

刘海平 赵宇编著

Liu Haiping with Zhao Yu

英美戏剧

THE ENGLISH AND
AMERICAN DRAMA:
Plays & Criticisms



南京大学出版社



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Liu Haiping *with* Zhao Yu

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前 言

《英美戏剧》于1988年列入国家教委高等学校外语专业教材编审委员会的年度编审计划,1989年5月编审委员会采用专家审稿的方式审稿通过,定为推荐教材出版,向全国发行。

《英美戏剧》是南京大学外文系新编英美文学系列教材中的第一部。在这同一系列中将出版的还有《英美散文》、《英美小说》和《英美诗歌》。这是一套采用新的编写原则、强调各类文学体裁的基本特征和构成要素的文学阅读教材。它们一改以往以史为主加读作品片断的做法,而以文学作品为根本,精选英美主要作家的代表作品的完整文本,希望通过指导性的阅读,培养学生赏析、评论英美文学作品的基本能力和掌握一些必要的技巧。这些教材可成套作为英语专业高年级英美文学课程的基本教材,一学期一本,二年学完;也可拆零,根据各类或各个学校的学生情况选用一、二,作为文学体裁选修课的教材。

《英美戏剧》全书由导论、剧本、评论和附录组成。

导论力求用简洁通俗的语言说明戏剧的本质、结构、类型、流派,以及为什么要学习戏剧作品。这些概念、术语和有关知识是深入学习戏剧作品的必不可少的入门准备。

第一部分所选的剧本是本教材的主体。英国和美国的戏剧分别有着近七百年和三百余年的发展历史,它们的作品汗牛充栋,上乘之作亦为数不少。要从中选出几部能在一个学期中上完、多少能反映英美戏剧面貌和发展,又能引起学生学习兴趣的作品来,无疑是件难事。所选作品要符合我们办教育的根本目的和英语学生的实际需要。我们还得考虑学生的语言水平、理解和购买能力以及有没有音像资料配套。写剧本,脑中不能没有剧团和观众;编戏剧教材,自然得时时刻刻想到教师和学生。这里所选的七个剧本正是上述诸项因素综合考虑的结果。取此总会为舍彼而惋惜,这兴许是所有编者的同感。但令我们感到宽慰的是,这些剧本经多次试用被证明能在教学中取得较好的效果,能使学生多方面、多层次地获得收益。

每篇作品前我们配有关于剧作家的简单介绍,对剧本的一些语言或背景知识方面的难点用中文或英文作了必要的注释,作品后还附有思考性问题以帮助教师组织课堂讨论或布置课外写作。另外,这七部剧本,除贝克特的独幕哑剧外,都有音像资料供选择使用。

第二部分评论,收集了近二十篇戏剧评论或专著的节选。每个剧本都有二、三篇这类出自著名评论家之手的剧评,或从相反的角度,或从不同的侧面剖析了作品。这对于开拓学生的思路,活跃课堂讨论显然是有益的。但是我们需要引导学生不受这些评论的束缚和限制,根据自己的文化背景和生活经验得出自己的评判。

附录因囿于篇幅,只能以极其简略的提纲方式,把英美戏剧各发展阶段上的重要流派、主要作家和代表作品以及英美戏剧在发展过程中与欧洲戏剧的联系作些粗线条的归纳。

《英美戏剧》的编写、试用和修改都离不开南京大学英语专业1982年至1990年间各届三年级学生在课堂内外的积极参与和配合,他们的意见——无论是口头表达的还是通过脸部表情反映出来的——都是我们修改和作注的主要依据;

在申请列入教材编审委员会的编审出版计划时承蒙南京大学外文系黄仲文教授和刘鸿坤教授的大力推荐;

北京外语学院袁鹤年教授担任了本书的主审,北京大学陈瑞兰教授和华东师范大学孙梁教授参加了本书的审稿,他们都对本书的送审稿提出了许多宝贵的修改意见;

在编写过程中曾参考了不少国外戏剧读物和学术著作(见“导论”后所列作者名和书名)；
南京大学出版社热情承担了本书的编辑出版工作；
黄云同志参加了全书的校对工作；丁夏林、陈陆鹰同志亦帮助作了部分的校对；
对于以上及其它各方面人士和单位的帮助与支持，我们借此表示由衷的感谢，并希望使用
本书的教师、学生和其它人士能不吝赐教，以利于今后的修订改正。

编者 1991.3

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Introduction To Drama

Why Drama

According to some statistics of the late 1960s, each night in the United States approximately 6 million people would go to the movies, more than 40 million would listen to radio, and over 150 million would watch television, while only over 100,000 would attend the legitimate theater, i.e., theater where plays are professionally produced. There have been some changes in the last two decades with the spreading of regional and educational theater on the one hand, and the emergence of video and cable television on the other, but the percentage of the American people going to stage plays remains roughly the same. And we know the attendance rate of modern theater (*huaju*) in China is perhaps even lower. Statistics of October 1990 show that in Shanghai only 90,000 people, less than one percent of its total population, pay for admission out of their own pockets for *huaju* performances in the city where modern Chinese drama originated and flourished. In the face of all these one may well ask, "Why study drama? Is it not out of tune with this age of information and television?"

We might find it a tough question to answer, if theater were just for entertainment. But good theater always means much more than entertainment. To great playwrights, some of whom are represented in this anthology, the theater is a means of probing honestly and courageously for the meaning of life and mystery of existence. In fact, a tremendous proportion of the greatest ideas conceived by human mind have been expressed in dramatic form. And theater has exerted a great influence on human civilization for thousands of years. To those with true insight the theater's heritage commands deep respect. Movies and television have added much that is new, but they rely on much more that is old. The things that excite, that move, that cause laughter and tears have changed but little.

A significant advantage that drama holds over its rivals like movies and TV lies in its liveliness and intimacy. Theater, in fact, is the most *human* of all the art forms. Humanity in all its diversity has been both the content and medium of the art. In the theater the process of stimulation and appreciation functions in two directions at once—from actor to audience, and from audience to actor. With the living actor and an intimate theater this sharing of experience is heightened to a degree that is difficult to achieve in any mechanical medium, be it movies, TV,

radio or video.

There is also a practical dimension to the study of English and American drama here in China. For those learning English as a foreign language, the study of "English situational dialogues" or "English in context", that the plays in this anthology are made of will naturally be of help in developing their ability to communicate in English outside their immediate circle. Furthermore, if we can combine the drama course with a drama workshop, trying to put on some scenes or acts or even an entire piece of what is being taught in class, it will certainly be of service to improving the cultural impoverishment many of our students have found themselves in.

The Nature of Drama

The play is a form of literature to be read and judged in itself like poetry and fiction, but it is also, or even more, meant to be performed on the stage. Because of this dual nature, there are inevitable differences between the methods in creating and interpreting drama and those involved in the other literary forms.

Through drama the writer can present experience more vividly and more intensely than through other literary forms, but on the other hand, with the exception of stage direction, he has basically only one means of expression: his dialogue. Unlike the poet or the novelist, who can make extensive use of description and discussion and present his ideas in a variety of ways from different points of view, the dramatist must express all his ideas through his characters' words and gestures.

Because a play is designed to be performed on the stage, its time scope and setting are necessarily limited; it must cover more events more quickly making fewer changes of location than do the epic or novel. The play limits digression and requires singleness of focus. The playwright must also translate thoughts, ideas and psychological conditions of his characters into the concrete and tangible, into dialogue and action.

The play reader, too, must work within a certain context. He must make full use of his imagination, his perception, and his own experience in reading and analyzing the play. He must visualize the play in the context of theater. In his mind's eye he should follow its progress as if being played on a real stage by actors moving, talking and gesticulating. To obtain maximum enjoyment and understanding, the reader of plays has generally more work to do on his own than does the reader of a novel or a poem. This limitation is in another sense an advantage, for the play's lack of description and authorial presence offers the reader greater opportunity to exercise his own judgment.

The Elements and Structure of Drama

Aristotle, the great Greek philosopher and drama theoretician, categorized drama into six elements, which are listed in his *Poetics* in order of importance as he viewed them:

Plot
Character
Thought
Diction
Music
Spectacle

And today we find them still a useful starting point for our discussion of drama.

1. PLOT

Aristotle places plot foremost in his list of elements that compose drama, for it provides the basic framework of the action. "Plot" is basically another term for structure: the things that happen in the play and the ways in which those incidents connect. The "plot" of a play is different from the "story" of a play. Plot is the way the story is told. Different ways of arranging the same story often yield different plays. The weakest type of plot, according to Aristotle, is the episodic plot where one event follows another with little or no causal effect or relationship. The strongest is the involved plot, such as the plot of *Oedipus Rex*, where each action flows out of some preceding action, where the very struggle of the tragic hero to free himself becomes the force that destroys him. We should know, however, there are good plays that use episodic plot. The relation between plot and drama is often compared to that between skeleton and body. And just as we are only consciously aware of the skeleton beneath the skin, in the same manner should we be aware of dramatic structure.

Any plot of a dramatic work necessarily has to do with **conflict**. The two sides of the conflict, the pros and cons of the argument, are usually represented by the protagonist and the antagonist in the play. The protagonist may be one person or many, and the antagonist may be a person, a group, or a force—social, natural, or supernatural.

The first thing the dramatist has to do is to establish what is going on, what has happened, and who is involved, through the technique of **exposition**, the exposing of the facts. This can involve a variety of approaches, from the servant and visitor telling each other what the basic situation is to the direct and immediate

involvement in fast developing action as in the opening scenes of *Macbeth*. Exposition must be revealed clearly and slowly enough for the audience to get the necessary information in order to relate it to subsequent scenes. Dramatic exposition can continue well into the play, through several scenes, as the past is revealed, the present explained, and characters introduced and assimilated.

While the playwright must furnish the audience with background material through exposition, he also has the task of preparing the spectator for future developments. He does this by **foreshadowing**. He makes the subsequent action credible by supplying clues which he carefully inserts in early parts of the play. Foreshadowing has several purposes. Besides making the events appear believable, it builds suspense and creates tension. It may reveal character, and aid in the development of complications. It may be used to build up an entrance or to create atmosphere. Playwrights generally value **suspense** more than they do **surprise**, and while dramas may use the unexpected, good craftsmanship requires that the chain of events be foreshadowed.

Once the dramatist provides sufficient background to hold the audience's attention, he proceeds with the **complications** that provide the conflict with its depth and breadth. The first complication is the **point of attack**, which refers to that moment in the play at which the sense of balance existing at the rise of the first curtain is disturbed: Professor Higgins says he can pass the flower girl off as a duchess after three months of training in phonetics, Robert Mayo says he wants to leave the farm and rove on the sea. These are characteristic points of attack—when an inciting force triggers the course of action.

Complications proceed through the **rising action**. It is time for plottings and counterplottings, accumulation of incidents and development of character, carrying the conflict forward to the play's high plot, its **climax**. This is the point toward which everything has aimed. It is a turning point, after which nothing new can be added. Any high point in the story hereafter becomes **anticlimactic**. Climax can be but a moment very late in the play.

Following the climax everything heads downward in **falling action**. Things fall into place, and the play heads toward the conclusion, or **denouement**. Then it's all over, the bodies are removed, the lovers embrace, and everybody goes home.

A great number of plays follow the exposition-to-denouement routine in almost perfect balance, capable of being graphically illustrated, scene by scene, act by act, in a uniformly parabolic curve, such plays have been given the label "**well-made**," and because the structure rather than the theme or idea or character became the predominant aspect, emphasizing mass popular entertainment rather than good dramatic literature, the term "**well-made**" has long been one of critical disfavor. But, on the other hand, many great plays are essentially "**well-made**," as we will discover in the structure of some of the plays collected in this anthology.

Plots have varied from the tightly knit, simple structure of Greek tragedy, to the loose episodes of medieval drama, bound together by a theme, to the complicated action of the Elizabethans, employing several sets of characters involved in overlapping situation, from the naturalist's attempt to avoid all semblance of structure in "slice-of-life" plays, to contemporary experiments in expressionistic, "absurd" and "epic" drama which have little regard for disciplined construction.

2. CHARACTER

In placing character as the second element, Aristotle started an endless argument. Many critics and playwrights insist that character is the most important element of drama. The controversy will perhaps never be solved as there are valid arguments on both sides, and, as a matter of fact, the two should not be seen as mutually exclusive, for in the last analysis plot is character in action.

The nature of drama and the conventions of the physical theater exert great influence on characterization. The dramatist must select a few key incidents occurring in a short space of time and in a few locales, and he must reveal character by speech and behavior. The dramatist usually has no means of commenting directly on character. As a result, the characters in plays must be simplified, their qualities made clear in a few telling scenes.

During the last quarter of the 19th century, under the impact of the scientific method and the new developments in psychology, the playwright became concerned with delineating characters with rich inner lives and complex motivations. Ibsen, Strindberg, and Chekhov, the three masters of modern Western drama, were particularly successful in creating figures with the stamp of life upon them. Dramatists in the 20th century have continued to strive for the creation of solid characters whose motivations are subtle and complicated.

Character may be portrayed in four ways. First, character is delineated by appearance. The actor's physical qualities give an immediate stimulus to the audience. Many modern playwrights have a very specific image in mind, describing the character's appearance in considerable detail.

Second, character is revealed by speech. The kind of language employed by the person, his manner of speaking, his voice quality and so on, all say something about him. The dramatist takes great care to write dialogue that makes an immediate impression about the characters.

Third, character is established by action. A character's external actions gives us clues to his inner motivations. Sometimes, the playwright may create a misleading or ambiguous impression of a character at the beginning of the play and then gradually reveal the truth as the play progresses. In the opening scene of Ibsen's *A Doll House*, Nora's initial appearance and actions suggest a doll-like character,

but the first impression is changed by Nora's subsequent course of action. Action is a fundamental technique for depicting character.

Fourth, character may be revealed by what others say about him, and the way in which they react to him. Often, the dramatist uses comment about an absent character as a method of revealing the truth about him. The dramatist may deliberately mislead or perplex the audience by having characters say ambiguous or controversial things, as in *Death of a Salesman*, Linda and her two sons and their neighbor Charlie each has a different story or opinion about Willy, the salesman. In some cases, it is the writer's purpose to leave the audience in a state of confusion. However, the more usual practice of the dramatist is to reveal the genuine nature and background of character through the speech of another.

The sharpness of a character's image has a lot to do with the structure of the drama. Plays written for a theater which permitted most of the essential action to appear on stage, gave the playwright a greater opportunity to create a more vivid, complex character than those plays which were confined to minimum of action. For instance, one reason that Willy Lowman is such a rich and interesting character is that we see him through the eyes of so many other characters.

The rounded, or three dimensional characters who are neither wholly good nor wholly evil, but wholly human, are certainly the most convincing and rich characters. But because of the compression of the form, drama usually cannot afford to fully realize all its characters. The minor roles of most plays tend to be flat, one-dimensional, or stereotyped. Characters who change and develop as the play progresses are called dynamic ones as opposed to those whose character traits remain static throughout the play.

3. THOUGHT

The third element, thought, refers to the reasoning aspect of drama. Thought, however, is more than the intellectual content, since a character's reasons for his behavior are bound up with his emotions. Characters in drama make subjective decisions under pressure, caught in conflicting emotional entanglements. In this respect, dramas are like the experiences of life with all of their complicating networks of feeling and meaning.

In addition to the rationale of individual characters, thought also concerns a play's theme which summarizes the moral and indicates the symbolic meaning of the play as a whole. A given play may convey a variety of interpretations to an audience. The dramatist does not usually make an explicit statement of his theme, unless his purpose is didactic. Unlike the medieval writers, most of the modern playwrights do not point to clearcut solutions to the problems they raise in their plays. Their purposes are to provoke thought rather than to persuade the audience

to adopt a specific plan of action.

4. DICTION

Aristotle's fourth element is diction, by which is meant the language of the play, the words which the actors speak. The dramatist has a utilitarian basis for his dialogue, his lines must advance the plot, delineate character, or get a laugh.

Discourse in drama must be clear since the language must be immediately understood by the listener; in the theater, there is no turning back the page, no pause to weigh and consider a line before continuing to the next. The dialogue must be interesting despite the need for simplicity and economy. It should capture the spirit of life and character. The diction must be appropriate for the character and the situation. Lines do not exist in the theater as separate entities. Therefore dramatists aim at appropriateness, rather than abstract beauty, of the language used.

The language of drama must be dynamic. Speech is a form of action. The dialogue shows the character's relationship to others, reflects the progression of the action, indicates what is happening inside the characters, reveals their suffering, growth or decline. It is a means of articulating the clash of wills and the conflicting motivations. Finally, good dialogue must be suited for oral expression. The lines must give the actor a basic pattern for performance.

5. MUSIC

Music here refers to all of the auditory aspect of a play, including sound effects and the tonal pattern of the spoken word. Many modern playwrights, such as Bernard Shaw, Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Samuel Beckett and Peter Shafer, who had a keen ear for the expressiveness of sound, made telling use of sound or silence to enhance the mood of their plays. In O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*, the sound of African drums throughout the play not only greatly intensifies the sense of fear but almost assumes the role of an invisible character or force throughout the play.

6. SPECTACLE

The last Aristotelian element of drama, spectacle, refers to all of the visual aspects of a production—scenery, lighting, costume, make-up, and the movement of the actors.

The kind and amount of spectacle have varied throughout theatrical history. In the Greek and Elizabethan plays, virtually no representation of locale is required, but these plays are rich in spectacle, particularly in the use of striking costumes

and in the action of performers. With the development of the proscenium-arch theater in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, a taste was cultivated for the pictorialism in the theater in which elaborate use was made of enormous and complicated settings. The realistic and naturalistic movements in the late nineteenth century gave spectacle a new importance in production because of the scientifically inspired concern with environment as a conditioning force in determining behavior. Hence spectacle came to assume an organic, psychological role in the theater, reinforcing the meaning of the play and serving as an expository device to relate character to the social environment.

While at times spectacle has dominated the stage, dwarfing or competing with the actor for the audience's attention, the current accepted attitude is that the visual aspects of theatrical production is just to provide the psychological and physical environment and create atmosphere for the play.

The Types of Drama

TRAGEDY

For Aristotle, drama is the imitation (i.e., representation) by impersonators, of an action (i.e., a sequence of happenings). The action in **tragedy** is serious and important, and is often a man's perception of a great mistake he has made; he suffers intensely and perhaps dies, having exhausted all the possibilities of his life. But tragedy is not what many of us think it is—a sad play with an unhappy ending. The root of tragedy has nothing to do with death or sadness, for it comes down to us from the Greek *tragos*, "song of the goat." The goat was sacred to Dionysus, god of wine and dance, out of which the drama grew. The whole concept of tragedy, as Jordan Miller points out in *The Heath Introduction to Drama*, is a product of Greek civilization and remains virtually unknown outside the West. It is founded upon a very special view which the Greeks held concerning mankind and its relationship to the gods.

The Greek gods were immortal but they were subject to every passion of love, hate, jealousy, rage, and sensual delight endured by men and women on earth. The Greeks admired the human body, male and female, painted and sculpted undraped, to be displayed in public. The Greeks created their gods modeling after themselves, beautiful, handsome, radiant, powerful. The gods were not completely independent, for they were subject to the final act of the Fates, the three sisters who span out the thread of life, drew it to its full length, and cut it, an event over which the gods had no control.

Thus, we can see that tragedy is an assertion of the greatness of man. It shows man's ability to rise to heights of human dignity in the face of an opposing force which he himself knows will finally destroy him. The protagonist of the tragedy may commit a gross mistake or even some evil deed, knowingly or unknowingly, but because the gods are capable of carrying grudges and taking offense,^b he may suffer from curses upon himself and his family unto several generations.

For the tragic protagonist, there is no escape. He is doomed, and we watch in awe as he moves toward that doom. Thereafter comes a balance of forces, a tranquility. Nothing comes afterwards. The end is final. What the protagonist has done in the process of the struggle and how he has faced the actual or symbolic death is what counts. Without hope of rescue or relief, the tragic protagonist, whatever foul deeds he may have done and whatever human foolishness he may have display, rises to the height in strength, courage, and defiance.

Tragedy does not deal with the incidental which can be avoided; it tackles the inevitable. It is not saddening and depressing in the sense of a fatal accident or some destructive catastrophe. Tragedy is positive and optimistic in its view of the heights the human being can reach. There is considerable distinction, as well, between the tragic protagonist and the religious or revolutionary martyr. The martyr suffers and dies for a particular cause, but the death of a martyr, unlike that of the tragic protagonist, implies that something comes after, making the suffering and death worth the pain. Those who survive are expected to carry on in the name of the cause. Things begin, they do not end, as in tragedy, with the death of the central figure.

Tears that may be shed at the final catastrophe are not tears of sadness, but of compassion. There can be profound emotional involvement, but there remains the fundamental optimism that must be present at the end of good tragedy. Aristotle, in this context, speaks of the **catharsis**, or **purgation** as sometimes is translated, and the arousal in the audience of **pity** and **fear**. What he seems to be saying is that when one views a tragedy he is moved by a compassionate, as opposed to sentimental, pity toward the protagonist for what he endures. By the end, when tranquility has been restored, the audience has gone through a kind of spiritual purgation, in the realization of how great the human being can be upon occasion.

The protagonist in tragedy must be human and cannot be a god. He must also be of a certain noble stature. Originally this meant royalty or nobility. Today, it means an element of human greatness beyond the ordinary. The tragic protagonist may, in modern drama, be a little man, but he is not in any sense a little person. On the other hand, the protagonist must have within him the tragic flaw, the making of his own destruction. Whether you call it pride, arrogance,^c vanity, or whatever, within the human psyche must rest the seeds of doom. In the end, the protagonist must finally recognize what he is and what is happening to him.

Throughout tragedy runs the constant thread of irony. Irony can involve the audience, aware of what is going to happen, or why it is happening, while the character concerned remains in ignorance. It can mean the twists and turns of fate when the harder the protagonist tries to avoid the catastrophe, the faster it arrives.

The dramatist who thinks he has created tragedy, but ends up with merely a "sad" play with an "unhappy" ending, is not writing tragedy at all. If the catastrophe brings depression instead of elevation; or if the dramatist moralizes upon the fate of his protagonist and speaks of "justice," he is not holding the tragic view.

COMEDY

Comedy as a form is very old, but not so old as tragedy. It is often considered inferior to tragedy in insight and power, but in some cases—in the romantic comedies of Shakespeare, for example, or in the penetrating social comedies of Bernard Shaw—the comic vision come very close to that of tragedy. The ultimate significance of great comedies is that they, too, provide an insight into the nature of the human condition and that they, too, deepen our understanding and experience of life.

The word "comedy" has a Greek origin as well. The primitive festival from which comedy grew was a joyous and happy one, marked by jokes and laughter. Today, "comedy" is a term broadly applied to a light, humorous play that ends happily.

In tragedy, we are seldom aware of the commonplace of everyday living. Comedy lives in the very world that tragedy transcends. Clothing, manners, physical appearance, money, possessions—these are the very stuff of comedy. It is the genre of plays that make us laugh at man's vices and follies. Comedy is most concerned with social man, while tragedy is most concerned with philosophical man. Comedy concentrates, not on man's destiny, but on his follies, foibles, and vices. Frequently, comedy will exaggerate or distort these deviations for greater effect. Yet, for all its painting of man's failings, comedy is usually affirmative, leaving us pleased and gratified.

In the writing of comedy, some elements have been constants from the earliest comedies to those of the present day. The first constant is heavy reliance on **stock characters**, that is, stereotype characters having little individuality. Such characters provide the playwright with opportunities to poke fun at various recognizable human traits. The audience, in turn, can immediately sense the character's essential quality without a painstaking analysis of his individuality.

Comedy also features many **stock situations**, such as "mistaken identity" and "screen scene" in which some character is eavesdropping behind a screen. The complications of a comic plot usually involve the characters in unusual or ludicrous

situations. Whether the whole plot is new or has been used before, there are usually situations within the plot that have done service for generations

TRAGICOMEDY

For a long time in the history of drama, the concept of tragicomedy was scorned by academic critics as something additive: bits of comedy added onto a tragedy. In such plays, the action, serious in theme and subject matter, seems to be leading to a tragic catastrophe until an unexpected and often arbitrary turn in events brings about the happy denouement. There one often finds complicated but improbable plot, contrast of deep villainy and exalted virtue, and saving of hero and heroine in the nick of time. This sort of play, unlike modern tragicomedy, is not so much a union of tragedy and comedy as an exclusion of both, lacking, for example, the awe we associate with tragedy and the fun we associate with comedy.

In the twentieth century the term has acquired a new meaning and the form has become thoroughly respectable. Indeed, many of the best plays of our century are described not as tragedies or as comedies but as tragicomedies—distinctive fusion (not merely mixture) of tragedy and comedy. The old statement by the British critic William Hazlitt that “man is the only animal that laughs and weeps; for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are, and what they ought to be” implies that the subjects of tragedy and of comedy are one rather than two. Eugene O’Neill, for example, wrote a hilarious comedy *Ah, Wilderness!* and a somber tragedy *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, set in the same place and based on the same experience of his own youth.

Modern dramatic theory (as of Cyrus Hoy) further suggests that a single principle underlies both tragedy and comedy: man has an ideal of human conduct, but circumstances and his own limitations make his belief that he can fulfill this ideal illusory. Still man persists, appearing “nobly enduring,” as well as “foolishly blind.” The Italian dramatist Pirandello once gave an interesting example of the phenomenon. Suppose, he says, we see an elderly woman with dyed hair and much too much make-up. We find her funny; but if we realize that she is trying to hold the attention of her husband, our sympathy is aroused. Our sense of her absurdity is not totally dispelled, but we feel for her and so our laughter is mingled with pity.

There has been a significant and fairly unified body of dramatic writings in the past few decades in the West called “the theater of the absurd.” The general theme is man’s great suffering, but the techniques used are those of comedy: improbable situations and unheroic characters who say funny things. The writers in this group are all preoccupied with what they see as the loneliness of man in a world without the certainties afforded by the old religion or by optimistic rationalism. This lone-