

THE **COMPACT** BEDFORD INTRODUCTION

# DRAMA

*Second Edition*



*Lee A. Jacobus*

*The Compact  
Bedford  
Introduction  
to Drama*

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SECOND EDITION

**Lee A. Jacobus**  
*University of Connecticut*

BEDFORD BOOKS of ST. MARTIN'S PRESS  BOSTON

**For Bedford Books:**

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*Cover Design:* Hannus Design Associates

*Cover Photo:* From the Royal Dramatic Theatre of Stockholm's 1987 production of *Hamlet* at the National Theatre in London, directed by Ingmar Bergman. Photo by Donald Cooper/Milton Keynes, England.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 95-76724

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Manufactured in the United States of America.

0 9 8 7 6

f e d c b a

*For information, write:* St. Martin's Press, Inc.  
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010

*Editorial Offices:* Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press  
75 Arlington Street, Boston, MA 02116

ISBN: 0-312-13400-2

**Acknowledgments**

**Greek Drama**

*Figure 1. Theater at Epidaurus from The Theatre of Dionysus in Athens* by Arthur Wallace Pickard-Cambridge. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.

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## *Preface for Instructors*

*The Compact Bedford Introduction to Drama*, Second Edition, owes its existence to the demand for a briefer (and less expensive) collection of plays than the longer edition provides — but with historical and critical material essential for a full understanding of different ages of drama. Instructors in many theater and literature programs convinced us that although a shorter version of *The Bedford Introduction to Drama* should be concise, it should not ignore the problems of performance, issues concerning drama criticism, and the needs of instructors who want their students to write intelligently about drama.

As a result of this demand, *The Compact Bedford Introduction to Drama* has all the features of the longer edition, but with only twenty-two plays. Nonetheless, it affords the most comprehensive collection available in a compact edition of drama. This edition shares with its predecessor extensive discussions of the most important eras in the development of drama, offering a succinct but thorough history of Western drama. Greek drama, Medieval and Renaissance drama, late-seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century drama, nineteenth-century drama, and early-twentieth-century and contemporary drama are all represented by key plays, considerable historical discussion, and detailed commentary on stages and staging. These are the same complete historical discussions included in the full-length edition of the *Bedford Introduction*. Each play is preceded by a biographical note on the playwright and the playwright's career as well as a discussion of the play and its performance history.

*The Compact Bedford Introduction to Drama* treats Sophocles and Shakespeare in depth, including two plays by each, giving students the opportunity to study and write about major figures in the development of drama. With four plays by women and minority playwrights, the book also offers a substantial selection of underrepresented writers. Commentaries about these playwrights and about others throughout the book draw on a wide range of sources: criticism, interviews, director's

notes, and, where available, playwrights' journals or diaries. In all, there are twenty-nine commentaries throughout the book, each one providing critical insight into the drama and its performance. Photographs of important productions have been retained throughout to help students visualize settings, costumes, and other aspects of the plays in performance.

Like the longer edition, *The Compact Bedford Introduction* is designed to be a complete resource book for the beginning student of drama. The general introduction includes a discussion of the difference between seeing a play in performance and reading it. It also gives an overview of the great ages of drama, the major genres, and the elements of drama. Defining important terms and basic concepts, the introduction demonstrates these concepts in action, drawing its examples from Lady Gregory's one-act play *The Rising of the Moon*.

The book includes four useful appendices: Writing About Drama, Glossary of Dramatic Terms, Selected Bibliography, and Selected List of Film, Video, and Audiocassette Resources. Writing About Drama shows students possible approaches to commenting on dramatic literature and points the way to developing ideas that can result in probing essays. From prewriting to drafting and outlining, the process of writing about drama is illustrated by reference to Lady Gregory's play, and a sample essay on the play provides one example of drama criticism.

The Glossary of Dramatic Terms defines concepts and terms clearly and concisely. These terms appear in small capital letters when first introduced and defined in the text.

The Selected Bibliography includes a list of reference works for the major periods of drama and selected references for the playwrights and plays. The general references, histories, biographies, critical studies, journal articles, and reviews are especially useful for research in drama.

While the book emphasizes the plays as texts to be read, a fourth appendix, the Selected List of Film, Video, and Audiocassette Resources, reinforces the important element of performance. This list, accompanied by a list of distributors, can help instructors and students find an illuminating treatment of the plays in performance.

## Acknowledgments

I want to thank first the large number of teachers of drama who wrote in response to the first two editions of *The Bedford Introduction to Drama* with suggestions for inclusion and with encouragement for the project: Elias Abdou, Robert E. Aldridge, Katya Amato, Keith Appler, Nora Bicki, Reverend Doctor Nadean Bishop, François Bonneville, Michael Boudreau, David Bratt, Ronald Bryden, Michael Cadden, William Carroll, Mary Coogan, Marianne Cooley, Walter Creed, Mary Beth Culp, Merilee Cunningham, Joan D'Antoni, Wayne Deahl, Robert Dial, Charlotte Doctor, Janet Dow, Jerry D. Eisenhour, Fred M. Fetrow, Jane E. Fisher, Charles Frey, Robert Funk, Jeff Glauner, Anthony Gra-

ham-White, Stephen Grecco, Jonnie Guerra, L. W. Harrison, Dave Hartley, Andrew Jay Hoffman, C. Fenno Hoffman, Robert D. Hume, Claudia Johnson, Ellen Redding Kaler, Harvey Kassebaum, Dorothy Louise, Annette McGregor, Jack Mahoney, James Marlow, Jordan Miller, Christy Minadeo, Carol A. Moore, Roark Mulligan, Eric Pedersen, M. Bernice Pepke, Patrick Quade, Paul G. Reeve, Carol Replogle, William Reynolds, Mark Rocha, Matthew C. Roudane, Dolores J. Sarafinski, Carol Scklenica, Laurence Senelick, Rodney Simard, Susan Smith, James Stephens, Jeannie B. Thomas, John Timpane, Gregory Ulmer, Susan Vick, Linda Wells, Keith Welsh, Virginia West, Timothy Wiles, G. Jennifer Wilson, Paul Wood, and J. S. Wszalek.

My colleagues at the University of Connecticut, Regina Barreca, Brenda Murphy, Michael Meyer, Ann Charters, Jack Manning, Irving Cummings, and David Leeming, were very helpful in our talks about drama and in general support for this book in its various incarnations.

The publishers and staff at Bedford Books have been unfailingly supportive and smart in their guidance from the inception to the completion of this book. Charles H. Christensen and Joan E. Feinberg, Publisher and Associate Publisher, have always provided the kind of help and insight associated with inspired leadership. Ann Sweeney deftly guided the manuscript through production, ably assisted by Karen Baart, Alanya Harter, and Maureen Murray. Andrea Goldman and Joanne Diaz helped with extensive editing responsibilities. Amy Page helped with manuscript production details. Carol Frohlich and Martha Friedman were instrumental in finding excellent photographs of key performances. My greatest debt, however, is to my friend and editor, Karen S. Henry, whose love of theater, like my own, buoyed our discussions and made this a better book.

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# *Introduction: Thinking About Drama*

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## **What Is Drama?**

DRAMA is the art of representing for the pleasure of others events that happened or that we imagine happening. The primary ingredients of drama are characters, represented by players; action, described by gestures and movement; thought, implied by dialogue and action; spectacle, represented by scenery and costume; and, finally, audiences, who respond to this complex mixture.

When we are in the theater, we see the actors, hear the lines, are aware of the setting, and sense the theatrical community of which we are a part. Even when reading a play, we should imagine actors speaking lines and visualize a setting in which those lines are spoken. Drama is an experience in which we participate on many levels simultaneously. On one level, we may believe that what we see is really happening; on another level, we know it is only make-believe. On one level we may be amused, but on another level we realize that serious statements about our society are being made. Drama both entertains and instructs.

When Aristotle wrote about drama in the *Poetics*, a work providing one of the earliest and most influential theories of drama, he began by explaining it as the imitation of an action (MIMESIS). Those analyzing his work have interpreted this statement in several ways. One interpretation is that drama imitates life. On the surface, such an observation may seem simple, even obvious. But on reflection, we begin to find complex significance in his comment. The drama of the Greeks, for example, with its mythic structure, its formidable speeches, and its profound actions, often seems larger than life or other than life. Yet we recognize characters saying words that we ourselves are capable of saying, doing things that we ourselves might do. The great Greek trage-



dies are certainly lifelike and certainly offer literary mirrors in which we can examine human nature. And the same is true of Greek comedies.

The relationship between drama and life has always been subtle and complex. In some plays, such as Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, it is one of the central issues. We begin our reading or viewing of most plays knowing that the dramatic experience is not absolutely real in the sense that, for example, the actor playing Hamlet does not truly die or truly see a ghost or truly frighten his mother. The play imitates those imagined actions, but when done properly it is realistic enough to make us fear, if only for a moment, that they could be real.

We see significance in the actions Hamlet imitates; his actions help us live our own lives more deeply, more intensely, because they give us insight into the possibilities of life. We are all restricted to living this life as ourselves; drama is one art form that helps us realize the potential of life, for both the good and the bad. In an important sense, we can share the experience of a character such as Hamlet when he soliloquizes over the question of whether it is better to die than to live in a world filled with sin and crime.

## Drama and Ritual

Such imaginative participation is only a part of what we derive from drama. In its origins, drama probably evolved from ancient Egyptian and Greek rituals, ceremonies that were performed the same way again and again and were thought to have a propitious effect on the relationship between the people and their gods.

Scholars believe that in ancient Egypt some religious rituals evolved into repeated passion plays, such as those celebrating Isis and Osiris at the festivals in Abydos some three thousand years ago. Greek drama was first performed during yearly religious celebrations dedicated to the god Dionysus. The early Greek playwrights, such as Sophocles in *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*, emphasized the interaction between the will of the gods and the will of human beings, often pitting the truths of men and women against the truths of the gods.

The rebirth of drama in the Middle Ages — after the fall of Rome and the loss of classical artistic traditions — took place in the great cathedrals of Europe. It evolved from medieval religious ceremonies that helped the faithful understand more about their own moral predicament. *Everyman*, a late play in the medieval theater (it was written about 1500), concerns itself with the central issue of reward and punishment after this life because the soul is immortal.

## Drama: The Illusion of Reality

From the beginning, drama has had the capacity to hold up an illusion of reality like the reflection in a mirror — we take the reality for granted while recognizing that it is nonetheless illusory. As we have seen, Aristotle described DRAMATIC ILLUSION as an imitation of an action. But