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for Students

DRAMA *for Students*

Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on
Commonly Studied Dramas

VOLUME 26

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The Study of Drama

We study drama in order to learn what meaning others have made of life, to comprehend what it takes to produce a work of art, and to glean some understanding of ourselves. Drama produces in a separate, aesthetic world, a moment of being for the audience to experience, while maintaining the detachment of a reflective observer.

Drama is a representational art, a visible and audible narrative presenting virtual, fictional characters within a virtual, fictional universe. Dramatic realizations may pretend to approximate reality or else stubbornly defy, distort, and deform reality into an artistic statement. From this separate universe that is obviously not “real life” we expect a valid reflection upon reality, yet drama never is mistaken for reality—the methods of theater are integral to its form and meaning. Theater is art, and art’s appeal lies in its ability both to approximate life and to depart from it. For in intruding its distorted version of life into our consciousness, art gives us a new perspective and appreciation of life and reality. Although all aesthetic experiences perform this service, theater does it most effectively by creating a separate, cohesive universe that freely acknowledges its status as an art form.

And what is the purpose of the aesthetic universe of drama? The potential answers to such a question are nearly as many and varied as there are plays written, performed, and enjoyed. Dramatic texts can be problems posed, answers asserted, or

moments portrayed. Dramas (tragedies as well as comedies) may serve strictly “to ease the anguish of a torturing hour” (as stated in William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*)—to divert and entertain—or aspire to move the viewer to action with social issues. Whether to entertain or to instruct, affirm or influence, pacify or shock, dramatic art wraps us in the spell of its imaginary world for the length of the work and then dispenses us back to the real world, entertained, purged, as Aristotle said, of pity and fear, and edified—or at least weary enough to sleep peacefully.

It is commonly thought that theater, being an art of performance, must be experienced—seen—in order to be appreciated fully. However, to view a production of a dramatic text is to be limited to a single interpretation of that text—all other interpretations are for the moment closed off, inaccessible. In the process of producing a play, the director, stage designer, and performers interpret and transform the script into a work of art that always departs in some measure from the author’s original conception. Novelist and critic Umberto Eco, in his *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Indiana University Press, 1979), explained, “In short, we can say that every performance offers us a complete and satisfying version of the work, but at the same time makes it incomplete for us, because it cannot simultaneously give all the other artistic solutions which the work may admit.”

Thus Laurence Olivier's coldly formal and neurotic film presentation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (in which he played the title character as well as directed) shows marked differences from subsequent adaptations. While Olivier's *Hamlet* is clearly entangled in a Freudian relationship with his mother Gertrude, he would be incapable of shushing her with the impassioned kiss that Mel Gibson's mercurial *Hamlet* (in director Franco Zeffirelli's 1990 film) does. Although each of performances rings true to Shakespeare's text, each is also a mutually exclusive work of art. Also important to consider are the time periods in which each of these films was produced: Olivier made his film in 1948, a time in which overt references to sexuality (especially incest) were frowned upon. Gibson and Zeffirelli made their film in a culture more relaxed and comfortable with these issues. Just as actors and directors can influence the presentation of drama, so too can the time period of the production affect what the audience will see.

A play script is an open text from which an infinity of specific realizations may be derived. Dramatic scripts that are more open to interpretive creativity (such as those of Ntozake Shange and Tomson Highway) actually require the creative improvisation of the production troupe in order to complete the text. Even the most prescriptive scripts (those of Neil Simon, Lillian Hellman, and Robert Bolt, for example), can never fully control the actualization of live performance, and circumstantial events, including the attitude and receptivity of the audience, make every performance a unique event. Thus, while it is important to view a production of a dramatic piece, if one wants to understand a drama fully it is equally important to read the original dramatic text.

The reader of a dramatic text or script is not limited by either the specific interpretation of a given production or by the unstoppable action of a moving spectacle. The reader of a dramatic text may discover the nuances of the play's language, structure, and events at their own pace. Yet studied alone, the author's blueprint for artistic pro-

duction does not tell the whole story of a play's life and significance. One also needs to assess the play's critical reviews to discover how it resonated to cultural themes at the time of its debut and how the shifting tides of cultural interest have revised its interpretation and impact on audiences. And to do this, one needs to know a little about the culture of the times which produced the play as well as the author who penned it.

Drama for Students supplies this material in a useful compendium for the student of dramatic theater. Covering a range of dramatic works that span from 442 BCE to the 1990s, this book focuses on significant theatrical works whose themes and form transcend the uncertainty of dramatic fads. These are plays that have proven to be both memorable and teachable. *Drama for Students* seeks to enhance appreciation of these dramatic texts by providing scholarly materials written with the secondary and college/university student in mind. It provides for each play a concise summary of the plot and characters as well as a detailed explanation of its themes. In addition, background material on the historical context of the play, its critical reception, and the author's life help the student to understand the work's position in the chronicle of dramatic history. For each play entry a new work of scholarly criticism is also included, as well as segments of other significant critical works for handy reference. A thorough bibliography provides a starting point for further research.

This series offers comprehensive educational resources for students of drama. *Drama for Students* is a vital book for dramatic interpretation and a valuable addition to any reference library.

Sources

Eco, Umberto, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, Indiana University Press, 1979.

Carole L. Hamilton
Author and Instructor of English at Cary
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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of *Drama for Students* (*DfS*) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying dramas by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's "For Students" literature line, *DfS* is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific plays. While each volume contains entries on "classic" dramas frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary plays, including works by multicultural, international, and women playwrights.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the play and the work's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a drama; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the drama as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the play; analysis of important themes in the drama; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the play.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the play itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each

work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the drama was written to modern Western culture, a critical essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the play. A unique feature of *DfS* is a specially commissioned critical essay on each drama, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each play, information on media adaptations is provided (if available), as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on each drama.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of *DfS* are selected by surveying numerous sources on notable literary works and analyzing course curricula for various schools, school districts, and states. Some of the sources surveyed include: high school and undergraduate literature anthologies and textbooks; lists of award-winners, and recommended titles, including the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults.

Input solicited from our expert advisory board—consisting of educators and librarians—guides us to maintain a mix of "classic" and contemporary literary works, a mix of challenging and

engaging works (including genre titles that are commonly studied) appropriate for different age levels, and a mix of international, multicultural and women authors. These advisors also consult on each volume's entry list, advising on which titles are most studied, most appropriate, and meet the broadest interests across secondary (grades 7–12) curricula and undergraduate literature studies.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in *DfS* focuses on one play. Each entry heading lists the full name of the play, the author's name, and the date of the play's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

Introduction: a brief overview of the drama which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.

Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the drama in question.

Plot Summary: a description of the major events in the play. Subheads demarcate the play's various acts or scenes.

Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the play. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the play, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation.

Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the Stage Manager in *Our Town*—the character is listed as “The Stage Manager” and alphabetized as “Stage Manager.” If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by the first name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the nickname “Babe” would head the listing for a character in *Crimes of the Heart*, but below that listing would be her less-mentioned married name “Rebecca Botrelle.”

Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the play. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.

Style: this section addresses important style elements of the drama, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary

devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.

Historical Context: this section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate *in which the author lived and the play was created*. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the play is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the play is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.

Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the play, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older plays, this section includes a history of how the drama was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent plays, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.

Criticism: an essay commissioned by *DfS* which specifically deals with the play and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material used in compiling the entry, with full bibliographical information.

Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. It includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

Media Adaptations: if available, a list of important film and television adaptations of the play, including source information. The list may also include such variations on the work as audio recordings, musical adaptations, and other stage interpretations.

Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the play. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world

history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.

Compare and Contrast: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century or early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the drama was written, the time or place the play was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.

What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured play or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and non-fiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes “The Study of Drama,” a foreword by Carole Hamilton, an educator and author who specializes in dramatic works. This essay examines the basis for drama in societies and what drives people to study such work. The essay also discusses how *Drama for Students* can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading/viewing experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the *DfS* series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the *DfS* series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in **boldface**.

Each entry may include illustrations, including photo of the author, stills from stage productions, and stills from film adaptations, if available.

Citing *Drama for Students*

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of *Drama for Students* may use the following general forms. These exam-

ples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed.

When citing text from *DfS* that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

“*Our Town*.” *Drama for Students*. Vol. 1. Ed. David Galens and Lynn Spampinato. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 227–30.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from *DfS* (usually the first piece under the “Criticism” subhead), the following format should be used:

Fiero, John. Critical Essay on *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*. *Drama for Students*. Vol. 2. Ed. David Galens and Lynn Spampinato. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 247–49.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of *DfS*, the following form may be used:

Rich, Frank. “Theatre: A Mamet Play, *Glen-garry Glen Ross*.” *New York Theatre Critics’ Review* 45.4 (March 5, 1984): 5–7. Excerpted and reprinted in *Drama for Students*. Vol. 2. Ed. David Galens and Lynn Spampinato. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 51–53.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of *DfS*, the following form may be used:

Kerr, Walter. “*The Miracle Worker*.” *The Theatre in Spite of Itself*. Simon & Schuster, 1963. 255–57. Excerpted and reprinted in *Drama for Students*. Vol. 2. Ed. David Galens and Lynn Spampinato. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 123–24.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editorial staff of *Drama for Students* welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest dramas to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via e-mail at: ForStudentsEditors@cengage.com. Or write to the editor at:

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Literary Chronology

- 525 BCE:** Aeschylus is born in Eleusis, Greece.
- 458 BCE:** Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* is first produced in Athens, Greece.
- 456 or 455 BCE:** Aeschylus dies in Gela, Sicily.
- 1860:** Anton Chekhov is born Anton Pavlovich Chekhov on January 17, in Taganrog, Russia.
- 1861:** Rabindranath Tagore is born on May 7, in Calcutta, India.
- 1888:** Anton Chekhov's *The Bear* is first published in Russian and will be published in English in 1916.
- 1888:** Eugene O'Neill is born Eugene Gladstone O'Neill on October 16, in New York, New York.
- 1904:** Anton Chekhov dies of tuberculosis on July 2, in Badenweiler, Germany.
- 1905:** Jean-Paul Sartre is born on June 21, in Paris, France.
- 1909:** Eudora Welty is born on April 13, in Jackson, Mississippi.
- 1912:** Lucille Fletcher is born in Brooklyn, New York, on March 28.
- 1912:** Rabindranath Tagore's *The Post Office* is published in Bengali and will be performed in English in 1913 in Dublin, Ireland, and London, England.
- 1913:** Rabindranath Tagore is awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for *Gitanjali*.
- 1916 or 1920:** Alice Childress is born October 12, in Charleston, South Carolina.
- 1917:** O'Neill's *Ile* is published.
- 1922:** Carlos Solórzano is born on May 1, in San Marcos, Guatemala.
- 1922:** O'Neill is awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Anna Christie*.
- 1923:** Paddy Chayefsky is born Sidney Chayefsky on January 29, in New York, New York.
- 1928:** O'Neill is awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Strange Interlude*.
- 1934:** Wole Soyinka is born on July 13, in Isara, Nigeria.
- 1936:** O'Neill is awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.
- 1941:** Rabindranath Tagore dies on August 7, in Calcutta, India.
- 1942:** Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Flies* is first produced in French in Paris, France. It will be produced in English in 1947, in New York, New York.
- 1943:** Lucille Fletcher's *Sorry, Wrong Number* is first produced as a radio play.
- 1949:** Alice Childress's *Florence* is first produced in New York, New York.
- 1949:** Eudora Welty's *Bye-Bye Brevoort* is first produced in Westboro, Massachusetts.
- 1949:** Lee Blessing is born on October 4, in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

- 1952:** Beth Henley is born on May 8, in Jackson, Mississippi.
- 1952:** Gary Soto is born on April 12, in Fresno, California.
- 1953:** O'Neill dies of a degenerative nervous condition related to alcoholism on November 27, in Boston, Massachusetts.
- 1953:** Paddy Chayefsky's *Marty* is first produced on live television.
- 1957:** O'Neill is awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for his posthumously produced play *Long Day's Journey into Night*.
- 1959:** Carlos Solórzano's *Crossroads* is first published in Spanish and will be published in English in 1993.
- 1960:** Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* is first produced in Ibadan, Nigeria.
- 1964:** Jean-Paul Sartre is awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, which he refuses.
- 1973:** Eudora Welty is awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for *The Optimist's Daughter*.
- 1980:** Jean-Paul Sartre dies of a lung ailment on April 15, in Paris, France.
- 1981:** Paddy Chayefsky dies of cancer on August 1, in New York, New York.
- 1986:** Wole Soyinka is awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.
- 1987:** Lee Blessing's *A Walk in the Woods* is first produced in New Haven, Connecticut.
- 1994:** Alice Childress dies of cancer on August 14, in Queens, New York.
- 1997:** Gary Soto's *Novio Boy* is published.
- 1998:** Beth Henley's *Impossible Marriage* is published.
- 2000:** Lucille Fletcher dies of a stroke on August 31, in Langhorne, Pennsylvania.
- 2001:** Eudora Welty dies of complications from pneumonia on July 22, 2001, in Jackson, Mississippi.

Acknowledgments

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November–December, 2001 for “Wole Soyinka’s Outrage: The Divided Soul of Nigeria’s Nobel Laureate,” by Alan Jacobs. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*Drama Survey*, v. 4, summer, 1965 for “The ‘Oresteia’ of Aeschylus,” by Harry L. Levy. Reproduced by permission of the author.—*Journal of Negro History*, v. 81, winter–autumn, 1996. Copyright © 1996 Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History, Inc., www.asalh.org. Reproduced by permission.—*Latin American Theatre Review*, summer, 1980. Copyright © 1980 by the Center of Latin American Studies, The University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045, U.S.A. Reproduced by permission.—*Law-Now*, v. 26, December–January, 2001. Copyright © 2001 University of Alberta, Legal Resource Centre. Reproduced by permission.—*Literature in Performance*, v. 1, April, 1981 for “A Conversation with Eudora Welty,” by Joanna Maclay. Reproduced by permission of National Communications Association.—*Long Island Business News*, v. 45, November 6, 1998. Copyright 1998 Long Island Commercial Review Inc. Reproduced by permission.—*Midwest Quarterly*, v. 48, spring, 2007. Copyright © 2007 by *The Midwest Quarterly*, Pittsburgh State University. Reproduced by permission.—*The Nation*, April 9, 1988. Copyright © 1988 by *The Nation Magazine*/The Nation Company, Inc. Reproduced by permission.—*The New Leader*, v. 71, March 21, 1988. Copyright © 1988 by The American Labor Conference on International Affairs, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—*The New*

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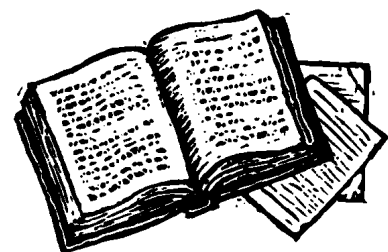
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Agamemnon

AESCHYLUS

458 BC

Agamemnon is one of the most famous plays by Greek dramatist Aeschylus. First performed at the influential dramatic festival in Athens in 458 BCE, it is the first play of the trilogy called *The Oresteia*, which concerns events surrounding the return of Agamemnon, king of Argos and leader of the Greek army that invaded Troy. According to legend, Agamemnon was forced to sacrifice his own daughter's life before the goddess Artemis would allow the Greek ships to sail from their shore. In Aeschylus's play, Agamemnon returns to a trap that his wife, Clytaemnestra, has been plotting for ten years to avenge her daughter's death.

The Oresteia won first place at the Athenian festival the year that it premiered. It is now the only surviving trilogy by Aeschylus, who is credited as the first to have written interwoven trilogies for the competition while other playwrights were submitting three unrelated pieces. Over the centuries, this story has been familiar in cultures throughout the world, and has been the basis for hundreds of similar stories. It deals with issues basic to humanity and civilization, such as honor, responsibility, revenge, deceit, kinship, and power. Readers of *Agamemnon* might feel a sense of outrage over power usurped; however, by the end of the trilogy, it is clear how such outrage can lead to one senseless act of revenge after another.

Dozens of reliable translations of *Agamemnon* are available today. One of the most recommended is by Robert Fagles, published in the 1979 Penguin Classic edition of *The Oresteia*.

