

for

DRAMA *Students*

Volume 11

DRAMA *for Students*

Presenting Analysis, Context and Criticism on
Commonly Studied Dramas

Volume 11

Elizabeth Thomason, Editor



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Drama for Students

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ISBN 0-7876-4085-9

ISSN 1094-9232

Printed in the United States of America.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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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. By presenting its distorted version of life to our consciousness, art gives us a new perspective and appreciation of reality. Although, to some extent, 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—that is, 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*, 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 the 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 were 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 production 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 the fifth century B.C. 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 and techniques. 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.

These inaugural two volumes offer 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.

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

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Introduction

Purpose of Drama for Students

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 overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the play. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned overview essay on each drama by an academic expert, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each play, information on media adaptations is provided, 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 were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; *Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges*; textbooks on teaching dramas; a College Board survey of plays commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of plays commonly studied in high schools; St. James Press's *International Dictionary of Theatre*; and Arthur Applebee's 1993 study *Literature in the Secondary School: Studies of Curriculum and Instruction in the United States*.

Input was also solicited from our expert advisory board (both experienced educators specializing in English), as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of “classic” dramas (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary dramas for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women playwrights. Our advisory board members—current high school teachers—helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

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 first production or 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, with interpretation of how these events help articulate the play’s themes. Subheads demarcate the plays’ 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 plays, 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 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 and Cultural 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.
- **For Further Study:** an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.
- **Sources:** an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- **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.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set separate from the main text:

- **Media Adaptations:** 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.
- **Compare and Contrast Box:** an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth-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 the mid-1970s 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 nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.
- **Study Questions:** 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.

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. Hamilton 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 has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from stage productions, and stills from film adaptations.

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 examples 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*. Ed. David Galens and Lynn Spampinato. Vol. 1. Farmington Hills: Gale, 1997. 8–9.

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

Fiero, John. Essay on “Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992.” *Drama for Students*. Ed. David Galens and Lynn Spampinato. Vol. 1. Farmington Hills: Gale, 1997. 8–9.

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, ‘Glengarry Glen Ross’.” *New York Theatre Critics’ Review* Vol. 45, No. 4 (March 5, 1984), 5–7; excerpted and reprinted in *Drama for Students*, Vol. 1, ed. David Galens and Lynn Spampinato (Farmington Hills: Gale, 1997), pp. 61–64.

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,” in *The Theatre in Spite of Itself* (Simon & Schuster, 1963, 255–57; excerpted and reprinted in *Drama for Students*, Vol. 1, ed. Dave Galens and Lynn Spampinato (Farmington Hills: Gale, 1997), pp. 59–61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor 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: **elizabeth.thomason@galegroup.com.**

Or write to the editor at:

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Literary Chronology

- 1828:** Henrik Ibsen is born on March 20 in Skein, on the east coast of Norway.
- 1856:** George Bernard Shaw is born in Dublin on July 26.
- 1887:** Josef Capek is born in Male Svatonovice, Bohemia (now part of Czechoslovakia).
- 1888:** Eugene O'Neill is born on October 16 in New York City.
- 1889:** *Ghosts* makes its world debut in Chicago; it is not produced in Ibsen's homeland, Norway, until 1898.
- 1890:** Josef's brother and future writing partner, Karel Capek, is born on January 9, also in Male Svatonovice, Bohemia.
- 1896:** Robert Sherwood is born on April 4.
- 1906:** Ibsen dies from complications brought on by a series of strokes on May 23 in Norway.
- 1907:** Mary Coyle Chase is born in Denver, Colorado.
- 1916:** Antonio Buero Vallejo is born on September 29 in Guadalajara, Spain.
- 1921:** *The Insect Play* is published in its original Czech.
- 1923:** *Saint Joan* is produced in New York City.
- 1924:** James Baldwin is born on August 2 in New York City.
- 1926:** *Great God Brown* opens at the Greenwich Village Theatre on January 23.
- 1929:** Brian Friel is born near Omagh, County Tyrone, in Northern Ireland, on January 9.
- 1934:** Amiri Baraka is born as Everett LeRoi Jones on October 7 in Newark, New Jersey.
- 1936:** Alfred Uhry is born in Atlanta, Georgia.
- 1937:** Tom Stoppard is born on July 3 in Zlin, Czechoslovakia, with the name Tomas Straussler.
- 1938:** Sherwood's play, *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, is produced and earns him his second of four Pulitzer Prizes.
- 1938:** Karel Capek dies of pneumonia on December 25 in Prague, Czechoslovakia.
- 1944:** Chase's Pulitzer-Prize winning *Harvey* opens on Broadway.
- 1945:** Josef Capek dies.
- 1948:** William Nicholson is born in England.
- 1950:** Shaw dies on November 2 in Ayot Saint Lawrence, Hertfordshire, England.
- 1953:** O'Neill dies of pneumonia on November 27 in Boston, Massachusetts.
- 1955:** Sherwood dies on November 14.
- 1957:** David Henry Hwang is born on August 11 in Los Angeles, California.

1965: *The Amen Corner*, although written in the 1950s, isn't produced until now on a professional stage, and isn't published until 1968.

1967: *Slave Ship* is produced.

1970: *The Sleep of Reason* is produced in Madrid.

1981: Chase dies of a heart attack on October 20 in Denver, Colorado.

1987: Uhry finishes *Driving Miss Daisy*.

1987: Baldwin dies of stomach cancer on November 30 or December 1 in St. Paul de Vence, France.

1988: *Driving Miss Daisy* wins the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

1989: *Shadowlands* debuts in England on October 5.

1989: *M. Butterfly* is produced and wins the Tony Award for Best Play of the Year.

1990: *Spike Heels* is first staged in New York.

1990: *Dancing at Lughnasa* is staged at the Abbey Theater in Dublin.

1994: *Indian Ink* is published.

2000: Buero Vallejo dies of a stroke on April 29 in Madrid, Spain.

Acknowledgments

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Massey, Raymond with Ruth Gordon, in a scene from the film "Abe Lincoln in Illinois," 1940, photograph. RKO. The Kobal Collection. Reproduced by permission.—Massey, Raymond with Ruth Gordon (seated in carriage), in a scene from the film "Abe Lincoln in Illinois," 1940, photograph. RKO. The Kobal Collection. Reproduced by permission.—Kendal, Felicity with Flora Crewe, Art Malik, and Dominic Jephcott, in "Indian Ink," photograph. © Donald Cooper/PHOTOSTAGE. Reproduced by permission.—Stoppard, Tom, photograph. AP/Wide World Photos. Reproduced by permission.—Uhry, Alfred, photograph. AP/Wide World Photos. Reproduced by permission.—Hyman, Earle, photograph. Martha Swope Associates/Carol Rosegg. Reproduced by permission.—Freeman, Morgan with Jessie Tandy and Dan Aykroyd, in a scene from the film "Driving Miss Daisy," 1989, photograph. Warner Bros. The Kobal Collection. Reproduced by permission.—Buero Vallejo, Madrid, Spain, 1986, photograph. AP/Wide World Photos. Reproduced by permission.

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