Macbeth in the sleepwalking scene goes through the motions of washing blood off her hands, she says "Yet here's a spot" (V.i.40). In her mind her hands are not only soiled but also carry the foul smell of blood ("all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand"), and she probably passes a hand quickly under her nose and makes a face. In the televised version the actress prepares us for this a little earlier, when with a distraught look she places her fingers near her nose.

Under the heading of gestures we can include such large movements as running, fighting, and sitting. A reader can scarcely hope to visualize all of the action, but the playwrights sometimes provide help in the stage directions. A good example occurs in *Hedda Gabler*: Hedda is trying to take Loevborg away from Thea Elvsted. In Act Two, Ibsen tells us that Thea "takes a chair and is about to sit down beside Loevborg," but Hedda, wanting Loevborg for herself, arranges the seating so that she is between Loevborg and Thea. This symbolic gesture is no less aggressive (despite Hedda's "Thea, darling") than when Hedda at the beginning of the act points a gun at Judge Brack.

### *Sound Effects*

Dialogue is of course the chief way of telling a story in plays that are also literature, but first we should notice another sort of sound, non-verbal sound. We recall that *Macbeth* begins with "*Thunder and lightning*," signs of disorder. Soon after we hear an owl shriek (another ill omen). A clinking of a bell is a signal that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are preparing to murder King Duncan (see II.i.32,62); after the murder is discovered, the alarm bell is struck violently, making an appropriately "hideous" noise. Near the end of the play, when Lady Macbeth kills herself, there is a "cry within of women" (V.v.7), and in this latter part of the play there are "alarums," that is, sounds of soldiers assembling and fighting. And, once again, it is worth mentioning that realistic drama, as well as poetic, does not fail to draw on the power of sound effects: the pistol shots in *Hedda Gabler*, and the fire-bell in *Three Sisters* (ringing for the fire, of course, but also for the ruin of the sisters' lives) are perhaps the most obvious examples.

*Dialogue*

But of course dialogue, from the Greek word meaning "to converse," is the most persistent sound in a play. The playwright gives us not a transcript of our chaotic fragmentary sentences and "you-know-what-I-means," but coherent speeches that continuously reveal character and advance the story. Let us talk first about the relation of speech to the speaker. If we listen to the people around us, we notice that although they share many words, some use certain words and rhythms that others do not use. And of course their attitudes toward themselves and toward other people help to shape the sentences they speak: some people are curt, some are foul, some are brisk, some are leisurely, some are long-winded, and so on. In a play, too, the speakers often reveal their character through their speeches. Or at least some of the speeches help to give identity to the speakers. For example, at the beginning of *Macbeth* we hear the Three Witches:

FIRST WITCH    When shall we three meet again?

                  In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

SECOND WITCH    When the hurlyburly's done,

                  When the battle's lost and won.

THIRD WITCH    That will be ere the set of sun.

(I.i.1-5)

These lines rhyme, and, if we count the syllables and compare the length of these lines with the length of the lines of most of the other speakers, we find that these lines have seven or eight syllables whereas other speakers' lines usually have ten syllables and are not rhymed. We may only be half-conscious of it, but the speeches of the Witches have a distinctive quality—not surprising for unnatural creatures who speak strange prophecies and utter charms. The passage quoted a moment ago is very different from the first speeches we hear after the Witches leave the stage. The king, seeing a bleeding man, asks for news about the rebellion ("revolt"), and Malcolm, the king's son, says the bleeding man assisted him in the battle ("broil").

KING DUNCAN    What bloody man is that? He can report,

                  As seemeth by his plight, of the revolt

                  The newest state.

MALCOLM            This is the sergeant

                  Who like a good and hardy soldier fought

                  'Gainst my captivity. Hail, brave friend!

                  Say to the king the knowledge of the broil

                  As thou didst leave it.

(I.ii.1-7)

Now, we don't mean to suggest that every speech by a given character resembles every other speech by that character, and that every char-

acter has his own recognizable way of speaking. We mean only that, for the most part, as we hear a speech it seems appropriate to the speaker or at least does not violate our sense of the speaker. But any given character may have a range of voices, and the tragic hero notably ranges from a grand style to a direct style, sometimes within a single speech. Consider, for example, Macbeth's lines spoken soon after he kills King Duncan and looks at his bloody hands:

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood  
Clean from my hand? No; this my hand will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
Making the green one red.

(II.ii.59-62)

The ocean is conceived of grandly as the realm of the sea god Neptune and, more simply, as "the green," and Macbeth's bloody hands will "incarnadine" it (redden it) and, again more simply, turn it "red." Immediately after this speech his wife speaks, and her language is far more ordinary than Macbeth's:

My hands are of your color, but I shame  
To wear a heart so white. (*Knock.*) I hear a knocking  
At the south entry. Retire we to our chamber.  
A little water clears us of this deed.

(II.ii.63-66)

We have only to compare Macbeth's "Neptune" and his "multitudinous seas" and "incarnadine" with Lady Macbeth's "a little water clears us of this deed" to see which of the two speakers is of a simpler nature. Lady Macbeth seems to speak common sense, and yet it turns out that her common sense is woefully inadequate for she will go mad from thinking about her crime. Though now she says, again matter-of-factly, "A little water clears us of this deed," in the sleepwalking scene ("What, will these hands ne'er be clean?") she will refute her earlier no-nonsense statement.

We cannot here try to trace Macbeth's speech—and character—through the entire play. However, it does seem fair to say that although Macbeth's language does not entirely lose its commanding richness, it does become harsher and plainer with Macbeth's growing despair. In the latter part of the play we increasingly hear this note of desperation, a "Valiant fury" (V.ii.14) if not madness, as in the speech when he determines to put on his armor ("harness") rather than yield. (Notice, by the way, how the first line suggests a distaste for light, and how the third line reminds us of the sounds that occurred the night Macbeth murdered Duncan.)

I 'gin to be aweary of the sun,  
And wish th' estate o' th' world were now undone.



## *General Introduction*

Ring the alarum bell! Blow wind, come wrack!  
At least we'll die with harness on our back.

(V.v.49-52)

The harsher, more stripped-down language that characterizes much (but not all) of Macbeth's later speeches is perhaps most clearly seen in his final words:

Before my body  
I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff:  
And damned be him that first cries "Hold, enough!"

(V.viii.32-34)

## *Plot and Structure*

This simplification or lessening of Macbeth's language works along with the play's structure, the arrangement of scenes. At the beginning of this introduction we briefly made the point that in a good play everything is relevant to everything else, and that the end, therefore, comes inevitably out of everything that has preceded it. A playwright, we recall, makes or builds a play; indeed, Ibsen once went so far as to speak of himself as a sort of architect. We must now talk a little more about the way in which all of the parts are related to the whole. In the first half of the play, we see Macbeth rise (through a moral fall) to become king: Act Three, the middle act, begins with Banquo's summary: "Thou hast it now: King, Cawdor, Glamis, all"; and almost exactly in the middle of the play we get the banquet scene, which should be a symbol of community but instead, since the banquet is interrupted by Banquo's ghost, is a symbol of the chaos Macbeth has brought to Scotland. When Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost, perhaps his language is at its poorest: "Which of you have done this"; and (to the ghost), "Thou canst not say I did it," a pitiful, almost childish, attempt to claim he is innocent because he did not with his own hands kill Banquo. From this point onward we see two things of special interest: we see the growing strength of the forces opposing Macbeth, and we see less of Macbeth with Lady Macbeth. That is, the second half of the play shows us the good powers assembling, and it shows us Macbeth's increasing loneliness. As early as Act Three, Scene Two, he keeps from Lady Macbeth the knowledge that he plans to kill Banquo and Fleance. Later their separation will widen: the last we see of her is in the sleepwalking scene, at which Macbeth is not present. She will die offstage, denied even a final tragic speech, and Macbeth (unlike most of Shakespeare's other heroes) will die without an impressive speech and without anyone to offer him a word of consolation. In the other plays in this collection, too, one can see how episodes are arranged: in the tragedies, to isolate the tragic figures, ultimately bringing them to the final isolation, death; in the comedies, to bring the characters together, usually in marriage.

Of course we have only touched on some obvious matters of plot construction. In a well-constructed play, every scene is necessary and right, like the parts in an efficient machine. After all, if we are concerned with the mere story of *Macbeth*, and not with the complete significance of the story, we do not need the first scene (the meeting of the Three Witches) nor the second (the bleeding soldier's report of Macbeth's valor). These two scenes can be omitted and the rest of the story will still follow. But these scenes contribute a great deal. Shakespeare wished first to establish a threatening and uncertain atmosphere ("When the battle's lost and won," "Fair is foul, and foul is fair"), and then to establish a context of blood and violence ("What bloody man is that?"). The fair Macbeth becomes foul, and he will spill much blood. Notice, as another example, that we learn that the valiant Macbeth killed the treacherous foe "And fixed his head upon the battlements" (I.ii.23). At the end of the play we may recall this grisly detail, when Macbeth's own head is brought in, and order is at last restored. In short, in a well-written play, every speech and every scene are parts of the overall design.

### *Characters in Drama*

When we see or read a play, we know that the persons represented—the characters—are fictional, and yet they behave more or less as we imagine real people might behave. They are psychologically consistent; their words and their actions are coherent. We can talk about their motivation, that is, about the forces—not only within the characters but also surrounding and influencing them—that cause the characters to speak and to act in the way that they do. As the play goes on, we increasingly feel that we know these people. How do we come to know them? Chiefly, by means of (1) what they say, (2) what they do, (3) what other characters say about them, and (4) what other characters do. The first two points do not need any further explanation, but the third and fourth points can be briefly amplified. What one character says about another is not necessarily true, but it at least gives us something to think about: for example, at the end of the play, Malcolm calls Macbeth a "butcher," and although we may not fully accept this severe judgment, we must take it into account just as we must take into account an earlier description of Macbeth as "valiant." The fourth point—what other characters do—means simply this: in a play, as in life, we compare people. Macbeth and Banquo both hear prophecies; but while Macbeth chooses to kill Duncan in order to make the prophecy come true, Banquo resists any temptation to act, and so we infer that Macbeth too could have refrained from criminal action if he had really wished to.

Now, the characters in plays are of course only airy nothings, but, if the playwright has done his job well, they have a convincing reality. We may even come to feel that we know Macbeth better than our