

FOURTH EDITION

PLAYS FOR THE THEATRE

AN
ANTHOLOGY
OF WORLD DRAMA

Edited by

Oscar G. Brockett



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Fourth Edition

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(earlier editions co-edited by Lenyth Brockett)

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Introduction

Selecting the plays for an anthology of world drama is a task accompanied by both anguish and risk—anguish at the realization of how many excellent plays must be left out, and risk because it is always uncertain whether plays traditionally regarded as masterpieces will still speak to the contemporary reader. Any selection is arbitrary to a degree, but we have chosen plays that have stood the test of long performance in the theatre or, in the case of recent dramas, those that seem to have the likelihood of doing so. We have also selected plays that are representative of various periods, countries, and genres. Obviously, the impression of world drama gained by knowing only some of its masterpieces is incomplete. Nevertheless, a useful if limited view of past drama can be obtained by reading some outstanding examples, much as one might get acquainted with a new terrain by noting its highest mountain peaks. This collection, then, offers a rough map of Western drama as revealed by significant plays ranging from the classic to the contemporary.

Oedipus Rex [c. 430 B.C.] The world's oldest surviving dramas are the tragedies that were presented during the fifth century B.C. at the religious and civic

festivals held in Athens to honor the god Dionysus. *Oedipus Rex* is considered by many critics to be the greatest of these works, and in modern times it has been one of the most frequently produced Greek plays. Aristotle, in his celebrated discussion of tragedy (written in the fourth century B.C.) refers to it often as an ideal example of the tragic form.

The most striking feature of Greek tragedy is the alternation of dramatic episodes (or scenes) with choral passages. Little is known for certain about the Greek tragic chorus, but in Sophocles' day it probably included fifteen performers who sang (or recited) and danced the choral passages to flute accompaniment. The Chorus (in *Oedipus Rex* composed of Elders from the City of Thebes) acts as a group, gives advice to the leading characters, expresses the community's point of view (and sometimes the playwright's), and functions as an "ideal spectator." Other typical features of Greek tragedy are the small number of individualized characters, the restriction of the action to a single place, the tightly unified plot, the serious and philosophic tone, and the poetic language.

The action of *Oedipus Rex* is extremely concentrated, for a complete reversal of the hero's position takes place in a single day. The story follows Oedipus, King of Thebes, as he attempts to discover the murderer of Laius, the former king, after an oracle has declared that the plague now destroying the people will not be lifted until the guilty one is cast out. Oedipus' search gradually uncovers terrible truths about the past and his own origins. The initial suspicion that Oedipus himself may be the slayer of Laius is a moment of high dramatic tension; it is followed by other electrifying moments (such as Jocasta's recognition that she is both Oedipus' wife and his mother) and the ultimate outcome: blindness, exile, and anguish for the once mighty king.

Sophocles is particularly admired for his skillful management of extensive plot materials: he accomplishes the gradual unveiling of mystery after mystery and a steady increase in dramatic tension, with the utmost economy of means. Although, like many great plays, *Oedipus Rex* is open to many interpretations, most critics have agreed that its central concern is the uncertainty of fate and man's helplessness in the face of destiny.

The Menaechmi [c. 184 B.C.] Of the few Roman plays that survive, the majority are comedies. Indeed, rollicking farces (exemplified by Plautus' *The Menaechmi*) designed solely for entertainment are a peculiarly Roman contribution to the development of drama. The subject matter of surviving Roman comedies is drawn from everyday domestic life and features intrigues that turn on mistaken identity, misunderstood motives, and deliberate deception. The characters are familiar, if sometimes exaggerated types: the old man obsessed with his money or children, the young man who rebels against parental authority, the clever slave, the parasite who lives by flattery and trickery, the courtesan or mistress, the shrewish wife, the unscrupulous slave dealer, and the cowardly soldier. Latin comedy has no chorus, but the action is sometimes interrupted by songs. Thus, it often resembles modern musical comedy.

Plautus opens *The Menaechmi* with a prologue designed to put the audience at ease and to set forth humorously all the information needed to understand what is to come. The opening scenes introduce the characters and situation, the comical possibilities of which are then fully exploited as the twins are in turn mistaken for each other. Plautus' inventiveness is everywhere evident, but especially in the reunion, for its potential sentimentality is subverted by good-natured cynicism when Menaechmus I offers all his property for sale—including his wife.

Although wholly different in tone, Latin comedy shares with Greek tragedy many structural conventions: a story is taken up near the climactic moment; action and time are restricted in scope; and there is no intermingling of serious and comic elements. In the Renaissance, when dramatists turned to antiquity for guidance, it was the Latin writers, above all, from whom they learned. Thus Roman comedy is important not only in its own right but also for its influence on later practices.

The Second Shepherds' Play [1425–1450 A.D.] After Rome was overrun by invaders in the sixth century A.D., public performances financed by the state ceased, and thereafter for approximately four hundred years theatrical activity in Western Europe was at best sporadic. Then drama was revived by the Catholic Church, although in a form radically different from that seen in Greece or Rome. Beginning in the tenth century, short playlets dramatizing Biblical events were performed in Latin in connection with church services. Around 1200, plays began to be presented out of doors, and eventually they were elaborated into lengthy series, or cycles, of plays dramatizing events ranging from the Creation to the Last Judgment. Productions of cycles were usually financed by trade guilds or religious societies; written in the vernacular language, they often required several days to perform in their entirety. *The Second Shepherds' Play* is the thirteenth segment (out of a total of thirty-two) from the cycle performed at Wakefield, England. Thus it is only one part of a much larger whole.

The major portion of *The Second Shepherds' Play* is an elaboration of a single sentence in the New Testament (Luke 2:8): "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night." This hint has been transformed into a short play rich in contemporary medieval detail and farcical humor. The anonymous author opens his story with a scene in which each of three shepherds complains of his hardships; thus, characters and situation are introduced in a leisurely fashion. Forward movement of the action does not begin until Mak appears, but thereafter it progresses swiftly as Mak steals a sheep, takes it home, and attempts to pass it off as a newborn baby when the suspicious shepherds arrive looking for the missing animal; the ruse is discovered and Mak is punished. Then, in a manner not unusual in medieval literature, the tone of the play alters suddenly, an angel appears to announce the birth of Christ, and the shepherds go to Bethlehem to worship him. The Biblical text thus is the basis for a short, entertaining farce that has been linked to a wholly serious and

devotional playlet celebrating the birth of Christ. The mingling of such diverse elements and the rapid shift in tone and locale, typical of medieval practice, clearly distinguishes the drama of this age from that of the classical era.

Hamlet [c. 1600] For many reasons, but primarily because of religious controversies, the production of medieval cycles was forbidden or abandoned in the sixteenth century. This separation of drama from the church stimulated the development of a wholly secular theatre. The first country to produce a drama of lasting excellence was England during the years between 1580 and 1640. Indeed, the plays of William Shakespeare, which date from this period, often are said to be the finest every written.

The plays of the English Renaissance were still sufficiently close to their medieval predecessors to retain many practices from the earlier era: a sprawling, often episodic plot; scenes set in many times and places; and intermingled comic and serious elements. Before the end of the sixteenth century, however, renewed interest in classical drama had modified and refined medieval practices considerably to create more complex conceptions of dramatic form and characterization. A synthesis of medieval and classical inheritances can be noted in Shakespeare's works, which are both numerous and varied in dramatic type. Shakespeare's genius is probably seen at its best, however, in the tragedies, of which *Hamlet* is an outstanding example.

Like *Oedipus Rex*, *Hamlet* has as its protagonist a man who is charged with punishing the murderer of a king. But Shakespeare uses a much broader canvas than Sophocles does and includes within his drama more facets of his story, more characters, and a wider sweep of time and place. *Hamlet* is rich in implications, of which the most important is the pervasiveness of betrayal—brother of brother, wife of husband, parent of child, friend of friend—which almost overpowers Hamlet as he learns that his father has been murdered by his uncle, that his mother has been unfaithful to his father, that his mother has accepted his uncle's usurpation of the throne that is rightfully his, and that his supposed friends have become his uncle's spies. A second set of implications is related to the opposing demands made on Hamlet—that he right the injustices occasioned by his father's death (seemingly requiring him to murder his uncle) and that he adhere to Christian teachings (under which that murder would be a deadly sin). Another group of implications concerns the nature of kingship and the need to rule oneself before attempting to rule others. This motif is seen especially in the conduct of Claudius and is suggested through the contrast between Claudius and his dead brother and with Hamlet and Fortinbras (who is left to return order to the state). Shakespeare's dramatic poetry is generally conceded to be the finest in the English language. The basic medium is blank verse, which allows the flexibility of ordinary speech while elevating it through imagery and rhythm.

Because of its compelling story, powerful characters, and great poetry, *Hamlet* is one of the world's finest achievements in drama. Although it embodies many ideas typical of its time, it transcends the limitations of a particular era. It

continues to move spectators in the theatre as it has since its first presentation around 1600.

Tartuffe [1669] While English drama retained many medieval traditions, continental dramatists were more inclined to follow Greek and Roman practices. This conscious imitation of the classics led to a set of literary standards summed up in the term *neoclassicism*; these included the unities of time, place, and action; strict distinction between tragedy and comedy, with no intermingling of serious and comic elements; the use of universalized character types; and the demand that drama teach moral lessons. Most of the plays written in compliance with these rules now seem lifeless, but the tragedies of Racine and the comedies of Molière, written in France during the seventeenth century, reached a peak of artistry in the neoclassical mode. Molière is one of the most skillful and inventive comic dramatists of all times, and *Tartuffe* is one of his best plays. Here, within the restricted frame of one room, one day, and one main story, using a limited number of characters and little physical action, Molière has created an excellent comedy of character in the neoclassic style.

The plot of *Tartuffe* can be divided into five stages: the demonstration of Tartuffe's complete hold over Orgon, the unmasking of Tartuffe, Tartuffe's attempted revenge, the foiling of Tartuffe's plan, and the happy resolution. Each scene of the play, with the possible exception of the young lovers' quarrel, contributes to the main action and hence to the play's unity. The scene in which Orgon hides under the table while Tartuffe attempts to seduce Elmire, Orgon's wife, is one of the most amusing in all comic drama. Molière has been criticized for delaying Tartuffe's appearance until the third act, but he makes skillful use of this delay by having other characters discuss Tartuffe at length, thereby establishing clearly his hypocrisy and Orgon's gullibility in trusting him. The final resolution, in which Tartuffe is suddenly discovered to be a notorious criminal, has also been criticized as overly contrived, but it is emotionally satisfying since it punishes Tartuffe and reestablishes the norm. *Tartuffe* was first presented in its five-act form in 1669 and has since remained in the repertory almost continuously. It is still performed more often than any other play by Molière.

The School for Scandal [1777] In England the neoclassic rules (which dominated the French drama until the early nineteenth century) were recognized but not followed slavishly. In Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* the unity of time prescribed by neoclassic theory is retained, but unity of place is broadly interpreted to include four different though neighboring houses, and the single plot is replaced by several related intrigues. Thus the play may be called an English response to continental critical precepts. It is also related to other important developments, particularly the comedies of manners written by English dramatists of the late seventeenth century. Like these earlier playwrights, Sheridan satirizes upper-class social foibles with wit and urbanity.

The main action is set against the background of a "school for scandal" in

which a circle of malicious men and women, over their teacups, destroy reputations. Attending this circle, the impressionable young Lady Teazle tries to ape their sophisticated manners. The shallowness of this group allows hypocrites to flourish, since the group cannot distinguish between fashionable behavior and true character. Sheridan places much of the blame for this state of affairs on the then-current vogue for sentimentalism, epitomized by the comic villain, Joseph Surface, who is admired because he sprinkles his conversation with moral maxims. On the other hand, Charles, his brother, is widely condemned merely because his speech and behavior are natural for a young man of his age and situation. Sheridan is thus concerned with the distinction between true virtue and pious words, but he treats this contrast comically. But if Sheridan satirizes sentimentality, he has not succeeded in freeing his own play from it. His admirable characters are themselves inclined to moralize or fall into "sentiments," and the play as a whole illustrates the lesson typical of sentimental comedy; true virtue will be rewarded—and with a sizable fortune. Sheridan is free of the worst excesses of sentimentality, however, and his moralizing is lightened by amusing dialogue and an air of high spirits.

Sheridan's skill in play construction is especially evident in the way he integrates the subplot and the main plot. At the beginning of the play, the Sir Peter-Lady Teazle story has little connection with the Joseph-Maria-Charles story. As the play progresses, however, the two stories move closer and closer together, and in the "screen scene" (one of the most skillfully contrived in the history of drama) the revelation of Joseph's relationship to Lady Teazle leads to the resolution of both the subplot and the main plot.

The School for Scandal has been called the greatest comedy of manners written in the English language. Its story, its urbane and polished dialogue, and its comic inventiveness have made it popular with each succeeding generation.

The Wild Duck [1884] During the nineteenth century a revolt against the ideals of Romanticism and sentimentality gave rise to a new literary mode, Realism. Many influences contributed to the realistic outlook, among them deepening interest in the emerging sciences of sociology and psychology and emphasis on environment as a determinant of human behavior. The result was a drama based on contemporary events closely observed and carefully rendered through lifelike dialogue and detailed settings. Henrik Ibsen's plays epitomize the new trend so well that he is often called the founder of modern Realism. *The Wild Duck* illustrates many of the techniques Ibsen used; it reproduces the speech and actions of ordinary people of the middle and lower classes in a fully detailed environment that plays an essential part in the story. In his dialogue Ibsen abandoned the older devices of the aside and soliloquy; instead, his characters reveal themselves as they would in real life, through indirection rather than explicit statement.

In *The Wild Duck*, the idealistic Gregers Werle returns home after an

absence of fifteen years, decides that the lives of all his acquaintances are based on lies, and determines to make them face the truth. His efforts lead to catastrophe: in forcing some unwelcome truths on his former schoolmate, Hjalmar Ekdal, he sets in train a series of events that end with a child's suicide. Opposed to Gregers in this tug of war between truth and illusion is Dr. Relling, who believes that people need a "saving lie" in order to endure life. Hjalmar illustrates this principle, for he enjoys a lazy, happy and self-centered life under the illusion that he will someday discover a great invention. Because of Ibsen's ironic treatment of Hjalmar, the play has many passages of genuine humor that relieve the generally somber tone.

Ibsen's themes are related to the central motif of the wild duck, which seems to symbolize various stages in human experience: the unfettered freedom of youth, the wounds of experiences, the effort to escape, and the necessity of going on living, though wounded and in an environment of illusions (symbolized by the Ekdals' attic). An engrossing play because of its tightly woven story, believable characters, and skillful balance of the serious and the satiric, *The Wild Duck* is significant from a historical viewpoint both as one of the works that helped to establish a new realistic drama and as a forerunner of Symbolist drama which was to become important in the next decade.

"The Hairy Ape" [1921] Of the several revolts against Realism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the earliest was Symbolism. Rejecting the Realists' belief that truth is discovered by close observation of the environment, the Symbolists held that external appearances were merely the mask of inner spiritual realities that could only be communicated through the use of symbols. Although the appeal of this drama was limited, it foreshadowed other antirealistic movements, including Expressionism, which emerged in Germany around 1912 and which spread to other countries after 1918. The Expressionists proclaimed the supreme importance of the human spirit, which they believed was being crushed or distorted by materialism and industrialization; like the Symbolists, they regarded appearance as the mask of significant inner truths. Therefore, to comprehend Expressionist drama the reader must be prepared to look behind its deliberate distortions for deeper significance.

"The Hairy Ape" shows the influence of Expressionism on American drama. The unity of the play derives from a central theme: man's frustrated search for identity in a hostile environment. In the first scene, Yank is confident that he and his fellow stokers are the only ones who "belong" because it is they who make the ship go (and, by extension, the factories and machines of modern, industrialized society). But when the shipowner's pampered, anemic daughter (who represents the power of money and influence) calls Yank a "filthy beast" (a "hairy ape"), his confidence is shattered. Seeking to reestablish his identity, he first visits Fifth Avenue, the home territory of the rich and powerful, where he proclaims his superiority by physically attacking the men only to have his very existence go unacknowledged. Thrown into jail, he decides that the answer lies in destroying

the steel and machinery over which he originally thought he had power. In jail he learns that the IWW opposes the owners of factories and ships and, when he is released, he offers to blow up the IWW's enemies. Rejected there too, Yank decides that the answer may lie with the apes at the zoo. When he releases a gorilla, it crushes him, and he dies still without a sense of belonging.

Yank is symbolic of modern man in an industrialized society—cut off from a past when human beings had an integral relationship with the natural environment and now little better than cogs in the industrial machine—he feels alienated from his world and lacks all sense of belonging. As Yank says to the gorilla, “I ain’t got no past to tink in, nor nothin’ dat’s comin’, on’y what’s now—and dat don’t belong.”

“The Hairy Ape” is representative of the outlook and techniques of Expressionism. The episodic structure and distorted visual elements are typical of the movement, as is the longing for fulfillment, which suggests a need to change society so that the individual can find a coherent, satisfying relationship between himself and his world.

Mother Courage and Her Children [1937] The Expressionists’ idealistic dream of transforming mankind foundered in disillusionment during the 1920s. Some writers came to believe that society could be improved only by adopting a program of concrete political action, and in the theatre they sought to focus attention on the great difference between human needs and existing conditions. Attempts to use the theatre as a weapon of social action took several forms, but the most significant and fruitful from an aesthetic viewpoint was Epic Theatre, exemplified in the plays of Bertolt Brecht. Brecht used many of the devices of Expressionist drama, such as episodic structure, unity derived from theme or thesis, and nonillusionistic visual elements. But Brecht, unlike the Expressionists, did not suggest that external appearance is untruthful or insignificant; rather, he wished to provoke audiences to reflect on the immediate world and its injustices, and he believed that he could do so most effectively if his audience remained fully conscious that it was in a theatre. Rejecting the theatre of illusion on the basis that it merely lulls the spectator’s critical faculties, Brecht devised several techniques (such as inserted songs, projected captions, and presentational acting) to interrupt the empathetic response and intensify the spectator’s awareness of social, economic, and political injustices. It was his hope that the spectator would become aware of the need to work for change outside the theatre.

Mother Courage and Her Children seeks to establish a causal relationship between war and capitalism—to suggest that war is merely an exaggeration of the business methods used in private enterprise. In the beginning, Mother Courage welcomes the war as an opportunity to better her lot. She loves her children and tries to protect them, but the war makes her stifle her human reactions for the sake of her business, and eventually all of the children are killed. As Brecht commented: “War, which is a continuation of business by other means, makes the

human virtues fatal even to their possessors." Most audiences have seen in *Mother Courage* a woman of indomitable strength—a tragic survivor of the evils of war. But Brecht wanted them to see *Mother Courage's* "crimes, her participation, her desire to share in the profits of the war business," and to recognize that her tragedy results from her belief that she can reap the monetary benefits of war without paying the human consequences. About his ultimate goal, Brecht wrote that he wished to make the proletariat see that it "can do away with war by doing away with capitalism."

Mother Courage and Her Children alternates dialogue and song. The songs serve to break up and comment on the action and to forward Brecht's aim of making the audience reflect on what it has seen. Scenery plays only a small role. Time and place are established by lengthy captions projected onto a screen at the beginning of each scene.

Although the audience may reject Brecht's solution for ending war, it surely must acknowledge the play's power to make us see the price that human beings pay for war.

Death of a Salesman [1949] Symbolism, Expressionism, Epic Theatre, and other antirealistic styles by no means replaced Realism in the modern theatre, but they unquestionably altered it. Realistic plays written since World War II are radically different in tone and technique from the works of Ibsen and earlier Realists. In general outlook, they differ from earlier drama principally by portraying human personality as more complex, and by being less optimistic about the likelihood of improving society. At the same time, dramatic techniques have been taken over from nonrealistic drama.

Many of these results are seen to good effect in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. The play's structure, with its fluid handling of time and place to follow the shifting thoughts of the protagonist, is so unlike the drama of Ibsen that on first acquaintance it may seem an entirely different style. Yet, like Ibsen, Miller evokes a specific social milieu, carefully observed and rendered, and creates a highly individualized protagonist, the vivid and memorable Willy Loman.

Death of a Salesman develops a primary conflict in the American consciousness: its tendency to measure success in wholly material terms even though it upholds love and family cohesiveness as major values. As a result, the play suggests, Americans often unconsciously mingle these goals in such a way that love and approval are withheld from those who have not succeeded materially. Miller has embodied this conflict in Willy Loman's obsessive desire to succeed and his confusion of success with the right to be loved. Miller has used two characters to represent the poles between which Willy is pulled. Uncle Ben, Willy's brother, epitomizes material success, while Linda, Willy's wife, represents love given without question or conditions.

It is interesting to compare Miller's play with works from earlier periods. Both *Death of a Salesman* and *Oedipus Rex* involve a search into the past to find

the roots of present evils. The scenes in *Oedipus Rex*, however, all take place in the present, and the past is revealed only through narration. *Death of a Salesman*, on the other hand, uses "flashbacks" to transport the audience backward in time to witness various scenes. The play shares with *Mother Courage and Her Children* a concern for the destructiveness of materialistic values.

In *Death of a Salesman* Miller has combined believable characters and a plausible environment with technical devices taken over from nonrealistic styles. When first produced, the play seemed startlingly novel because of this mixture of elements, but subsequent developments have served to define it more clearly as modified Realism. After more than a quarter century it is still one of the most effective and moving of all American plays.

Happy Days [1961] In the 1950s a new style, now usually called Absurdism, emerged. *Absurdism* is a term coined by the critic Martin Esslin to describe the work of Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and several other dramatists. Esslin concludes that Absurdism grew out of a "sense that the certitudes and unshakable basic assumptions of former ages have been swept away, that they have been . . . discredited as cheap and somewhat childish illusions." Or, as Ionesco put it, "cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd and useless." Most Absurdist plays, rather than telling a story, explore this condition, in which the characters are depicted as seeking to insulate themselves against the void with meaningless activities or abortive attempts at communication.

Happy Days embodies most of the tenets of Absurdism. It has virtually abandoned action. The first act shows a middle-aged woman trapped up to her waist in a mound of earth. She does not struggle against her physical entrapment but fills her days with a routine built around objects which she keeps in a shopping bag; she speaks often to her husband, who for the most part remains unseen behind the mound and who responds only rarely. In the second act, she is buried up to her neck and can only move her eyes and mouth; at first she is not even sure that her husband is still alive, but eventually he crawls up the mound into her view. Despite her situation, the woman remains determinedly cheerful; she speaks often of her blessings and the small things that will make this "another happy day." She never questions why she is in this situation, nor does she wonder at her isolation. She apparently accepts her lot as something no more to be questioned than human existence itself.

As in others of his plays, in *Happy Days* Beckett uses visual imagery to sum up his vision of the human situation. Here, as in other plays, he shows human beings trapped in a symbolic wasteland, cut off from all but the most minimal contact, passing time as best they can while waiting doggedly or hoping desperately for something that will give meaning to the moment or to life itself. Occasionally they reveal flashes of anxiety, but they quickly divert themselves with games, memories, and speculations.

The form, structure, and mood of *Happy Days* cannot be separated from its meaning. Beckett has said that his plays formulate as clearly as he can what he is trying to convey. In them, there is little progression and there is no resolution in the usual sense. The plays end much as they started; they explore a state of being rather than show a developing action.

A Raisin in the Sun [1959] A fruitful development of the late 1950s, and particularly of the 1960s, was the emergence of plays written by blacks and other minority playwrights. One of the best examples of this drama is *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry, the first play by a black woman to appear on Broadway and to be the winner of both the New York Drama Critics Circle and Best Play of the Year Awards.

In many respects it is a traditional play: it focuses on a family and its dreams, and in structure it is a play of impeccable craftsmanship. It concerns the Younger family: the tenacious Lena, or Mama; Beneatha, her daughter, who wants to become a doctor; Walter, Lena's son, a chauffeur; his wife Ruth, a cleaning woman; and Travis, the young son of Walter and Ruth. Poor but proud, they dream of bettering their position in a world where they have been held back because they are black. When they receive the insurance on Mama's recently deceased husband, their dreams seem within reach, but circumstances thwart them. Nevertheless, all come to a better understanding of themselves and, as the play ends, they courageously move into an all-white neighborhood, determined to continue their struggle.

Despite its traditional form, the play introduces almost every theme that has since been developed by black playwrights. The opposition of the white community to the intrusion of the Youngers explores the problem of integration. The contrast between the opportunistic Walter and the idealistic Beneatha dramatizes the difference between materialism and altruism. The issue of the blacks' loss of their heritage is developed through one of Beneatha's suitors, a Nigerian student who arouses the girl's interest in her African "roots." The theme of growth and maturity is touchingly shown by Mama's nurturing of a spindly plant in a tenement window. The final moment, when she takes the plant with her to their new home, implies that the family will not "dry up like a raisin in the sun," but will survive and flourish. In a play of universal appeal, Hansberry makes clear the injustice American society has done to blacks.

Streamers [1976] The 1960s was a time of near-frenetic experimentation with dramatic and theatrical techniques, but the 1970s saw a partial return to more realistic modes and a renewed interest in storytelling and complex characterization. *Streamers*, by David Rabe, is an outstanding example of this new drama. The third of Rabe's plays to use the Vietnam war as background, *Streamers* takes place just before the conflict escalated into a major war. It concerns an American myth: army life as the essence of masculinity. The effects of this myth are explored

through a story that emphasizes two explosive and controversial elements, homosexuality and violence.

In Rabe's play, the myth is shown from several angles. Two young soldiers, Billy and Roger, seek to live up to it, while another, Richie, scorns it. But the myth is most completely embodied in two middle-aged sergeants who served as parachutists in World War II and Korea. The situation is relatively stable until the arrival of Carlyle, a recent black draftee, whose dislike of the army acts as a catalyst. The outsiders, Carlyle and Richie, are drawn together and propose a sexual liaison; Billy tries to interfere; and both he and one of the sergeants are killed by Carlyle.

The title of the play is taken from a song sung by the sergeants, a prayer for a parachute to open. It is sung twice, the first time as an indication of what it means to be "a real man," the second, following the deaths, as a lamentation for all wasted lives. *Streamers* is not a defense of homosexuality nor an anti-war play; rather, it is about the human need for love and understanding in conflict with a myth that makes violence the ultimate test of manhood. In the compassionate treatment of complex characters caught in a situation over which they lose control, Rabe has created a play with true tragic dimensions.

Detailed analyses of the plays in this volume, accompanied by descriptions of contemporary conditions and other pertinent historical information, may be found in Oscar G. Brockett's *The Essential Theatre*, 3d edition (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984). In addition, a number of these plays are discussed in Oscar G. Brockett's *The Theatre: An Introduction*, 4th edition (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979) and *Historical Edition: The Theatre* (1979).

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Sophocles

Oedipus Rex

**English Version by Dudley Fitts
and Robert Fitzgerald**

PERSONS REPRESENTED

OEDIPUS

A PRIEST

CREON

TEIRESIAS

IOCASTE [JOCASTA]

MESSENGER

SHEPHERD OF LAÏOS

SECOND MESSENGER

CHORUS OF THEBAN ELDERS

THE SCENE—*Before the palace of OEDIPUS, King of Thebes. A central door and two lateral doors open onto a platform which runs the length of the façade. On the platform, right and left, are altars; and three steps lead down into the “orchestra,” or chorus-ground. At the beginning of the action these steps are crowded by suppliants who have brought branches and chaplets of olive leaves and who lie in various attitudes of despair. OEDIPUS enters.*

PROLOGUE

OEDIPUS: My children, generations of the living

In the line of Kadmos, nursed at his ancient hearth:

Why have you strewn yourselves before these altars

In supplication, with your boughs and garlands?

The breath of incense rises from the city

With a sound of prayer and lamentation.

Children,

I would not have you speak through messengers,

And therefore I have come myself to hear you—

I, Oedipus, who bear the famous name.

[*To a PRIEST.*]

You, there, since you are eldest in the company,

Speak for them all, tell me what preys upon you,