

TECHNIQUE OF PLAY WRITING

CHARLTON ANDREWS

INTRODUCTION
BY J. BERG ESENWEIN

A FULL WORKING GUIDE
OF THEORY AND PRACTICE
FOR THOSE WHO WOULD
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The Technique of Play Writing

BY

CHARLTON ANDREWS

AUTHOR OF

"THE DRAMA TO-DAY,"

"HIS MAJESTY THE FOOL," ETC.

INTRODUCTION BY J. BERG ESENWEIN

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To MY WIFE

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Author's Foreword

Although there are several recent treatises on the art of writing plays, none of them, generally speaking, is precisely a text-book of the subject—"dogmatic in theory, so as not to muddle the student with alternatives before he has grasped any one rule; detailed in the analysis of examples and in the statement of principles, so that he may see just how a certain thing is done; full of the little maxims and tricks of the trade; and supported at every point with practical exercises." The present volume is not offered as one conforming in every detail to the foregoing standard. Nevertheless, it aims to embody at least some of these characteristics, in the hope that it may prove of service as a guide to him who would make his first experiments in the art of dramatic composition.

It is obvious that in all primers, after the first authoritative one, much repetition of admitted truth is inevitable. Unless the writer be one of the perverse whose chief pleasure in life is derived from stout denials of all the established principles of art, he will need to refer to the dicta of Aristotle, of Hegel perhaps, of Brunetière certainly, of Lessing, Sarcey, Dumas *filis*, Hugo, and a score of other critics and dramatists foreign and domestic, when he is laying down the fundamentals of the play-writing craft. There be those of lesser breeds than such leaders in art and criticism who, having once restated these principles—

sometimes without credit—have come thereafter to regard them as their own. Of course, their claims to proprietary rights in these many truisms are at best about as valid as would be an assertion of copyright on the multiplication table, announced by the author of a new elementary arithmetic. No acknowledgment can be due to such compilers.

In a preliminary way, it will be well to survey quickly some of the pretty generally acknowledged foundation-theories first formulated by the great trail-blazers of dramatic art.

Action is the soul of tragedy, or of drama generally, asserted Aristotle. This action means a conflict of wills, Hegel and others hinted, and Brunetière succinctly declared. Drama deals with the *crucis* of existence when duty and inclination come to the grapple, Stevenson repeated. Periods of great national vitality have accordingly given birth to the greatest drama, added Sarcey—and others.

That the theatre is a place of illusion, based on many conventions, is an obvious matter which dozens of critics have emphasized.

Dramatic composition, like every other sort, must recognize Spencer's doctrine of the economy of attention. Stage dialogue, for instance, must be divested of the tautologies of real life.

In the theatre the appeal is primarily to the eye. A gesture, a facial expression, is often far more eloquent than much speech. Actions speak louder than words, as

we say. Hence plays start well that start with their essential conflicts visualized in action.

A play must have a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Its characters reveal themselves through what they say and do, and their speech and conduct must harmonize with the author's evident estimate of his personages.

Gozzi, Schiller, and others have tabulated all possible plot-materials and found only thirty-six different situations.

The most telling dramatic action is that which takes place within the hearts and souls of men and women.

The theatre is a democratic institution, and coöperation on the part of the audience is the first essential of success.

The drama of to-day differs from the drama of other times chiefly in that it deals with commonplace subject-matter in a realistic way.

We might prolong this catalogue of familiar generalities almost indefinitely. Indeed, for the purposes of this treatise it will be necessary in a sense to list the majority of them as we proceed. Practically every one has been stated or restated by virtually all writers on the drama; therefore as I have said, it is difficult to agree that any of them is private property. Moreover, it is surprising how readily these matters lend themselves to phraseological similarity. Once an axiom has been well said, few writers find it worth while to try to say it otherwise than in time-honored language. I could quote interesting parallels *ad libitum*. To cite one very brief example:

“It is the convention of opera,” writes one critic, “that there exists a race of human beings whose natural speech is song.”

And another asserts, “The Wagnerian opera is written and composed about a race of beings whose only mode of vocal communication is that of song.”

Much longer and consequently more striking parallels are the easiest things in the world to find. They abound in all criticism—particularly in that of the drama; and they are, I dare say, in the majority of instances insignificant. At all events, primers dealing with the stage and its art cannot hope to avoid them, any more than such works, to be of practical value, can fail to take into account the theatre’s most recent developments.

“The drama,” says Sir Arthur Wing Pinero, “is not stationary but progressive.” And he adds, “By this I do not mean that it is always improving; what I do mean is that its conditions are always changing, and that every dramatist whose ambition it is to produce live plays is absolutely bound to study carefully the conditions that hold good for his own day and generation.”

This quotation serves here in a double capacity. In the first place, it illustrates what has just been emphasized. The suggestion is not a new one—and manifestly the brilliant British playwright was not offering it as a discovery. “The theatre,” wrote Sarcey many years ago, “like all the other arts, lives only by virtue of incessant change, of modelling itself upon the dominant taste of each generation. Transformation does not mean deca-

dence; I dare say—and all those who know the theatre will agree with me—that our time has been, on the contrary, one of the most fruitful in great dramatic works.”

In the second place, the quotation expresses the obvious reason why, in the present work, the aim is to consider the subject of play writing from the viewpoint not only of its immemorial traditions, but also of its most recent phases, and so to try to present fundamental principles with the greatest possible amount of accuracy and simplicity and a constant view to their practical application in dramatic composition.

Now, it is well known that recent years have constituted a sort of “open season” for radicals fond of gunning for dramatic technique. Exceptions to the rules have been greatly emphasized in a specious effort to upset the fundamentals altogether. Aristotle has been made a universal target—and has reappeared after each fusillade manifestly unscathed. Perhaps in an effort to contribute a new idea as well as to gain the support of enthusiastic reformers, critics have fired broadsides at Brunetière—though to no perceptible effect. In the words of the familiar war report of the day, the situation remains unchanged. It is true that certain minor, nonessential traditions of the drama have become obsolete or have undergone a gradual alteration; but the essentials are, and have of late been repeatedly demonstrating that they remain, exactly as they have continued since the age of Pericles and before.

As a matter of fact, the alterations in the technique of the drama prove upon examination to be mere shifts of

emphasis. The stage has, for the time being, at least, done away with such devices as the soliloquy and the aside. (Who achieved this all-important reform, I have no idea. It appears that there exist in America two "schools" founded upon divergent views of this mighty matter: the "school" that asserts Ibsen, and the "school" that insists Edison, gave the death-blow to the soliloquy.) The emphasis upon action has been largely shifted from the merely physical to the psychological aspects of conflict. Undoubtedly the true doctrine in this matter is that both sorts of action should coexist in the drama, and that the physical should body forth the psychological. Furthermore, many experiments have been made in plotless, actionless, emotionless "drama," practically all of which have failed in the theatre or have achieved at best a negligible, non-dramatic success.

In spite of all efforts to dispense with them in the drama, conflict, climax, character portrayed in action, humor, pathos, pantomime, preparation, suspense, surprise, and a score of other such fundamentals remain unchanged. And all the many desperate efforts to redefine the drama, so as to substitute for the dynamic and the emotional the static and the intellectual have proved vain. The student of dramatic composition need have no fear on this point. If there is no technique of the drama with reasonably positive principles to rely upon, then there is no technique of any sort of composition; then unity, coherence, and emphasis are mere idle chatter, and we may as well abandon all thought- and writing-processes to the delirious gibberings of the ultra-futuristic.

Of course, there is, after all, only one cardinal rule of dramatic technique: Be interesting. First act clear, last act short, and the whole interesting, said Dumas. Or, as Cosmo Hamilton and others have negatived it: Never be dull. All the rest of the technique of the drama merely concerns itself with HOW to be interesting. Throughout the long history of the stage, playwrights have found that there are certain ways of attaining, maintaining, and augmenting interest. These discoveries, from which have developed so-called rules—though they must *not* be regarded as rigid regulations—are all in consonance with recognized laws of psychology. Since the only way to interest a human being in your product, of whatever sort, is to adapt it in its appeal to the workings of his mind and heart, it will be found that the really fundamental principles are few, for the simple reason that the basic laws of psychology are not many.

When one hears that such and such a play, with a seemingly novel plan, has upset the rules of dramatic technique, examination will usually show that it is only pseudo-rules that have suffered; "rules" based on sweeping generalizations uttered before the class of situations to be covered had been thoroughly canvassed. "You must never keep a secret from your audience," the theatre pundits have told us sagely and repeatedly, only to have to modify their dictum so often that they finally take refuge in the feeble assertion that all rules for the drama are only temporary and—*autres temps, autres mœurs*.

The real rules of the technique of play writing merely

insist that you must early gain the emotional interest of your audience, hold it and heighten it till the close, and then dismiss it satisfied. Plans and devices which experience has shown to be reliable, if not always immutable, furnish the working basis for this treatise.

The author with pleasure takes this occasion for recording his indebtedness to the editor of this series of textbooks, Dr. J. Berg Esenwein, for valuable suggestions, the admirable Introduction, and the series of questions and exercises he has contributed out of his long experience with fiction writing of every sort.

CHARLTON ANDREWS.

New York City,
August, 1915.

The Modern Play

AN INTRODUCTION

BY J. BERG ESENWEIN

Dramatic art at its best is the apotheosis of all the arts combined in one; and in such measure as the play-maker understands and believes this truth will his eyes be open to the wonderful store of material which invites him to build it into that consummately satisfying thing, an effective modern play.

First of all—and it *must* always be first of all—is the art of the play itself as a whole, considered apart from mere accessories. While modern stage-writing is less rhetorical, less poetical, less literary than that of earlier centuries, its artistic merit stands out in easy competition with any other one product of twentieth century art. When done supremely well, its solely literary qualities of dialogue, characterization, and plot-progress bring it into worthy comparison with other fictional forms. But its literary qualities do not stop here, for just as a good song-poem must be judged by its fitness to be linked with music, so that play is best whose theme, situations, plot-development, characters, dialogue, and whole atmosphere most perfectly suggest all that goes to make up an artistic stage production. Since public performance is its chief end, for that purpose it is conceived and its working out is directed. In precisely the same spirit as realism in the novel lays stronger emphasis on the truthful characteriza-

tion of the people in the story than on the mere literary quality of their speech, dialogue in the play should be literary only so far as an effective performance of the piece will permit.

Growing out of this fact that the modern play is meant primarily to be acted, and in most cases to appear in printed form not at all, is another condition: The first great aid to the apotheosis of the play as art is the power of trained vocal expression. The lines of the drama, whose "lilting fluency flowers every now and then into a phrase of golden melody"—to quote a charming, if mixed, metaphor of Mr. Clayton Hamilton's—need an adequate reading to show their full value.

Add to the effect of the "word fitly spoken" the magnetic presence of an impressive personality, and to this add again the delight of a subtle phrase delicately interpreted by one who has given the lines a hundred-fold more consideration than we could ourselves usually give to the printed page, and we begin to see the artistic values of the play piling up. Yet we have only begun the evaluation. To see, and not merely imagine, the characters in the play working out some action; to catch in one posture, one gesture, one look, more than the novelist might convey in a page; to feel that two, three, a dozen characters—each speaking to the eye by his dress, and gait, and behavior—are actually living their lives before us, is immeasurably more real-seeming than to meet them one at a time in a book. Shattered Ophelia by the water's edge lives in our sympathies when her every word has been forgotten.

In setting, too, we find one more, and a very great, addition to the apotheosis. In the modern play the realistic set is no longer an accessory but part of the dramatist's conception of the story he is telling in sound, action, form, and color to those who listen and look. It is a far cry from the sceneless and uncovered stage of Shakespeare's era to the perfect illusions of present-day *inscenierung*, the child of Science wedded with Art. The artistic beauty and reality of setting, the carefully placed dramatic emphasis, the essential harmony of scene and tone, the effect of suggested atmosphere, are proving wonderful helpers in the presentation of the play as an artistic whole. Indeed, even a new art—stage designing—has leaped forth to help the scene designer produce his effects at the call of the playwright. How notable has been the progress in this field alone may be read in Mr. Hiram Kelly Moderwell's recent book, "The Theatre of Today."

The kindred arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, and interior and exterior decorating, all bring gifts to aid dramatic presentment. Incidental music has a delicate share, too, and that playwright is happy whose producer lays no more than due emphasis on the contributory musical accompaniment.

But modern stage art owes more to the new effects of decorative and symbolic color and light than to any other accessories. From the Elizabethan daylight performances, through the oil-lamp period with its feeble lights focused on the stage apron, down to the gas footlights and overhead lights, was a long road; yet the miraculous schemes of electric lighting in vogue today mark a still greater

advance—they have created a new stage and a new stage art. No longer need the author's lines forsake the story of the play in order to tell of approaching twilight or herald the rise of a storm. When day dawns with all its softening shadows and crimsoning hill tops to make nature lovely, we *now* see in "As You Like It" a shepherd leading his flock of sheep down the glade and feel ourselves to be on the scene with the time and atmosphere attuned to the mood of the action.

Thus the magic of trained human voices, the charm and reality of the actor's representative and interpretive art, the truthful setting which emphasizes yet does not obtrude the essentials of time and place and circumstance, the harmonies and contrasts of color, the beauty or the studied ugliness of form, the eloquence of designed movement, the contribution of music, and the variation of light and darkness, unite with the lines of the play to produce what I have ventured to call the apotheosis of all the arts centred in this one. Singly, each of these arts may find greater and more complete expression elsewhere, but nowhere else do they so wonderfully work together.

Now, all this is emphasized not so much to show, what we all admit, that the stage of today is a new place, but to stress the importance of recognizing the new materials for play-making. In other words, the efficient playwright is more than his title explicitly shows: he is a *playwright*. As such, he is concerned with all the possibilities of present-day stage-craft, for while the installation and management of "effects" belong to the pro-

ducer and the stage director, the playwright must be aware of his resources and reckon with each one of them when he devises the means by which his story is to be presented.

The new stage-art, therefore, is not only an asset to the playwright, but a liability as well. By so much as his play may be helped by the use of "effects," will their absence or misuse mar the production. For who must put them into the play? It will not do to suppose that Mr. Aladdin Producer will supply all these helps and thus transmute a manuscript into a golden play. But, not every play lends itself to scenic effects, and to cloak a weak fable with an elaborate staging would smother it; and besides, the true, the best, use of setting and its artistic accessories is by no means always an elaborate one, but is oftenest simple, and always unobtrusively secondary to the play itself. It is for the author to plan the contrasts and harmonies of time, place, and incident, invent a use for properties that will most effectively show the action of the story, and so devise his climaxes that the characters may be seen in striking relationships both to each other and to the setting, in part and entire; but *how* these physical matters may best be handled is at last the problem of the stage director. The essential point is, the producer and the director must have picture-inspiring materials wherewith to work.

That all the literary arts have much in common is obvious, and equally so that the novel and the drama are of all the most closely allied. In both we have

the same stress on plotted story and on characters in contrast as they work out the story in a given setting. The play, too, in further similarity to the novel, often exemplifies a theme, and is designed to give a unified picture of life.

But he who attempts the play must forget the primary appeal of the novelist, which is to the fancy, and visualize everything for the spectator—the dramatist's appeal is directly to the eye, and if he makes any demands on the reflective and imaging faculties of his audience it is only in a secondary way, through what they see and feel.

This brings up the fundamental question, so often discussed and yet so hard to answer: *What is dramatic?*

The perennial nature of this inquiry is not chiefly theoretical for the playwright, as it is for the critic, because the maker of plays is momentarily confronted with the problem of what sort of material he must choose and how he must handle it so as to make his play more than a series of pictures of life. And it is precisely here that the differentiation between dramatic and non-dramatic must be made—it is the difference between a plotted story and a literary sketch: the former hinges its action on a crisis, a tangle, a cross-purpose, a struggle, in the affairs of its chief characters, and then shows how that crisis is brought to its solution; the latter is a mere picture of static emotion—and as such may be most effective, be it said.

The essence of the dramatic in a situation lies in action and counter-action; not merely in action, but in both. The initial action may arise in the inner man—in the will, or in the emotions—but it must not end there. Unless the mo-

tivating force is strong enough to make feelings and will come to a grapple with some antagonist, whether seen or unseen, material or immaterial, the impulse dies. Then, indeed, we might have the *motif* for a literary sketch, a lyric poem, or a painted picture; but for a drama, never.

On the other hand, let the man push his impulse first to resolve and later to action, and let that action run counter, say, to his own nature, his training, his surroundings, his friends, or his enemies, thus resulting in a definite issue—then we have the beginnings of a struggle whose outworkings, as Mr. Andrews has clearly pointed out in this volume, make the very heart of drama.

But, further, there must be counter-action. A walk-over makes a poor fight, in a play as in a baseball game. Hence the action must arouse opposition worth wrestling with, and whose outcome seems so significant to the spectators that they more or less consciously take sides. The feeblest dramatic action in the world is that which arouses in no one a single pang when defeat comes to one side or the other.

By all odds the greatest number of successful plays, however, begin t'other way about: the action starts not from within the man but from without, moves upon the will of the person attacked, and arouses him to opposition, which in turn brings out greater effort against him—and so on, shuttlecock and battledore, until the high point in the struggle is reached, when, by some force expected or unexpected, the issue is decided and a quick aftermath is either shown or suggested.

Mr. Andrews has dwelt at sufficient length on this essen-

tial element of struggle in the drama, but I may be permitted a further word on the reasons why the spectators feel such deep interest in the contest.

Mr. Clayton Hamilton has pointed out, in an interesting chapter on "The Psychology of Theatre Audiences,"¹ that the drama is written for "a crowd," composed of many kinds of folk, but mostly women, who are prone to sink their normal differences in a common interest; and further, "that characters are interesting to a crowd only in those crises of emotion that bring them to the grapple." This is quite true, so far as it goes, but something more than the joy of witnessing a struggle must be found to account for the deep, partisan, and often unmoral interest felt by an audience in the struggle on which the play hinges, particularly an audience in which women are in the majority.

Other critics, notably M. Brunetière, as Mr. Hamilton observes, have insisted on the essential nature of struggle in the drama, but I do not remember seeing it noted that *the element of danger to a character engaged in, or concerned in, a struggle is the crucial point of interest for the spectators.*

The skillful dramatist rarely *begins* with a struggle but uses every device short of a *tour de force* to win interest and sympathy for his chief character; so that when the issue is joined, sides will have been already taken by the on-lookers, both on the stage and in the audience; for the opponent—the "villain," in old parlance—must "deserve" little sympathy, if not actual reprobation, from the judges of the contest.

¹*The Theory of the Theatre.*

But the dramatist goes further—he sees to it that the object striven for is of importance, not only to the contestants but in the estimation of the audience. And it must be worthily fought for by the hero, since he must retain the sympathy he has won.

But over and above all this lies the element of danger. What will victory win, is rarely so poignant a question as what defeat will cost. The enthralling thing in "The Easiest Way" was the terrible alternative that opened up before the young woman; though it must be said that what chiefly revolted the audience was that Miss Starr had put so much charm into the character she essayed that when the girl chose "Broadway" one felt that so sweet a spirit could not have made so low a choice. The play was well motivated, but the acting was not down to the level of a woman who was weak enough to fall a second time.

It is the element of reward and penalty—of danger, in other words—that forms yet another big plot-factor in the play: that of suspense. Of this, too, Mr. Andrews has written effectively. The joys of reward are great only to those who face the danger of loss or non-attainment. What the defeat of the protagonist may mean is what makes the fight "for blood." We almost know the outcome—yet we tremble! It is the championship games that count, for defeat means no "look in" for the finals.

We are nowadays more ready to believe that books such as the present treatise are of serious value to those who would master an art, yet there are still those in high places

who maintain that experience is the only teacher. But is it not plain that principles gathered by induction, after fairly observing a large number of cases, ought to merit careful consideration? And is it not worth while to be told how successful writers have secured their effects? No one, I suppose, would seriously maintain that students, however faithful, could be taught to write any piece of creative literary work without possessing an alert mind, some degree of native endowment for invention and self-expression, and a well developed taste for the art to be essayed. But, given these, together with a teachable spirit, and it seems to me that the rest is patient labor, under intelligent instruction. The danger of unguided practise in dramatic art lies here: the playwright may fail to discriminate between defects in popular plays, defects which are mitigated by unusually competent or popular actors—and the meritorious points in those same plays: as in "Ready Money," for instance. One strong dramatic situation is likely to gloss over the essential weakness of another situation in the same play. The public likes what it likes, almost or quite irrespective of adjacent things it does not like, therefore strong approval for the one case begets a tolerance for the other.

So in taking up the study of dramatic art, whether for the larger enjoyment of the play as a spectator or with the purpose of dramaturgic writing, I can think of no guidance so helpful as the sort offered by the present volume.

Glossary

ACTION.—"The thing represented as done in a drama; the event or series of events, real or imaginary, forming the subject of a fable, poem, or other composition." (Murray's English Dictionary.) "Action," asserts Professor Butcher, commenting on Aristotle, "embraces not only the deeds, the incidents, the situations, but also the mental processes, and the motives which underlie the outward events or which result from them. It is the compendious expression for all these forces working together toward a definite end."

ANTAGONIST.—The chief opposer of the protagonist (which see).

ASIDE.—A speech spoken within sight of the other actors, but obviously not for their ears.

CATASTROPHE.—"The change or revolution which produces the conclusion or final event of a dramatic piece." (Johnson.) The *dénouement* (which see).

CHARACTER.—"A personality invested with distinctive attributes and qualities, by a novelist or dramatist. (Murray.)

CHARACTERIZE.—"To describe or delineate the character or peculiar qualities of a person or thing." (Murray.)

CLIMAX.—"The highest point of anything reached by gradual ascent; the culmination, height, acme, apex. (Murray.) The summit of interest; the point of greatest emotional tension.

COMEDY.—"A stage play of a light and amusing character, with a happy conclusion to its plot." "That branch of the drama which adopts a humorous or familiar style, and depicts laughable characters and incidents." (Murray.) In high, or true, comedy, the plot is governed by the characters; and human nature, rather than incident, is stressed.

COMPLICATION.—The interweaving of the strands of action so as to bring out the struggle.

CONNOTATION.—"That which is implied in a word [a look, a gesture, a situation, etc.,] in addition to its essential or primary meaning." (Murray.)

CRISIS.—"A vitally important or decisive stage in the progress of anything; a turning-point; also, a state of affairs in which a decisive change for better or worse is imminent." (Murray.)

DÉNOUEMENT.—"The final unravelling of the complications of a plot in a drama, novel, etc.; the catastrophe; . . . the final solution or issue of a complication, difficulty, or mystery." (Murray.)

DRAMA.—A story, containing a fundamental element of conflict; composed of a unified sequence of events; having a beginning, a middle, and an end; and told in action—usually by means of dialogue—by the personages taking part in it.

DRAMATURGY.—"Dramatic composition; the dramatic art." (Murray.)

EPISODE.—"A digression in a play, separable from the main subject, yet arising naturally from it." (Murray.)

EXPOSITION.—"The part of the play in which the theme or subject is opened out." (Webster's Dictionary.) The conveyance to the audience of preliminary information necessary to a comprehension of what is to follow.

FABLE.—"The plot or story of a play." (Murray.)

FARCE.—"A dramatic work which has for its sole object to excite laughter." (Murray.) A play, chiefly of plot, *farced*, or stuffed, with ludicrous situations.

GENRE.—"Kind; sort; style." (Murray.)

INCIDENT.—"A distinct piece of action in a play." (Murray.)

INTRIGUE.—"The plot of a play . . . ; a complicated scheme of designs, actions, and events." (Webster.)

INVENTION.—"The devising of a subject, idea, or method of treatment, by exercise of the intellect or imagination; 'the choice and production of such objects as are proper to enter into the composition of a work of art.'" (Murray.)

LOGIC.—"Something that tends to convince as completely as reasoning; anything that as an antecedent determines what must

follow; as, the *logic* of the situation made surrender inevitable. (Webster.)

MELODRAMA.—"A dramatic piece characterized by sensational incident and violent appeals to the emotions, but with a happy ending." (Murray.) In melodrama plot takes precedence over characterization.

MISE EN SCÈNE.—"The necessary preparations, as scenery, properties, etc., for the representation of a play; stage setting; also, the arrangement of the scenery and players in a scene; scene." (Webster.)

PLOT.—"The arrangement of the incidents." (Aristotle.) The plan or scheme of a play, resultant on the interweaving and subsequent disentangling of the strands of action.

PROTAGONIST.—"The chief personage in a drama." (Murray.)

PROPERTY.—"Any portable article, as an article of costume or furniture, used in acting a play; a stage requisite, appurtenance, or accessory." (Murray.)

REALISM.—"Close resemblance to what is real; fidelity of representation, rendering the precise details of the real thing or scene." (Murray.)

SCENARIO.—"A sketch or outline of the plot of a play, giving particulars of the scenes, situations, etc." (Murray.)

SITUATION.—"A group of circumstances; a posture of affairs; specifically, in theatrical art, a crisis or critical point in the action of a play." (Century Dictionary.)

STORY.—"The plot or intrigue of a drama." (Century.)

TRAGEDY.—"That form of the drama which represents a somber or a pathetic character involved in a situation of extremity or desperation by the force of an unhappy passion." (Century.) The spectacle of an inadequate struggle against an invincible and relentless antagonist or overwhelming force. In tragedy the plot is subsidiary to the characterization.

The art—the great and fascinating and most difficult art—of the modern dramatist is nothing else than to achieve that *compression* of life which the stage undoubtedly demands *without* falsification. If Stevenson had ever mastered that art—and I do not question that if he had properly conceived it he had it in him to master it—he might have found the stage a gold mine, but he would have found, too, that it is a gold mine which cannot be worked in a smiling, sportive, half-contemptuous spirit, but only in the sweat of the brain, and with every mental nerve and sinew strained to its uttermost. He would have known that no ingots are to be got out of this mine, save after sleepless nights, days of gloom and discouragement, and other days, again, of feverish toil, the result of which proves in the end to be misapplied and has to be thrown to the winds. When you sit in your stall at the theatre and see a play moving across the stage, it all seems so easy and natural, you feel as though the author had improvised it. The characters, being, let us hope, ordinary human beings, say nothing very remarkable, nothing, you think,—thereby paying the author the highest possible compliment,—that might not quite well have occurred to *you*. When you take up a playbook (if ever you *do* take one up) it strikes you as being a very trifling thing—a mere insubstantial pamphlet beside the imposing bulk of the latest six-shilling novel. Little do you guess that every page of the play has cost more care, severer mental tension, if not more actual manual labor, than any chapter of a novel, though it be fifty pages long. It is the height of the author's art, according to the old maxim, that the ordinary spectator should never be clearly conscious of the skill and travail that have gone to the making of the finished product. But the artist who would achieve a like feat must realize its difficulties, or what are his chances of success?—ARTHUR WING PINERO, *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Dramatist*, in the *Critic*, 1903.

CHAPTER I

THE PLAY AND ITS WRITER

Let us ask this direct question of every man and woman who reads these pages: Have you taken any pains to satisfy yourself that you possess this Inborn Talent? If not, do so without delay, before you scatter futile ink over another sheet of wasted paper. And it is not a question of having or not having the creative instinct, but of having it in sufficient degree to make its development really worth while. For the Inborn Talent in a writer may be compared to the grade of ore in a mine—the question is not simply whether there is any precious metal there at all, but whether it is present in paying quantities. It is well to find out, if you can, just how richly your talent will assay, and then work it accordingly.—FREDERIC TABER COOPER, *The Craftsmanship of Writing*.

I would not willingly say one word which might discourage those who are attracted to this branch of literature; on the contrary, I would encourage them in every possible way. One desires, however, that they should approach their work at the outset with the same serious and earnest appreciation of its importance and its difficulties with which they undertake the study of music and painting. I would wish, in short, that from the very beginning their minds should be fully possessed with the knowledge that Fiction [of which genus the drama is, of course, a species] is an Art, and that, like all other arts, it is governed by certain laws, methods, and rules, which it is their first business to learn.—SIR WALTER BESANT, *The Art of Fiction*.

“A play,” declares Mr. H. Granville Barker, “is anything that can be made effective upon the stage of a theatre by human agency. And I am not sure,” he adds, in revolu-

tionary good measure, "that this definition is not too narrow."

To most people, however, the definition that is possibly too narrow would seem amply comprehensive. At any rate, in spite even of Mr. Barker's earnest efforts to prove his proposition by means of homemade examples, the playgoing public continues to differentiate, if somewhat hazily, between "a play" and mere wise, verbose, or witty dialogues, or simple galleries of passive types.

After all, even if Aristotle, being human and not omniscient, did err in the matter of the ten pounds of lead, which Galileo proved would not fall a whit faster than a single pound of the same metal, still the Stagyrte was and remains fairly sound in the less scientific, more æsthetic matter of the drama, in which he was naturally somewhat more adept. Moreover Mr. Barker—and others—have not succeeded in demolishing the Aristotelian view with quite the same degree of success that attended Galileo's experimentation.

Fundamentals of the Drama

Aristotle, then, in discussing the nature of a play, insisted primarily upon plot. "Drama" etymologically indicates action; and the action in a play must, first of all, tell a story. This includes a unified sequence of events, having a beginning, a middle, and an end, and is represented by means of individuals imitating the personages taking part in the story.

Story and people, therefore, are two fundamental elements of a play. They depend upon each other—in fact, the delicacy and the harmony of their inter-relations present the main problem of the dramatist. For it should be noted that neither element alone is sufficient. Story, indeed, cannot exist without people, or at least symbols of people; while people merely, not involved in any story, cannot constitute a play. “Drama,” says Professor A. W. Ward, “is not reached till the imitation or representation extends to action.”

As without a plot there can be no drama, so without a procedure from cause to effect there can be no plot. The third fundamental to be remembered, then, is logic. It applies not only to the element of story, but also to the element of people, in their characterization. In fact, logic is, in a sense, the binding principle which cements the plot and the people in a play. Another name for this principle is “probability;” still another, “consistency;” neither of these terms, however, is so satisfying, because not so inclusive, as “logic.”

The Endowments of the Playwright

The aspiring playwright should first introspectively consult his creative equipment for the purpose of discovering whether it includes aptitudes in line with the three essentials of the drama so far mentioned. Is he gifted with the ability to imagine stories? Is he not only something of a born plot-maker, but also a sound, if intuitive, psychologist? Has he that power of observa-

tion which enables him unerringly to single out and to classify the traits, regular and eccentric, of human nature? And, finally, is he endowed with a relentlessly logical thinking apparatus, which will never allow itself to be thrown out of gear or off the track, no matter how much pressure may be brought to bear upon it by the power of mental habit or the tyranny of precedent?

The probably successful playwright must have this triple gift. He needs to be, in fact, a combination of the scientific and the artistic type of mind. The science of humanity is the foundation of the art of the drama, and it is in both fields that the dramatist must be an expert.

Manifestly, not all men and women can be made into playwrights. Life is infinitely too short. Writers for the stage must be born saturated with drama, oozing drama from their finger-tips, living their lives largely in an imaginative realm of the mimetic, thinking in terms of drama, seeing all life, indeed, from the special angle of its effective theatrical representation.

Sarcey¹ quotes Sardou as insisting on the fact that "the true character, the distinctive sign, of the man born for the theatre, is to see nothing, to hear nothing, which does not immediately take on, for him, the theatrical aspect: " 'This landscape he admires, what a beautiful *setting!* This charming conversation he listens to, what pretty *dialogue!* This delicious young girl that passes, how adorable an *ingénu!* Finally, this misfortune, this crime, this disaster one describes to him, what a *situation!* what a *scen!* what *drama!* The special faculty of drama-

¹ *Quarante Ans de Theatre.*

tizing everything constitutes the power of the dramatic author.' . . . Unfortunately, it must be at once admitted that this thing is not easy or common. We are forever passing by dramatic incidents and situations which do not strike us at all, because they are affairs of ordinary life; but which others, gifted with a special vision, perceive, and from which they extract the drama we never even suspected

“To see a true thing and to feel that it would be effective on the stage, that is the first part of this special gift Sardou talks about; to imagine the dramatic form which would reveal this true thing, that is, to find a means of giving it verisimilitude in the eyes of twelve hundred people assembled before the footlights, is the second and last part which makes up the whole. And there is nothing rarer in the world than this gift.”

In insisting on this element of congenital endowment as being necessarily fundamental to all training in play-making, we might go further and say that the successful dramatist, even our latter-day species, must be a *poet*. So, indeed, he was usually named a century or two ago, not because he wrote in verse, but because he dealt in an art-form closely related to poetry pure and simple. The drama aims primarily at the emotions. A story acted out by characters, however logical it may be, if it fails to arouse the feelings of the audience, is not a play. Drama to-day is oftenest written in prose; but, if it is to succeed, it does not confine itself to a purely intellectual appeal. Rather are we accustomed to believe that drama rises above mere spoken dialogue and pantomime to its own

peculiar plane solely when it produces a distinct emotional reaction.

This, then, is drama, reduced to its elements: A unified and logical story told in action by its own characters and making a sustained emotional appeal. Its proper construction requires a certain innate poetic ability specialized in the direction of what is effective for the stage—the expression of life in terms of concrete action, the visualization of truth. Without the power to embody the abstract, without a mentality combining the clearest thinking with the deepest feeling, the aspirant to honors in writing plays will probably fall short even of mediocrity.

Underlying and infusing all worthy dramatic writing is the individualized and emphatic personality of the dramatist. Personality is, after all, the prime requisite. Are you a man or a woman gifted with a mental, moral, and spiritual constitution that sufficiently differentiates you from the mass of humanity to make your viewpoint, your utterances, your creative endeavors of whatsoever sort, inherently attractive merely because they have in them the flavor of yourself? If so, you may safely begin to take stock of your other native endowments with a view to determining your fitness to write plays. The ability to effect mere rearrangements of antiquated situations and characters is far from sufficient. Ibsen, Brieux, Pinero, Shaw, Rostand, Maeterlinck, Barrie—these are personalities constantly revealing themselves through the mimic world they create. There is no set formula for the process. The style is the man, and it can be neither mistaken nor imitated. What the men and women on the

stage say and do, or refrain from saying and doing, in some mysterious manner reveals the sympathies and antipathies, the tastes, the foibles, and the ideals of their creator; and him we like, abhor, or are indifferent to, according as he is strong and sincere, feeble and disingenuous, or commonplace and dull.

Endowment Plus Preparation

If, however, the self-consulting aspirant thinks he finds the necessary endowment present—in germ, as is most likely, rather than in total development—there will still remain by way of preparation the mastering of a considerable number of time-tried technical processes. The drama, like all other arts or crafts, has its body of doctrine gained from experimentation. One must know as many facts about ways and means before broaching the construction of a play, at least as one must know, for instance, before beginning to build a house.

To set forth as simply and concretely as possible these basic tenets of the art of dramatic composition will be the aim of the chapters to follow.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Formulate your own definition for the drama.
2. Quote as many definitions as you can from authorities.
3. Make a list of the elements generally agreed on.
4. What elements in these definitions seem to you to be not properly included?

5. Are one's native mental and emotional endowments generally in plain evidence at the age, say, of from twenty-five to thirty?

6. What sort of experiences and exercises are likely to reveal *to oneself* his own native gifts?

7. Compare the necessity for native gifts in the playwright and in the painter; in the poet; in the novelist.

8. Restate in your own words the qualities that the present author holds must be inborn in the truly successful playwright.

9. Would you add to or subtract from this list? Why?

10. What relation does intelligent study bear to native endowment?

CHAPTER II

THE THEME

Beginning with the "*Fils naturel*" he [Dumas *filis*] engaged in the development of social theories. To paint characters, ridicules, and passions was not enough. He wished to leave with the spectators "something to think over," to make them hear "things good to be said."—GEORGES PELLISSIER, *Le Mouvement Littéraire au XIX^e Siècle*.

The truth is that plays of ideas must, first of all, be plays of emotion. "Primum vivere, deinde philosophari." The "idea" is excellent, as giving a meaning and unity to the play, but if it be allowed to obtrude itself so as to impair the sense of reality, the flow of emotion is immediately arrested. Emotion, not logic, is the stuff of drama. A play that stirs our emotions may be absolutely "unidea'd." That is a case of emotion for emotion's sake—the typical case of melodrama. The play really great is the play which first stirs our emotions profoundly and then gives a meaning and direction to our feelings by the unity and truth of some underlying idea.—A. B. WALKLEY, *Drama and Life*.

Directions for writing plays usually commence with the choice of a theme, and properly so; for, *theoretically*, a drama is supposed to be the development of an abstract truth, which is its germ, which may be summed up in a sentence or two, and which is thought out in advance of any actual composition.

The theme of "Macbeth," for instance, may be thus stated:

A man of high position is led to commit a great crime to attain his ambition.

To maintain his position he is led to other crimes.

Finally, gaining no enjoyment from the attainment of his ambition, he is put to death by forces aroused by his own crimes.

Or the theme of "Hamlet" may be somewhat more elaborately couched as follows:

Hamlet, a student and a dreamer, has been made aware of his father's murder and his mother's seduction by his uncle, now king. This he has learned from the ghost of his father, who incites him to revenge. Hamlet is hesitant, dilatory, incredulous: he loses time while he devises a test of the worth of the ghost's word, and again for fear of sending his enemy's soul to heaven by killing him while he is at prayer.

His inactivity results in his killing by mistake an innocent man, and thus maddening that man's daughter, Hamlet's sweetheart. His purpose almost blunted, he departs, returns, and, finally in killing his enemy, is himself involved in a general destruction which his own hesitancy has brought about.

Or, much more briefly, the matter might be phrased as a thesis thus:

Placed in a position demanding heroic action, a dreamer, though of superb mentality, can only involve himself and others in ruin.

The Thesis as a Theme

Between these two ways of stating the Hamlet theme we find a distinction that is worth noting: the former is chiefly a compression of the plot, with a hint of the truth

that underlies it; the latter is the precise formulation of the argument, or thesis, which the story works out by way of illustration. Most of the great serious plays may be shown to support such theses, though not necessarily to have started out with that chief purpose—of which more later.

A further distinction must be pointed out between both of the foregoing theme-types and the kind that sets forth certain facts of life in a sort of unprejudiced, reportorial way, without formulating a thesis—as in certain obvious instances presently to be cited.

Theoretically we should conceive of Shakespeare as having first selected a thesis and afterward casting about him for a fable, or story, and a set of characters, that would give the idea suitable and adequate dramatic illustration. Similarly, Mr. George Bernard Shaw would begin "Man and Superman" by reflecting on the paradoxical notion that woman is really the pursuer in love; Mr. Augustus Thomas would start to work on "The Witching Hour" after due consideration of the dynamic power of thought; Henrik Ibsen would preface the writing of "Ghosts" by recalling the fact that the sins of the fathers are visited on the children; and Messrs. Arnold Bennett and Edward Knoblauch would deliberately select as the underlying idea for "Milestones" the conflict of the radicalism of youth with the conservatism of age.

But I do not know whether these latter-day writers actually thus set to work. Shakespeare, as scores of critics have pointed out, began "Macbeth" and "Hamlet" by in each instance taking an old story ready-made and

then altering and rearranging its incidents and characters. Possibly this process was carried out, too, with little definite conception, or at least with no definite phrasing, of a central thought as theme. Most serious playwrights, upon analysis, do turn out to have themes; but it may be that they generally have them as children have parents—without much previous selection. So we must not insist too firmly on this theory.

“I will not say that it is a fault when the dramatic poet arranges his fable in such a manner that it serves for the exposition or confirmation of some great moral truth. But I may say that this arrangement of the fable is anything but needful; that there are very instructive and perfect plays that do not aim at such a single maxim, and that we err when we regard the moral sentence such as is found at the close of many ancient tragedies, as the keynote for the existence of the entire play.”¹

In writing “The Witching Hour,” as has just been suggested, Mr. Augustus Thomas doubtless began with the conviction as thesis that the stronger and more wholesome thought vanquishes the weaker and less healthful. In “Arizona,” however, which is essentially a story-play, he did not require so clear and concrete a germ idea. And if in “As a Man Thinks” he purposed to illustrate the poison of hatred and its antidote forgiveness, it is obvious that he added thereto certain ancillary themes, such as the modern relations of Jew and Gentile, and the double standard of morals for the sexes. This last in a sense amounts to a specific denial that this is, after all, a man’s world—a sort of reversal of Ibsen’s theme in “A Doll’s House.”

¹ Lessing, *Dramatic Notes*.

But which comes first, abstract notion or concrete incident? The question is of minor importance: what matters is that the idea be properly embodied in the event. Note the case of "A Doll's House." Its basic thought the author himself thus worded:

"A woman cannot be herself in the society of the present day, which is an exclusively masculine society, with laws framed by men and with a judicial system that judges feminine conduct from a masculine point of view." As a matter of fact, however, it appears that Ibsen's real starting-point was the account of a woman's forgery; though the circumstances and the cause of her action doubtless led to the formulation, by an inductive process, of the drama's thesis.

Absence of Thesis in Some Forms of Drama

On the other hand, it is quite apparent that Mr. Paul Armstrong had no definite thesis in mind when he dashed off "Alias Jimmy Valentine" in the course—it is said—of a single week; nor had Mr. Graham Moffat, when he wrote "A Scrape o' the Pen." The former work was, of course, merely the adaptation and expansion of a story by O. Henry; the latter a picture of humble Scotch life and character.

Plays are sometimes roughly divided into three classes: story-plays, character-plays, and plays of ideas. It seems obvious that a writer may set out to tell a story, or to exhibit characters in action, without laying down for his work any fundamental thesis. Perhaps, after all, the only story-plays and character-plays that actually grow out of

a preconceived theme are those that are also in a measure plays of ideas. Farce and melodrama—"The Deep Purple," "Within the Law," "Kick In," "Twin Beds," "Over Night," "Seven Days," "Hernani," "Virginius," "The Whip," "The Importance of Being Earnest," "Officer 666," "The Dictator"—scarcely need any antecedent themes other than the purpose to amuse or to thrill.

Other Play-Bases than the Set Theme

The playwright, then, may start his play with a basic idea—the vaulting ambition of Macbeth or the unpracticalness of Hamlet—and often such is his method. However, it is equally feasible that he should begin merely with an incident noted in real life or described in a periodical. Mr. Charles Kenyon is said to have found the entire plot of "Kindling" ready-made, in a single newspaper clipping. Less fortunate story-play writers will perhaps combine various incidents similarly gleaned, with figures eclectically assembled. As for the writers of character-plays, they will gather their men and women where they can and set them forth on the boards, often also without having connected them with any abstraction to be illustrated.

How Some Plays Were Born

"One blindingly foggy night in London," we are told, "Messrs. Haddon Chambers and Paul Arthur were trudging from the theatre to the former's lodgings. Suddenly out of the impenetrable mist loomed what Mr.

Chambers calls a 'smear,' 'a stain on humanity,' a typical London tramp, one who neither sows nor spins. Mr. Chambers and the tramp collided, but the latter was quick with apologies well worded and gently spoken. The man, whose name was Burns, interested Mr. Chambers, who finally invited him home, along with his friend Mr. Arthur, for a bite of supper. Without realizing it, the playwright had received the stimulus which was to result in 'Passers-By.' "

Almost anything, apparently, may suggest a play. Mr. Hubert Henry Davies, it is said, wishful of success in the drama, suddenly reflected that there are many admirable actresses past their prime of beauty, who need only good plays to demonstrate that they still have talent. Thereupon he set about the writing of such a vehicle and produced "Mrs. Goringe's Necklace."

Once upon a time, we learn, a man assaulted Mr. Charles Klein, who threatened his arrest. The assailant defied him, openly relying upon his influence at the office of the public prosecutor. This intimated corruption suggested the play, "The District Attorney." Magazine and newspaper reports of Congressional proceedings and of monopoly methods are said to have furnished the inspiration for "The Lion and the Mouse." The phrase "the one-man power" was what first drew the playwright's attention. "I wrote the play," he explains, "to show the terrible possibility for evil of unlicensed money-power." A remark by a well-known psychologist, that a man might be forced through suggestion to confess a crime of which he was innocent, combined with the idea of police graft to inspire "The Third Degree."

“The ideas of my plays,” Sir Arthur Wing Pinero is quoted as having explained, “are born—I do not know how. They come to me most readily when there is plenty of activity and excitement around me. They are suggested by my observation of simple, everyday things—perhaps a mere incident will become the cornerstone of a dramatic theme.”

Though he had often travelled in the far Southwest, William Vaughn Moody did not there acquire the idea of “The Great Divide.” Instead, the story came to him in a Chicago drawing-room, where a friend was relating the episode of a Sabine union that had actually occurred in the wilderness. This gave Moody his now celebrated first act—originally, by the way, Act II—from which he developed his psychological melodrama.

Certainly this sort of play origin is very different from the method of logical formulæ. The four most important figures in Victor Hugo’s “Ruy Blas,” for example, “represent the principal features observed by the philosopher-historian in contemplating the Spanish monarchy of a hundred and forty years ago.” The idea underlying “*Le Roi s’amuse*” is that paternal love will transform a creature utterly degraded by physical inferiority. The idea of “*Lucrece Borgia*” is that maternal love purifies even moral deformity.

Monsieur Pellissier points out that this rational view of the subject leads naturally to the abstract. “All the activity of the personages has as its preconceived goal the realization of an ‘idea,’ a ‘thought’ of the playwright. We have what is no longer the development of characters,

but merely the deduction of a thesis." And after Hugo comes Alfred de Vigny, ready to substitute the "*drame de la pensée*" for that of life and of action. Directly opposed to him, however, was Dumas the elder, with his gifts of movement, brilliancy, and color.

At all events, it would be hard to determine whether abstract ideas or concrete individuals and incidents form the starting-point of the majority of plays. Doubtless in many cases it is impossible for even the dramatist himself to explain exactly how his play took rise. Often enough, indeed, it has simply been "begot in the ventricle of memory, nourished in the womb of *pia mater*, and delivered upon the mellowing of occasion."

The Value of Themes

Meanwhile, however, it appears reasonable that a play that is actually developed from a definite theme is most likely to possess both the unity and the simplicity, to say nothing of the freshness, which good drama requires. Purposeless stories in and from real life are apt to be digressive; all too readily they absorb incidents and characters that distract rather than concentrate the attention. Story for story's sake has a natural tendency to become involved and intricate beyond the bounds of good dramatic art. A character-play without a theme, too, may not readily find any satisfactory unifying principle; whereas a drama that deliberately sets out to demonstrate a clear-cut basic idea will likely be held by its very purpose to organic oneness. Moreover, if there be any possible plot novelty nowadays, it will probably arise

from the sincere and vigorous treatment of a heartfelt conviction. Playwrights with definite themes, it is true, often enough go astray into the easy highroads of conventionality, but they are much better safeguarded against this defection than are the mere story-tellers of the stage. It is certainly preferable for a play to be about something.

“The ‘well-made’ play,” says Mr. H. T. Parker, “the play of artful and vigorous mechanics, from Scribe and Sardou to Bernstein and sometimes Jones—is indeed a poor thing, with its personages as puppets or cogs, with its emotions made according to prescriptions for more or less assured effects, with its dialogue as a kind of lubricating oil, with no vitalizing spirit except the spirit of the theatre as an exciting show place. A play with an underlying and informing idea, if only the idea be significant, is a better thing, however ineptly the idea may be expressed and developed through the speech and the action on the stage. The ideal play, as the ideals of the contemporary stage go (when it is lucky enough to have any) is the play that is born of such an idea, and that by the artistic means of the theatre brings it to full and persuasive impartment.”

Theme Difficulties

There are two main difficulties with regard to dramatic themes: first, new ones are exceedingly rare; and, second, once chosen, they are often next to impossible of adequate illustration. “The New Sin,” for example, was planned to demonstrate the rather novel notion that the right to live is sometimes nullified by the duty to die. However,

the fable devised is insufficient to make this difficult idea acceptable. Again, as has been frequently said, in Clyde Fitch's "The City," the powerful central scene—the revelation to Hannock of his marriage to his own half-sister—is totally disconnected from the theme of the drama, which is the influence of urban life upon character.

In the case of Mr. George M. Cohan's ambitious effort, "The Miracle Man," the power of faith for physical and moral regeneration is obviously the thesis—much as it was in "The Servant in the House," and "The Passing of the Third Floor Back." In Mr. Cohan's play, however, neither plot nor characterization is sufficient for a convincing demonstration of the thesis. Similarly, in "What Is Love?" Mr. George Scarborough signally failed to illustrate the difference between the real and the false foundation for marriage. In this case, the author was unsuccessful, it is true, largely because his own conception of the theme was vague and abortive. One went away from both "The Miracle Man" and "What Is Love?" with a distinct feeling that the playwright had undertaken something as yet beyond his powers. Excellent themes had been chosen, but they had not been adequately exemplified.

Themes, then, though not indispensable to the story-play—at least, not in the sense of abstract underlying ideas—are reasonably presupposed in the art of the drama, and in many plays may be found and concisely expressed with little difficulty. Thus, upon analysis, it will be seen that the theme of "*L'Aiglon*" repeats that of "Hamlet," and that the fundamental idea of "The Master Builder" resembles that of "Macbeth." In "Kindling" we note

how children have a right to be well born; in "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," how hopeless is the struggle of such a woman as *Paula* with a "past;" in "The Blue Bird," how happiness, which men are prone to seek far afield, oftenest lies at home; in "The Pigeon," how worse than useless is misplaced charity; in "Joseph Entangled," how eagerly people will put the worst interpretation on innocent occurrences; in "The Phantom Rival," how ill a woman's romantic *souvenirs* are likely to accord with reality; in "The Well of the Saints," how much more pleasant are illusions than grim facts; in "The Elder Brother," how second marriages beget family quarrels; in "The Thunderbolt," how prospective legacies intensify natural depravity; in "Pygmalion," how the gap between the flower-girl and the duchess may be bridged by phonetics—at least, to the satisfaction of Mr. Shaw; in "Outcast," how serious a business it is for a man to regenerate a woman's soul; in "What Is Love?" how real love, as Mr. Scarborough sees it, is that which lends to a kiss the sensation ordinarily produced by drinking apple toddy; in "The Legend of Leonora," how superior to the laws and logic of mere man is charming and inscrutable femininity; in "Magda," how impossible of adjustment are social conservatism and radicalism; in "Ruy Blas," how essential nobility may shatter itself against the barriers of caste; in "A Woman of No Importance," how unjust is a double standard of morals for the sexes; in "Hindle Wakes," how poor a "reparation" marriage may be for a wronged girl; in "Polygamy," how dire are the consequences of polygamy; in "Waste," how

an impulsive violation of the moral code may result in much waste of power and life; in "Chains," how completely responsibility chains us down to humdrum monotony; in "The Blindness of Virtue," how blind is ignorant virtue; in "You Never Can Tell," how you never can tell; in "It Pays to Advertise," how it pays to advertise.

I am aware that hasty summaries of the gists of plays lay one liable to much scornful criticism. Dramas often have more sides than one, and the appraisal of underlying ideas is likely to vary. It remains, however, that plays do often have themes, in spite of the fact that we usually cannot determine whether the themes preceded or followed the plots in point of time or were cognate with them. But, in any event, as critics are constantly reiterating, the beginner at play-writing may rest confident that dramatic work springing from a definite germ of thought will logically stand a better show of success than will that which is accreted indiscriminately from mere scraps of story and character and dialogue.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Point out the difference usually found between a theme and a title, and illustrate from two modern plays.
2. State the themes of three modern plays, each couched in two forms: first in the "plot" manner illustrated on page 10, and second in the thesis manner, on page 13.
3. Give an instance from your own observation in which the thesis-theme is imperfectly sustained or illustrated by the action of the play.

4. Have you ever seen a weak play on a really big theme? Criticise it from your present viewpoint.

5. Formulate the theme of any one of Shakespeare's comedies.

6. State the thesis of any one of Shakespeare's tragedies.

7. In your opinion, can the permanency of any of the world's great plays be in large measure attributed to the greatness of its theme?

8. What factors lend permanency of interest to a theme? Illustrate.

9. Cite themes from popularly successful plays that in your opinion are doomed to only a passing interest on account of their themes. Give reasons.

10. Give the themes—in any form—of six modern plays.

11. Express in the form of a proverb the theme of one modern play.

12. Invent theses for three possible plays. Try to avoid triteness in expression.

13. Invent three subjects for plays, but do not use the thesis form of statement.

14. Criticise any of the theme statements on page 20 that you can intelligently.

15. Tell how any one dramatic theme came to you personally.

16. What habits and practices would seem to you likely to bring about a mood productive of theme ideas?

17. Do themes occur to you readily?

18. Does it encourage originality or imitation to sit down and try to think of a theme?

19. Relate any one experience in life that has come to you that suggests a dramatic theme.

20. Try to find in the newspapers a theme suitable for a play. Clip it and present it in class.

21. The foregoing suggestion may prove to be no more than a theme in embryo. If so, develop the germ until it is expressed clearly and fully in a single sentence.

22. What short-stories or novels recently read by you disclose themes for plays?

23. State the themes of from three to five of these, briefly but fully.

24. Give a modern example of a play on a trite theme that has been redeemed by fresh treatment.

CHAPTER III

THE ELEMENTS

One other law is no less essential: it is that which indicates that an action in the theatre must be conducted by wills, if not always free, always at least self-conscious. . . . This law is nothing more than the expression . . . of that which in the very definition of the theatre is essential, peculiar, and, to repeat, absolutely specific. . . . That which peculiarly belongs only to the theatre, that which through all literatures, from the Greek to our own, forms the permanent and continued unity of the dramatic species, is the spectacle of a will which unfolds itself;—and that is why action, and action thus defined, will always be the law of the theatre.—FERDINAND BRUNETIÈRE, *Les Époques du Théâtre Français*.

It is sometimes supposed that the drama consists of incident. It consists of passion, which gives the actor his opportunity; and that passion must progressively increase, or the actor, as the piece proceeded, would be unable to carry the audience from a lower to a higher pitch of interest and emotion. A good serious play must therefore be founded on one of the passionate *crucis* of life, where duty and inclination come nobly to the grapple.—ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, *A Humble Remonstrance*.

Roughly speaking, all plays are compounded primarily of plot, characters, and dialogue. Dialogue, it is true, is wholly absent in the case of pantomimes; but then it is in a sense supplied by gesture and facial expression, much as in opera it is supplied by song, and as in still other forms of drama it appears as poetry or rhetoric. These elements—fully treated later—must now be viewed broadly in a preliminary way.

Assuming that the dramatist has chosen his theme, he has next to devise a plot, or story-framework, and characters that will be adequate to its expression. The characters will reveal the story by means of dialogue, in addition to appearance, physical action, and pantomime. The story, being for the stage, will have to be emotionally exciting. Moreover, it must not trespass upon the truth of the characterization—too far, in the case of melodrama or farce; at all, in the case of comedy or tragedy. On the other hand, the characterization must not be developed at the expense, or at least to the exclusion of, the plot. And the dialogue, always including pantomime, must, to fulfill its function, both reveal character and advance the story from line to line.

Struggle an Essential Plot Element

The action of a drama—meaning the doings and the sayings of the characters in a unified fable, or plotted story—most readily takes on the emotional quality through the portrayal of conflict. It has generally been asserted that the essence of the drama is a struggle;¹ and,

¹ Mr. Archibald Henderson, in an article in *The Drama* (August, 1914; pages 441-442), reiterates the observation I made in *The Drama To-day* that a play appeals as does a fight—prize fight, bull fight, cock fight, etc.—struggle naturally being the thing best adapted to emotional excitation. Mr. Brander Matthews had previously quoted the assertion of Professor Groos that “the pleasure afforded by the drama has one very essential feature in common with ring contests, animal fights, races, etc.,—namely, that of observing a struggle in which we may inwardly participate.” The gist of the matter, of course, as most writers on the

while exceptions have been taken to this view, they are for the most part feeble and quibbling. There are dramas without struggle, we are told, but this is true only in a special sense of the word. A conflict is made up of effort and resistance, even though that resistance may be as passive as that of a mountain resisting the climber. Without both of these elements, there can be little, if any, drama. How can there be a play of any important appeal, through which a protagonist simply wanders without purpose, meeting with no obstacle, human or otherwise? How can there be a play of any vital consequence in which the hero proceeds straight forward on his resolute course, with no let or hindrance, to the final curtain?

It has been suggested by Mr. William Archer that it is not conflict that is essential to drama, but rather *crisis*. As many reviewers have promptly seen, this is scarcely a satisfactory substitution. There is crisis in drama, certainly, but does it not invariably appear as the real or supposed turning-point in some sort of antagonism? Of plays said to contain no struggle, we are cited to "Ædipus Rex," "Othello," "As You Like It," "Ghosts," "Hamlet," "Lear," as examples. Conflict in the drama does not necessarily mean "a stand-up fight between will and will." It is not

¹ *Continued—*

drama have observed, is simply that every good play is at bottom some sort of fight.

As Mr. Chester S. Lord, of the New York *Sun*, recently pointed out to a group of journalism teachers, the same principle holds true with regard to the newspaper. "Were you to ask me to name the kind of news for which the people surge and struggle," he said, "I surely must reply that it is the details of a contest—a fight, whether between men or dogs or armies."

even essential that the fight should be a resolute knock-down affair: all men are not constituted to wage that kind of battle. Œdipus contends as best he may against the tremendous antagonism of the Fates. Hamlet hacks fitfully at the opposing circumstances that hem him in. Even the monotony-haunted clerks in Miss Elizabeth Baker's "Chains" make *some* effort to break their shackles. And it has been pointed out, also, that Richard Wilson's attempt to cut loose from the routine that is gradually subjugating his soul is typical of the underlying conflict of certain great forces that mark our modern civilization—the yearning for land ownership and the rebellion against being a mere cog in the machine. In "As You Like It" the element that most interests us, not to mention various conflicts with wicked relatives, is that war of the sexes and of wits that is the staple of high comedy today as ever. And as for "Ghosts," what more fearful, if impotent, struggle was ever waged than that of Mrs. Alving, backed up by conventional morality as personified in Pastor Manders? Her great antagonist is Natural Law, the modern prototype of the Fates, here masked as horrid and relentless Heredity. Moreover, the play as a whole exemplifies the terrific battle of the dead present with the living past. What underlies true tragedy, after all, but a helpless grapple with the overwhelming forces of destiny? Hamlet, Lear, Othello, Œdipus, Agamemnon, Brutus, Paula Tanqueray, all are involved in this strife, though it be not a hand-to-hand combat with destiny incarnate.¹

¹ Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, in an introduction, dated July, 1914, for a reprint of Brunetière on the law of the drama, I find,

Moreover, there is in all drama, not only central, but also ancillary conflict in many phases. "We start from a state of calm which contains in it the elements of a dramatic conflict; we see these elements rush together and effervesce; and we watch the effervescence die back again into calm, whether it be that of triumph or disaster, of serenity or despair."²

It appears that there are some critical playgoers who are as insistent on stand-up-and-knock-down battle as was Polonius for his jig or his tale of bawdry. Without a sheer physical fight, like him they sleep. It is neither a necessary nor a probable course, however, for the playwright in every instance to set about the illustration of his theme by deliberately choosing two antagonists and, Cadmus-like, putting them at odds with each other. But it is well to remember that conflict is nearly if not quite the first state of drama, and that it is most naturally adapted to the excitation of emotion.

Setting the Struggle in Array

Mr. Augustus Thomas is quoted in a newspaper article as thus describing the process by which a play takes form:

"There must be, to begin with, a proponent for the idea, a character who believes in it, who preaches it, who guides

¹ *Continued*—

has similarly refuted the "crisis theory." What here appears on the subject was written within a few weeks after the publication of Mr. Archer's "Play Making" in 1912. Of course, the weakness of the theory is perfectly obvious, and it can be shown in no other way than to point out the struggle in the examples cited.

² William Archer, in *The Forum*; March, 1910.

his life by it. Next, there must be an opponent. He is to oppose the idea, to bring about the conflict upon which drama lives. There must then be a third person, a person in dispute, as it were. Not so much a person for whom the first two are struggling—such as the heroine of melodrama, for instance—more a character whose life and fortunes are to be shaped, heightened, or despoiled according as the idea of the play conquers or falls. Lastly, there must be a detached character, whom we might call the Attorney for the People. He is an outsider, a doubter. He represents the audience. He sees the struggles of the proponent and the opponent. Like us in the audience, he must be affected one way or the other, for or against. Often this attorney is the familiar ‘family friend,’ a fine comedy part, because so human, so real—just like the audience that he represents.”

This is, indeed, a specific formula. One will probably not agree to follow it so closely as has Mr. Thomas in certain of his later plays. One may object, for example, to the *raisonneur* out of Dumas *films*—the Judge Prentice, the Lew Ellinger, or the Doctor Seelig. Nevertheless, roughly speaking, the procedure indicated is in part at least the one usually adopted. Reflection upon the theme—or whatever else may serve as a starting-point—will presently suggest the kind of men and women by means of whom in action the theme may be visualized. Gradually they will take shape and be delimited. As they are mentally revolved and molded, the conduct possible to them in the realm of the logical will appear. Then will come the effect of this conduct upon their fellows, indi-

vidually and in the mass. Action and reaction will result in inevitable crisis and climax. From all this must be chosen what seems best adapted to the original purpose and what does no violence to truth by producing inconsistency. After selection, proportion. To each incident and each individual the appropriate allotment of time and space. This means, of course, relative importance, which is, in turn, a matter of emphasis. Thus the drama slowly looms forth, chaotic at first, then vaguely outlined, and at length clear-cut and solid, if still unpolished.

Marshalling the Characters for the Struggle

An illustration may be of service. Suppose that the theme chosen is that vital thesis that Wordsworth embodied when he wrote,

“The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.”

What figures and what fable might we devise to give this truth dramatic expression? The opportunities are large. We will start with a worldling, perhaps recalling an individual of our own acquaintance, at least compound one from our own observations. We shall want to portray him in his attachment to the mundane and to show the consequences of his infatuation. Is our protagonist to be man or woman? Say, a man. Is he young or old? Perhaps old, because it takes time for chickens to come home to roost. How will he suffer? We look about us for examples, and observe that it is often in their children that men find their retribution. Here, then, is the father of,

say, two children, a son and a daughter. Through them he will chiefly pay the penalty of having early sold himself to the devil of commercialism. Three figures already. What will the son be like? What the daughter? Is their mother yet living? If so, how has she fared? Let us think her out of nothingness into being. Perhaps for our purposes we decide to let her die, or rather to let her never have existed. What then? We shall need other characters. Our protagonist suggests, by the highly effective dramatic principle of contrast, his counterpart: another man, *not* a worldling. Has *he* a family? Shall we carry the balanced structure so far? There is some danger in it. But somehow we think out this man and his connections.

So the process goes. The children of the protagonist suggest their husbands or wives, their lovers or sweethearts. A lover perhaps suggests a rival. Very soon we find we must stop to consider whether the as yet ghostly figures that have been evoked are all likely to prove adapted, or which of them may prove best adapted, to the original aim.

Meanwhile, the plot element is not standing still. Indeed, we can make little headway with our selection of characters without taking the plot into account and watching it evolve. Our protagonist, for example, to show himself for what he is—what he has become as a result of his worldliness—must do something. He must exhibit an attitude, say toward his children, oppose their wishes, force upon them his own plans, and so involve himself and them in the natural consequences. Each will react from a given stimulus in harmony with the prin-

ciples of his character. Of course, human nature is unfathomably complex. That is why Zola's scientific, laboratory method for its study is impracticable. But, after all, on the stage as in all fiction, simplicity must be cultivated in the treatment of character. We should avoid the old exploded "ruling passion" or "humour" plan—except perhaps in farce and melodrama—and aim to show figures that are more than mere personifications of single principles. Our people should be sufficiently rounded to appear human. Yet, if they be developed with anything like the completeness of a George Eliot treatment, no time will be left for the fable. Therefore the need of economy. Character must be shown in swift and telling strokes. Plot must be unfolded in striking and vital incident. And the two processes must be interwoven. The playwright cannot be always alternating between characterizing speeches and plot-advancing speeches. He must seek, as far as possible, to use double-purpose lines.

Dialogue

So, then, the characters having been developed in a completed story, there is still to be considered the dialogue, including pantomime. And this, again, of course, is really no separate element but part and parcel of the character revelation and the story-telling. In fact, they two have produced the dialogue as they have evolved.

Dialogue is subject to the same principles that apply to all correlated language: unity, selection, proportion, coherence, emphasis, and elegance are all to be considered.

Moreover, the dramatic line has its own special requirements. Chief of these is absolute economy. Then comes connotation, for dramatic speech constantly suggests more than it says in words.

Furthermore, the relation of speech to action must be specially considered. In fact, when a play has been finally passed upon as correct in plot and characterization, there yet remains no mean task in the mere cutting and fitting and polishing of the dialogue to harmonize with the business of pantomime and with the *tone* of the play.

Starting with an Incident

Manifestly, all these processes we have been considering are quite the same, whether one starts out to develop a definite theme or finds the first suggestion in a newspaper paragraph, and makes the aim merely that of telling an interesting story on the stage. Suppose the playwright comes across the account of a man who, after having been for many years considered dead, turns up to declare his kinship with a family that has grown rich and powerful. In real life, the claimant is regarded as an impostor. He has experienced a variegated career, including a blow on the head which temporarily destroyed his memory, and a term in the penitentiary. In the printed accounts of the trial of his suit for recognition there is some suggestion as to the characteristics of the various persons he claims as his relatives. There are glimpses of his alleged boyhood acquaintances who testify for or against him. The reporters describe especially his own appearance and manner.

One sees that here is a considerable mass of available material. In a general way the leading figures are already sketched out, together with the leading incidents. There is, probably, only the germ of a plot, but it is exceedingly fertile. Of course, the story is not entirely new. But there are no new plots. The best we can hope for, in the way of novelty, is the fresh treatment and combination of old situations.

In the present instance, from the characters suggested in the newspaper cuttings, those that seem vital to the story will be chosen. Others will be added, from any source. Perhaps some will be combined. It all depends on the plot, which will be similarly built up. We shall have first to decide whether our hero is really an impostor or not, and then whether we wish to reveal his true identity in the start, or later on. Imagination will reconstruct the boyhood of the man who has so long been missing, and we shall choose such points as may bear upon our fable. The incidents of the memory-destroying blow and the penitentiary sentence will require consideration, first as to whether they shall be employed or discarded, and then as to how they shall be used. Has our hero actually been in the penitentiary? And, if so, did he commit a crime, or was he unjustly punished? We will reflect that it is often hard to gain real sympathy for a criminal. This is a story play, and first of all the story must be a success. However, it must not be allowed to do violence to the characters.

And so we proceed along exactly the same lines as in the case of the play which had its inception in a poet's wording

of a profound truth. Plot, characterization, dialogue, and pantomime: these are our principal ingredients. They must not be merely mixed, but compounded with the most delicate chemical accuracy. Not an atom too much or too little. Perfect balance and proportion. Complete fusion and blending.

In chapters to follow we shall give each of these prime elements a separate consideration.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Do you know any one important play that does not feature a struggle?

2. Briefly state the nature of the conflict in five modern plays.

3. Do the same for five of Shakespeare's dramas.

4. Invent five themes involving struggles; state each in one short sentence.

5. Discuss two diverse modern plays, contrasting a spiritual struggle with that of a business or social nature.

6. Take one of the original themes asked for in question four and roughly select the characters in the manner indicated on page 30.

7. Define *proponent*, *protagonist*.

8. Restate, in your own language, with any changes you prefer, Mr. Thomas's formula, pages 28 and 29.

9. Make a list of at least twenty-five obstacles contributory to struggle, whether found in short-stories, novels, or plays. State the source specifically in each instance.

10. Make an original list of five such obstacles.

11. Find five such obstacles in newspaper accounts, and, if necessary, modify them for dramatic plot purposes.

12. Are some struggles essentially tragic, others essentially social comedy, and others essentially comic? Illustrate.

CHAPTER IV

THE PLOT AND SOME OF ITS FUNDAMENTALS

Novices in the art attain to finish of diction and precision of portraiture before they can construct the plot.—ARISTOTLE, *Poetics*.

The common notion seems to be in favor of mere *complexity*; but a plot, properly understood, is perfect only inasmuch as we shall find ourselves unable to detach from it or *disarrange* any single incident involved, without *destruction* to the mass. This we say is the point of perfection,—a point never yet attained, but not on that account unattainable. Practically, we may consider a plot as of high excellence when no one of its component parts shall be susceptible of *removal* without *detriment* to the whole. Here, indeed, is a vast lowering of the demand, and with less than this no writer of refined taste should content himself.—EDGAR ALLAN POE, *Mr. Longfellow, Mr. Willis, and the Drama*.

The plot is the skeleton of the play. "The word means," explains Professor Bliss Perry,¹ "as its etymology implies, a weaving together. Or, still more simply, we understand by plot that which happens to the characters,—the various ways in which the forces represented by the different personages of the story are made to harmonize or clash through external action."²

The plot of a play attracts the attention largely through

¹ *A Study of Prose Fiction*, Chapter VI.

² To this it may be added that an effective plot is one that arranges its character-forces so as to rise with progressive interest to the main crisis, bring out that "big scene" strongly, and then adequately end all.—*Editor*.

the element of suspense, or the curiosity to know what is going to happen next. Primarily, however, plots are interesting because they deal with people, the most alluring subject humanity can contemplate. We could not possibly be so fascinated by the most artfully constructed chain of adventures participated in by mere inanimate objects, unless, indeed, they had been thoroughly personified.

The Relation of Character to Plot

It is obvious that in the consideration of human nature, upon the stage as elsewhere, the vital thing is what the people *are*; and this we can satisfactorily learn only through what they *do*. Strictly speaking, character is the fundamental in drama; but, since character reveals itself so exclusively through conduct, the action has come to stand first, in all discussions from Aristotle on.

The Plot Exhibits the Characters in Action

“Without action there cannot be a tragedy,” declared the Stagyrite; “there may be without character.” By “action,” to repeat, Aristotle intended a story directed by the human will and having a beginning, a middle, and an end—what we now call a plotted story. But, on the stage, every such action (plot) must be worked out by means of the outward movements of the characters, accompanying their words. Thus the *action* of the play is illustrated by the *actions* of the players—that is, the characters.

We have seen how reflection upon a theme or an incident will suggest illustrative characters, who will in turn indi-

cate illustrative action. It is by this united means that the drama progresses. Speech is but an auxiliary—not at all essential, entirely secondary. The playwright will do well to make sure early in his labors that he is telling his story concretely to the *eye*. This is what especially counts in our day. A little surreptitious, dishonest movement on the part of a protesting “saint” will convey volumes of information on the subject of his hypocrisy. All that he can possibly say, or that others can say about him, may not accomplish half so much. The keen-eyed dramatist looks about him in life for these character-revealing motions which are of the essence of drama.

What is Novelty in Plot?

Perhaps the foremost difficulty in the weaving of a plot concerns the question of novelty. As has often been pointed out, absolutely new incidents are practically impossible. The thirty-six fundamental situations counted by Gozzi and Schiller—or perhaps only the twenty-four pronounced by Gérard de Nerval to be fit for the theatre—have probably been utilized in every conceivable grouping.¹ Goethe—as he told Eckermann—a hundred years ago gave up the search for a new story. We must distinguish, however, between the fresh and the trite use of old materials in plot building. As a matter of fact, the greatest dramatists—Sophocles, Shakespeare, Calderon, Molière—have been

¹ The student interested in this subject, which has been mentioned by practically all writers dealing with the structure of the drama, should consult *The Thirty-six Dramatic Situations*, by Georges Polti.

content to deal with familiar narratives, but they have all by their handling, more particularly through the infusion of their personalities, made the old material distinctly their own: the Athenian dramatists, like the Elizabethan, took twice-told tales and revitalized them with new meaning. Indeed, there are certain dramatic combinations that are legendary, and that one or another playwright is forever reverting to as the basis of a new play. So the Don Juan story is fish to the nets of dramatists so diverse as Molière and George Bernard Shaw. So the Faust legend affords ample opportunity to Marlowe and to Goethe. So Paolo and Francesca serve Boker and Maeterlinck and Stephen Phillips. So various authors can find various treatments for Antony and Cleopatra. So the love of a sophisticated woman and an unsophisticated man can furnish forth pieces like "Thais," "Captain Jinks," "Michael and his Lost Angel," "The Garden of Allah," and "Romance." So the winning back of a husband's or a wife's lost love is at the bottom of all manner of plays, such as "The Thief," "The Real Thing," "A Woman's Way," "The Marionettes," "Divorçons," "The Governor's Lady," "The Lady from Oklahoma," and "The Master of the House." Where one writer aims at sentiment, another attempts tragedy; and melodrama and farce spring with equal facility from almost the same material.¹

Actual dramatic novelty, then, is perhaps possible only in characterization. Old expedients must be combined for

¹ For differentiations among *kinds of plays* see the chapter so entitled, and the Glossary which prefaces this volume.

use with fresh figures. But, when both figures and expedients are trite, the probability of failure is strong. Thus, for example, Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, in his medley, "We Can't Be as Bad as All That," employed characters and situations which not only many other writers but also he himself had already utilized in other plays. There was the woman with a past, endeavoring to forestall discovery, as in "Mrs. Dane's Defense," together with the one honest man contending against general insincerity, as in "The Liars." The very combination itself had formerly been made by the same writer in his "White-washing Julia."

On the other hand, the "*Heimat*" of Sudermann, which appeared in America under the title of "Magda," set a fashion for plays wherein advanced young women who have been betrayed deliberately refuse the so-called reparation of marriage. And many of these plays, including such recent ones as Mr. Stanley Houghton's "Hindle Wakes," Mr. John Galsworthy's "The Eldest Son," and Mr. St. John G. Ervine's "The Magnanimous Lover," are quite free from the accusation of conventionality. Each is original in its characterization, as well as in the treatment of the incidents and the revealed personality of the author.

The Need for Consistency in the Plot

But if the plot of any play can scarcely pretend to absolute freshness, it can at least achieve consistency. This latter is also a quality bound up with, and dependent on, the characterization. Because it is easiest to devise a com-

plicated fable in frequently disregarding the logical actions of the people portrayed in it, dramatists of lesser rank often sacrifice consistency. The best dramaturgy, however, let us repeat, fuses plot and people in a skilful blending that sacrifices neither element to the other.

The playgoer's sense of logic is more and more easily offended these days with stage personages who act out of accord with probability. That is one reason why coincidence—more concerning which subject will be said later—is considered an amateurish expedient in plot building. For example, we are likely to resent being asked to believe that the fortuitous Colonel Smith, who turns up, in Mr. A. E. W. Mason's "Green Stockings," on the very day the spinster heroine has had his death notice published, should be able to guess, on the strength of the meagre data in his possession, all the details of the fabrication she has foisted on her relatives. Our resentment in such cases, of course, varies in proportion to the seriousness of the attempt to portray life, for much is accepted in farce that would prove unconvincing in serious drama.

The Use of Art in Gaining Continuity of Plot

Next after consistency, the plot of a play stands most in need of continuity. Its parts must be clearly related in an unbroken and cumulative narrative. We all know that the naturalistic school long since endeavored to suppress plot, to do away, in fact, with art itself, and to substitute mere fragments of reality. Arno Holz and his followers labored valiantly in this collecting of graphophonic conversations. With such men as Gerhart Hauptmann, how-

ever, a coherence was sought which should at the same time be as nearly plotless as possible and without suspicion of heightening or of culminating effect.

Monsieur Augustin Filon has almost satirized this extreme of tendency in his volume, *De Dumas à Rostand*:

“Place . . . these personages in an initial situation which will give free play to their dominant vices, their master passions. Then let them go it alone; meddle not in their affairs; you will spoil everything. No complications, no climax, nothing but the development of the characters. Above all, no intervention of Providence. . . With M. Becque, the gods never arrive, and men disentangle themselves as best they can. How does one know when the play ends? By the fact that the curtain falls. And when does the curtain fall? When the author has extracted from his characters all that is contained in them in a given situation.”

It is true that there is very little plot in real life. Nevertheless, the drama, to satisfy, must, like any other art, be finished and not fragmentary. The Torso Belvedere is all very well in its way, but even though we can appreciate a “Walking Man” by Rodin, no one would think of amputating the limbs and head of the Apollo as a means of improvement. And equally of course, if there were no value in selection, composition, and the personal equation, mere color photography would entirely substitute for landscape painting. The soundest critics have had frequent need to reiterate that a play, like a picture, must begin, not simply start, and end, not merely break off. It may be that “the constant and bitter conflict in the

world does not arise from pointed and opposed notions of honor and duty held at some rare climacteric moment, but from the far more tragic grinding of a hostile environment upon man or of the imprisonment of alien souls in the cage of some social bondage." But even such forms of conflict may be more effectively portrayed by artistic selection and arrangement of typical scenes than with the indiscriminating camera. Indeed, the first of the realists himself declared that "the dramatic author who shall know man as did Balzac and the theatre as did Scribe will be the greatest that ever lived." We are undoubtedly made so that we understand

"First when we see them painted, things we
have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
And so they are better, painted—better to us,
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;
God uses us to help each other so,
Lending our minds out."

And prominent among the tried and proved expedients of the dramatic art are beginning, complication, climax, end, —plot, in short.

Says Monsieur Filon, again in *De Dumas à Rostand*, referring to Augier and Dumas, "They saw clearly one thing that escapes our young authors to-day: that is that the intrigue is necessary, not only for the amusement of the spectator, but also for the psychological development itself. Characters are not studied like insects under the microscope. They do not even know themselves, and it

might be said that they do not exist, except potentially, until the moment when they come into contact and conflict with events or with other characters."

The plot of a drama, then, is the indispensable story formed of interwoven strands of action, wherein the characters unconsciously reveal themselves. If there are—under the sun—no new stories, there are at least endless possibilities for the novel treatment of freshly drawn figures studied from life and placed in unhackneyed relationships and environments. And—the problem of emotional interest aside—this sequence of motive and incident in which the personages involve themselves should have a definite beginning, a logical continuity, and a convincing and satisfying end.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. From any available works on the technique of the drama or of fiction select the definition of plot that to you seems best.¹
2. Try to formulate a definition of your own. Remember that a definition must include neither too little nor too much.
3. Distinguish between the *action* of a play and the *actions* of the characters.
4. Why is the play as a type more given to external action than is the novel?

¹ Full chapters on plot are given in *Writing the Short-Story*, by J. Berg Esenwein, *Writing the Photoplay*, by Esenwein and Leeds, and *The Art of Story-Writing*, by Esenwein and Chambers, issued uniform with the present volume of "The Writer's Library."

5. Does the relation of conduct to character hold on the stage as it does in real life?

6. In which realm would the relation be more marked?

7. Give one example of a modern play in which fresh handling has saved a trite plot.

8. Give examples of your own discovery of at least two playwrights' use of the same fundamental plot idea.

9. Discuss briefly the fitness of the following comparison: The plot brings the leading character in the play to a cross-roads in his career and shows dramatically the force or forces that determine his course, and then swiftly suggests the end of the road.

10. From some present-day play show how the following statement applies: The plot in drama shows by means of action a soul in its hour of crisis, what brought about the crisis, what constitutes the problem, and how it is solved.

11. Criticise some modern play from the standpoint of its handling of *struggle* as a plot element.

12. Does crisis—a "mix-up" brought to a breathless query of "What will be the outcome?"—apply to lighter forms of drama as well as to the more serious? Illustrate from actual plays.

13. What do you understand by "consistency" of plot? Illustrate.

14. What do you mean by "continuity?" Illustrate.

15. What is Realism? Naturalism?

16. Take a simple though vivid happening as found in the newspapers and show how by artistic arrangement—selection, elimination, addition, shaping, shifting of the

order of events—you could make a dramatic plot. Do not forget to make the struggle central, and indicate not only the outcome but the means by which it is brought about.

CHAPTER V

SOME FURTHER PLOT FUNDAMENTALS

It [the "action," or plot] embraces not only the deeds, the incidents, the situations, but also the mental processes, and the motives which underlie the outward events or which result from them. It is the compendious expression for all these forces working together toward a definite end.—S. H. BUTCHER, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*.

In the plot of any story, whether it be a mere thread of incident, as in the stories of the Bible, or the slow complicated movement of some modern novels, the one necessity which underlies everything is that a throng of things which happened all together must be straightened out into single file in order to be put into words. . . . Your first act. . . . is to get your material into a natural and orderly sequence.—J. H. GARDINER, *The Forms of Prose Literature*.

Before the author ventures upon the start of a play, there are several important considerations to be taken into account.

How many acts are there to be? Modern dramaturgy prefers three or four; although there are noteworthy recent examples of the five—and even of the two-act drama. How many scenes to the act? Present-day custom, except in the case of spectacular melodrama, usually prescribes but one. "On Trial," "My Lady's Dress," and "The Phantom Rival" are noteworthy exceptions, illustrating the moving picture influence. It is always well to consider material economy.

Elaborate and numerous settings, as well as extensive casts, rarely appeal to the prospective producer; and, besides, they often serve to dissipate the attention of the audience. Spectators doubtless take a passing pleasure in seeing the curtain rise on new and interesting settings; but if the play itself be what it should, scenic monotony will be readily forgiven. Everyone knows that it is a common occurrence nowadays for a slender play to be quite lost in an elaborate *mise en scène*. Recent cases in point are "The Garden of Allah," "The Highway of Life," and perhaps to a considerable extent "The Battle Cry." Mr. Edward Sheldon's "The Garden of Paradise," founded on Hans Christian Andersen's lovely story of the little mermaid, was fairly swamped by the superb settings devised for it by Mr. Joseph Urban.

But it may be noted that it is not always the excess of scenery that is at fault. The negro lad in the familiar anecdote, who became ill, explained ruefully that it was a case not of too much watermelon, but of "too little niggah." In many instances it is not too much scenery—unless the time limit be overstepped—that brings failure, but rather too little play. The author should remember that only a big picture can take a massive frame.

All the foregoing bears directly and vitally on the question of plot handling, as regards not only the finished product but also the preliminary considerations.

Where to Begin the Play

In formulating his plot itself, obviously the first question that confronts the playwright is, *Where* to begin?

Some leisurely dramatists commence like the eighteenth century novelists, if not at or before the birth, at least early in the youth of hero or heroine. "The High Road," of Mr. Edward Sheldon, follows this course, long intervals elapsing between the acts. Mr. Thompson Buchanan's melodrama, "Life," gives us our first glimpse of the protagonist while he is still an undergraduate—that is, manifestly, before he has "commenced" life.

The opposite plan is to seize the story near the crisis, to let the causes be briefly suggested in the exposition, and to produce in the whole play, as critics have told us that Ibsen so often did, only a sort of elaborated fifth act. "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" is a familiar example, though "Rosmersholm" is a more extreme instance.

On the whole, this second scheme is preferable. It makes for concentration and avoids the unessential. And, generally speaking, it gives a better opportunity for the more comprehensive character-drawing. The point where one begins, however, depends largely on the purpose in mind. A detective story, whether in print or on the stage, usually starts at what is, chronologically, almost the end of the tale, namely, the crime, and works back to the start, the motive of the criminal. In Mr. Elmer L. Reizenstein's "On Trial"—much heralded by the osteocephalous as a revolutionizer of all established usage—the narrative commences with the trial of the murderer and proceeds by stages into the past, in the detective-story manner, reverting occasionally to the courtroom, where, of course, the tale is being told as the trial progresses. In "Innocent" the hero shoots himself during the prologue, leaving a diary,

the events of which are acted out in the regular time order. There is, obviously, nothing revolutionary about this method, not even in the frequent fitting from scene to scene, as in "On Trial," a procedure in itself certainly not younger than the Elizabethan drama.

Relative Prominence of the Characters

Another important preliminary consideration deals with the question of whether the play is to have a "star" part. Formerly few dramas lacked a central figure about whom, as the story unfolded, the other *dramatis personæ* revolved. At present there is a growing tendency to emphasize a small group of significant characters, rather than merely one of them. However, the playwright of to-day who looks to the actor's interest, so far as gaining production for his play is concerned, will do well to provide for the emphasized opportunities demanded by the "star" system.

Above all, in this connection, be sure to make your protagonist *sympathetic*. He may be a forger like Jim the Penman, or a burglar like Arsène Lupin; she may be a courtesan like Zaza or Marguerite Gautier; but the utmost skill must be exercised to make him or her appealing, lest there turn out to be no differentiation between "hero" or "heroine" and villain or adventuress. By way of illustration, the student of dramatic technique would find it enlightening to consider the causes for the stage inadequacy of Stevenson and Henley's "Macaire."

Unity and Symmetry of Plot

Unity of thought and feeling, as well as simplicity, is essential to the drama, as to all good art. Symmetry, too, is often a valuable asset, though it may be exaggerated into a defect. For example, in "The House Next Door," a comedy adapted from the German by Mr. J. Hartley Manners, there are, to begin with, two homes. At the head of each is a baronet, whose household consists of a wife, a son, a daughter, and at least one servant. This elaborate balance is maintained in the plot, the son of each family being in love with the daughter of the other. In Mr. Rudolf Besier's "Lady Patricia," to cite another often cited instance, the romantic heroine and her husband each carries on a supposed love affair with a susceptible youngster. Eventually the two couples are reassorted as they properly should be; and, meanwhile, the uniform succession of balanced scenes has made for a considerable monotony.

But excessive symmetry is a far less serious defect than a lack of unity, meaning, of course, the only "unity" that matters—that of "action," idea, tone. The old-fashioned "underplot" frequently caused this latter failing. Indeed, it was often difficult to distinguish the minor from the major action. In the finished plays of to-day at least, the comic relief is not separated from the central plot, as it is, for instance, in "Secret Service," or "Held by the Enemy." Rather, the amusing characters, like the juvenile lovers, are woven into the main story.

Generally speaking, a play should elaborate only one theme or action—and a "problem" play should attempt

only one problem. Otherwise there may be a falling between stools. In Mr. Henry Arthur Jones's melodrama, "Lydia Gilmore," there is, first, a mother who perjures herself for the sake of her child, and, second, her lover, an attorney who connives at perjury to save her husband. Here are obviously two striking problems; but the play balks them both, as such plays almost invariably do.

As for unity of feeling, it is quite as essential to good dramatic composition as to any other kind. This does not mean that we must strictly adhere to the pseudo-classic differentiation of the *genres*. On the contrary, we may—in fact, nearly always must—mingle the comic with the tragic, the humorous and the pathetic, the lofty and the humble, since, as romanticists have so long pointed out, these elements are not separated in actual life. But there are distinct types of the drama, and they are not with impunity to be confused. Farce, for example, is pitched in a very different key from comedy, and melodrama from tragedy.¹ Moreover, satire and seriousness must be handled discreetly in conjunction with each other. Only the master hand can be trusted to blend them safely, as Pinero has done in "The Thunderbolt."

"The impression must be one," insisted Sarcey, in his "Æsthetics of the Theatre:" "every mixture of laughter and tears threatens to confuse it. It is better, then, to abstain, and there is nothing more legitimate than the absolute distinction of the comic and the tragic, of the grotesque and the sublime. However," the good "Uncle" added somewhat amusingly, "every rule is subject to

¹ See the chapter on "Kinds of Plays."

numerous exceptions." This one is, certainly. Nevertheless—as the same shrewd critic pointed out—when "*Le Crocodile*" of Sardou begins as comedy of manners, turns into philosophical satire, changes then to *drame noir*, at length becomes idyllic, and ends in fantasy, one is at every moment disconcerted, thrown off the track.

Violations of Unity of Feeling

In vaudeville recently there was performed a playlet which had as its main content and its sole source of interest, the grotesque antics of an alcoholic, chiefly in the repeated negotiation of a spiral stairway. Into this vehicle of low comedy acrobatics, however, was introduced an absurd and serious version of that ancient melodramatic expedient—the girl who sells herself to save her father from debt. Eventually the clown inebriate, himself enamored of the heroine, learning the reason of her complaisance, paid the paternal bills and, after an unintentionally ridiculous moment of "agony," handed the girl over to her poor but honest lover.

It all constituted an extreme instance of that violated unity of impression, that totally unsuccessful effort to blend the humorous and the pathetic, against which so many authorities have repeatedly warned us. While the crudity of it was no great matter in vaudeville, obviously it would have gone far toward ruining the chances of any full-length effort at play writing.

Certainly the "confusion of the *genres*," in almost any circumstances, must prove a dangerous pastime. Desirable and even necessary as it is to provide the relief

of humor in serious plays, to sweep an audience along through an act of obvious melodrama, and then to switch suddenly into settled high comedy or perhaps even tragedy, is to bewilder and render us impatient. The failure of "The Big Idea" of Messrs. A. E. Thomas and Clayton Hamilton was probably due as much to the fact that it skipped continually from melodrama to farcical burlesque and back again as to any of the other contributory causes. The gist of the matter is that, in such circumstances, the spectator loses all confidence in what he is observing, because the fundamental illusion upon which—as Sarcey and numerous of his faithful followers have repeatedly pointed out—the success of the theatre depends, is shattered again and again.

In the case of "My Lady's Dress," the conditions are quite different, Mr. Edward Knoblauch's entertainment being little more than a string of distinct and separate playlets. Although taken together the work comprises farce, melodrama, comedy, and tragedy, each of these elements keeps pretty strictly to its own galley. Of course, the thing as a whole lacks the full appeal of actually unified drama.

The Relations of the Genres

Almost everybody who writes about the theatre nowadays takes frequent occasion to remind us that farce is to comedy as melodrama is to tragedy; that in farce and melodrama the plot is emphasized at the expense of the characterization; and that in comedy and tragedy the characterization takes precedence of the plot. It is

evident that, of the four forms, farce and melodrama, comedy and tragedy, are respectively the nearest akin. Melodramatic farce,¹ or farcical melodrama, like tragic-comedy, is not impossible. In fact, the markedly successful "Officer 666," of Mr. Augustin MacHugh, is a case in point, as in a lesser degree is Mr. James Montgomery's "Ready Money." "Seven Keys to Baldpate," "The Ghost Breaker," "Hawthorne of the U. S. A." and "Under Cover" are examples of similar combination.

Occasionally we meet with a successful farce that depends on a distinctly comedy treatment, as in the case of Messrs. Wilfred T. Coleby and Edward Knoblauch's amusing skit, "The Headmaster," which draws its effectiveness from the display of an elaborately sketched character confronting a preposterous combination of circumstances. On the other hand, Sir Arthur Pinero's "Preserving Mr. Panmure" failed largely because of the incompatibility of its comedy subject-matter with its farcical form; and such hybrids as a rule have not proved hardy. As for a piece that wavers between farce and tragedy, or between high comedy and melodrama, it will certainly find existence a struggle.

Just what moods may be safely mixed, it is the business of the playwright to determine—if he can. I recall at least one case in which the friendly criticism of an unproduced play that mingled comedy with a type of neurotic tragedy resulted in both the emasculation of the piece and delay until another equally mixed embodiment of the same

¹ Robert Louis Stevenson and William Ernest Henley, for example, thus classified their play, "Macaire."

novel subject had been successfully acted. In all such matters we are constantly thrown back upon the significant fact that whatever persistent audiences unquestioningly accept will do, even though it be a scene like the first act climax of a popular version of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," wherein simultaneously the serious villain is shot and the comic villain is spanked!

The "happy ending" is notoriously responsible for countless abrupt changes of dramatic key. Many a playwright, as will be elsewhere emphasized, starts out with potential tragedy and winds up in sudden comedy or farce, presumably in response to a relentless popular demand. All too obviously, this is the sheerest prostitution of the art. Of course, there is slight excuse for arbitrarily killing off characters in a play that might with reason end pleasantly; but to portray clear-cut characters in an action and an environment that make for tragedy, and at the last moment belie them for the sake of a trite marriage or an incredible reconciliation, is indeed to sell one's birthright for a mess of pottage.

Perhaps the most serious violation of the unity of feeling or tone in plays is produced by the injection of melodrama into what should be comedy or tragedy. There are several latter-day writers who are chronically troubled by this tendency. Mr. Eugene Walter¹ allowed it to militate

¹ "In 'Paid in Full' Mr. Walter starts out with the very modern and very general problem of living according to latter-day standards upon an inadequate income. Much as Mr. Broadhurst does in "Bought and Paid For," and as Sir Arthur Pinero does in "Mid-Channel," as Clyde Fitch does in "The City," and as scores of lesser lights have done in scores of other plays, however,

against his success in "Paid in Full," much as Mr. James Forbes did in "The Chorus Lady," or Mr. Henry Arthur Jones in "Michael and his Lost Angel."

A Logical Plan Necessary

The plot of a drama, then, requires consistency, continuity, unity, in addition—or rather as contributing elements—to interest. It would seem manifest that these qualities cannot be attained unless the play is constructed upon a definite, preconceived plan. It has been asserted that the stage itself supplies the element of imagination by means of its interpreters, its scenery, and its accessories, and that in a sense invention really does not exist for the modern realistic dramatist, who merely reproduces actuality for the theatre. The supreme element remaining is logic. Dumas *filis*, the master logician of the stage, advises the playwright never to commence his work until he is sure of the scene, the movement, the very language

Mr. Walter here quickly throws his initial problem overboard and launches into a conventional, if rugged and brutal narrative. It is the old story of the plot-ridden characters who, instead of doing the inevitable things that would result from all the conditions according to the logic of life, do the usual things which are merely theatrically effective according to the quite different unlogic of the footlights. Before we have progressed far into Act II we have broken with our fundamental social and economic problem—one, besides, that teems with unexplored dramatic possibilities—and we are deep in the old, old melodrama of the woman tempted to sacrifice her honor to save a man from ruin."

—*The Drama To-day.*

The beginner should study, by way of contrast, the remorseless working out of the tragic theme in the same gifted author's, "The Easiest Way."

of the final act¹. In fact, the end of the play should be the goal toward which the author proceeds from the beginning. At the moment of departure he should have his eyes fixed upon his destination.

“With what fulness, with what firmness of logic,” Sarcey exclaims, “has Dumas exposed and sustained his thesis! The whole play bears its weight on this conclusion, on this final point, after which one might write, as do the geometricians: Q. E. D.: *quod erat demonstrandum*. The thesis-comedies of Dumas are, indeed, living and passionate theorems.”

Manifestly, however, only the most spiritless of mortals would allow himself to be indissolubly bound by any preliminaries of his own devising. Few persons build so much as a humble dwelling-house in exact accordance with the original specifications. We discover from Ibsen’s carefully preserved notes and sketches that he often learned to know his characters only after he had begun to reduce his scenario to dialogue, and that, in consequence, he frequently rewrote his play entire. This is, of course, the rational procedure. The dramatist lays out his ground-plan and follows it only so far as it is capable of leading him. Once he finds himself beginning to transcend it, he

¹“Dumas is, in dramatic art, the most logical man I know; his plays—I speak of the good ones—are built with mathematical precision; we can, then, with the aid of the *dénouement* which was his ultimate object, reconstruct through a process of reasoning the entire drama and show the part each element must of necessity play in the common action.”—Francisque Sarcey, *Quarante Ans de Théâtre*.

alters it to whatever extent is indicated, even to that of complete re-invention. It was thus with "The Wild Duck," the elaboration of which resulted in an entire readjustment of the original outlines.

It is safe to say, then, that some preliminary sketch—usually written down, though perhaps occasionally merely mental—is invariably the forerunner of a successful drama. Such a document generally contains a plan of the plot as divided into acts, together with a notion of the characters, and certain hints as to the dialogue. Frequently, as the resultant play takes shape, new developments arise, and there is an increase of illumination. Only the formalist, let it be emphasized, would under such conditions allow himself to be circumscribed by his own preconceived limitations; certainly not the ebullient, creative dramatist dealing enthusiastically with the infinite complexity of human life and character.

Before beginning work upon any play, accordingly, the dramatist should determine the scheme of division, the *locale*, and the importance and appeal of his leading character. Singleness of theme or purpose and, perhaps, symmetry of structure should be utilized to insure unity of idea, of impression, and of tone. Finally, there should be a reasonably definite preconceived plan; but its terms should in no case be allowed to dictate a character-belying compromise for any purposes of plot, including the "happy ending," nor in any way to hamper the full and free development of the personages and of the impeccable logic of their conduct.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. From your own observation, how many acts and scenes are used in five specified plays?

2. What changes in this respect would, in your opinion, have added to popular interest and the effectiveness of the production? Consider the questions of cost and practicability in making your answer.

3. Have you ever seen a play that degenerated into a mere blur of many successive scenes? If so, criticise it *constructively*—that is, so as to suggest improvements.

4. Show where, in the plot, five modern plays made their beginnings. Criticise any two of these favorably or adversely from the standpoint of effectiveness, or attention-winning value.

5. What modern plays divide prominence among several, or even all the characters?

6. Personally, do you like this system? Do your friends? Find out, and give reasons.

7. What were the "Three Unities" (see any encyclopedia) and how do our modern standards differ from them?

8. What modern Unities are especially important?

9. Illustrating from modern plays, show how some of them are (a) effectively used, or (b) neglected.

10. Does the saying "Nothing succeeds like success" have any bearing on such dramatic "laws" as the modern Unities?

11. Show how Balance, or Symmetry, may be over-emphasized.

12. Does Poe's dictum regarding the short-story, that

it should leave a completely unified impression, apply to the play? If so, can you give several instances in point?

13. Does the use of a clear-cut theme have any bearing on the unity of a play?

14. What forces in the audience tempt a playwright to disregard unity?

15. In your opinion, what technical defects in "Macaire" seem calculated to make the play ineffective for stage purposes?

16. Show why a carefully elaborated outline ought to help the playwright to produce a unified, consistent, climacteric, and logical play.

17. Using one of your own themes, construct such an outline for a play.

CHAPTER VI

OUTLINING THE COMPLICATION

Every alteration or crossing of a design, every new-sprung passion, and turn of it, is a part of the action, and much the noblest, except we conceive nothing to be action till they come to blows.—DRYDEN, *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*.

I remember very distinctly his saying to me: "There are, so far as I know, three ways, and three ways only, of writing a story. You may take a plot and fit characters to it, or you may take a character and choose incidents and situations to develop it, or lastly—you must bear with me while I try to make this clear"—(here he made a gesture with his hand as if he were trying to shape something and give it outline and form)—"you may take a certain atmosphere and get action and persons to express and realize it. I'll give you an example—'The Merry Men.' There I began with the feeling of one of those islands on the west coast of Scotland, and I gradually developed the story to express the sentiment with which the coast affected me."—GRAHAM BALFOUR, *Life and Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*.

"The crux of the plot is what the word implies—a cross." (I take these illuminating passages from Dr. Esenwein.) "It may be like a cross-roads, with its consequent choice of ways, or it may be the crossing of wills in individuals, or the unintentional crossing of one's purposes by some innocent person, or the rising of an evil deed out of one's past to cross his ambitions, or any one of a countless number of such complications. The types are limited, but the variations are unlimited and invite the resourceful playwright.

“In a full-length play a single complication of major importance and strength may result in struggle enough to keep the characters embroiled down to the very end. In this way minor complications will weave in and out, all contributory to or growing out of the main struggle. The one thing to be avoided, as has already been suggested, is that two complications of major calibre should war for possession of the auditor’s interest. Minor complications must resolutely be kept in their places.”

Planning the Complication

By means of such devices as are discussed in the immediately succeeding chapters, as well as by use of the ordinary chain of events in the story, the beginner will build a plot outline. Having laid out the strands of interest and motive provided by the characters in their initial situation, he proceeds to the interweaving of those strands. New incidents, personages, or motives are introduced. Something happens which changes the trend of affairs. Two or more characters coming together clash, react, and proceed along diverted courses. A loves B and would marry her. But C arrives and conceives a similar ambition. A and C contend, and D intervenes, with his own peculiar motive, to lend his influence to A. However, E and F are interested in the contest in divers ways, and they take sides accordingly. So the process goes, all designed to interest the audience intensely, as any hard-fought contest must—providing, always, that it does not lapse into mere wrangling or “sparring for wind.”

The beginner will find it helpful to examine the plot

structure of a number of representative plays. For a good American example, let us take Mr. Augustus Thomas's masterpiece, "The Witching Hour." ✓

"I snare an idea, arrange a half-dozen characters, and begin on the plot. The second act comes out in the writing of the first, and the third act develops itself out of the second." The quotation is from Mr. George M. Cohan.

Obviously, in "The Witching Hour," the theme "snared" by Mr. Thomas is—to put it most simply—telepathy. Assuming that such a phenomenon actually exists, we must at once realize its dramatic possibilities. We can perhaps fancy the author casting about in memory and imagination for characters fitted to work out the psychic theme. According to his own prescribed formula, quoted in Chapter III from a newspaper interview or article, there will be a proponent, an opponent, a person in dispute, and a detached character, "the Attorney for the People."

Mr. Thomas chose Kentucky as the scene of three of his four acts. Perhaps it was because he knew an actual Kentuckian who was fitted to serve as his proponent. Perhaps it was because the author saw in the Goebel murder case material suited to his purpose. It may be that the proverbial quick temper and readiness for gun-play associated with Kentuckians had something to do with the choice. Doubtless there were numerous other determining considerations. At all events, the playwright's mind shaped Jack Brookfield, a gambler, a man of physical and mental strength and magnetic personality, doubtless unscholarly but by no means uneducated.

Complication in "The Witching Hour"

Toward the close of a midnight supper in Brookfield's luxurious house, Tom Denning, a worthless gilded youth, comes to play cards. He is told to wait until the guests have gone. Among them are Clay Whipple, a promising young architect, son of the former sweetheart of the gambler, and Viola, Brookfield's niece. The youngsters are in love; and Clay is much exercised when he ascertains that Frank Hardmuth, assistant district attorney, has proposed to Viola. The girl greatly prefers Clay, however; and the opposition the mothers of the pair evince with regard to the match seems likely to prove brief.

Hardmuth comes to enlist for his suit the support of Brookfield. At this point, manifestly Proponent and Opponent are for the first time brought face to face. Hardmuth's moral fibre is too weak, the gambler tells him in all frankness; the attorney, who has sworn to uphold the law, is betraying his duty, and is therefore unfit to become Viola's husband. When the angry lawyer stoops to belittle his young rival for the girl's hand, Brookfield retorts, "Some day the truth'll come out as to who murdered the governor-elect of this state. . . . I don't want my niece mixed up in it."

In a conversation between Brookfield and Clay's mother, we are told how Jack's "profession" came between them years ago. The obstacle apparently still persists; Jack confesses his inability to give up gambling. We get also the play's second reference to his unusual psychic power: when he was in college, Jack used to compel Helen to write to him, merely by fixing his mind upon the idea.

A belated visitor, Justice Prentice, formerly of Kentucky, now of the United States Supreme Court, drops in. After he has astonished Brookfield by casually answering the latter's *unspoken* questions, the jurist first voices the thesis of the play: "Every thought is active—that is, born of a desire—and travels from us—or it is born of the desire of someone else and comes to us. We send them out—or we take them in—that is all. . . . If we are idle and empty-headed, our brains are the playrooms for the thoughts of others—frequently rather bad. If we are active, whether benevolently or malevolently, our brains are workshops—*power-houses*."

Meanwhile, the vapid Denning, now tipsy, has been mercilessly teasing young Whipple, who has an inherited aversion to cat's-eyes. One of these jewels Tom maudlinly persists in thrusting into Clay's face. In a moment of frenzy the latter youth snatches up the heavy ivory paper knife—which the audience has already seen Helen let fall by accident—and, striking Denning with it, kills him. Hardmuth has gone to the telephone, when Brookfield checks him, saying Clay himself shall have the credit of notifying the police.

It will be observed that Act I is largely explanatory. The main characters have all been introduced; the theme has been defined; through the visit of the Justice, an element of preparation has been brought in;—and the battle of Brookfield *versus* Hardmuth is on. Clay Whipple, the "person in dispute," has by his rashness put a weapon into the Opponent's hands. But there is another weapon, as yet unrevealed, which chance is preparing for the

Proponent's use. If for a figure we adopt the not inappropriate parlance of the prize ring, we may say that Round One ends with the advantage on Hardmuth's side. What will happen in Round Two?

Coincidence has it that the appeal of Clay Whipple for a new trial, after an unfair hearing during which he has been condemned to death, is taken to the United States Supreme Court, and Justice Prentice has the deciding voice in the matter. Brookfield, Helen Whipple, and Viola call on the Justice to plead in behalf of Clay. Coincidence again has it—this time in no feeble terms—that Helen should be no other than the daughter of Margaret Price, with whom Prentice as a youth was in love. His letter to the old sweetheart, referring to a duel he had fought with a man who had frightened her with a cat's-eye jewel, causes the Justice to reverse his determination not to grant Clay a rehearing. In fact, Prentice promises to testify in the lad's behalf at the second trial. Later, when he is left alone with Margaret Price's handkerchief, her miniature, and the perfume of mignonette, the jurist—as the clock strikes two—is convinced that the spirit of the long-dead woman has been in that room and has "directed a decision of the Supreme Court of the United States."

So Round Two in the fight is Jack Brookfield's round. But the battle is by no means over: the honors are merely even.

Again at midnight, we are in Kentucky. While Clay Whipple's friends are awaiting the verdict after his second trial, Brookfield, thinking hard, strives for a telepathic influence over the one apparently friendly jurymen. Jack

has just told the newspapers what he knows about Hardmuth's connection with the murder of the governor-elect. The two antagonists again come face to face, and the attorney threatens the death of the gambler if the "story" is published. "I'll print it myself and paste it on the fences," retorts Brookfield, resolved to thwart Hardmuth's ambition to become governor, as well as to reckon with him for the "hounding of Clay to the gallows." If the youth is again convicted, there will be an appeal to the governor. What if the governor were Hardmuth?

Brookfield's efforts at a telepathic influence over the juryman appear to have been not in vain. Shortly after Jack has learned this fact, he gets a warning that Hardmuth, who has now seen the printed murder charge, will shoot on sight. This news moves Helen to confess her love for the now reformed gambler. To his friend Ellinger—a "comic relief" character—and incidentally to the audience—Brookfield explains that, when all Kentucky is thinking about the charge against Hardmuth, the general *thought* cannot fail to reach the deliberating jury. Meanwhile, the newspaper "story" has prevented the unscrupulous lawyer's nomination for governor.

Then Clay Whipple suddenly returns—acquitted. While his friends are rejoicing, Hardmuth rushes in and thrusts a revolver against Brookfield's body. Again Jack resorts to dynamic thought, with the result that the enraged attorney, not able even to hold the weapon in his hand, recoiling slowly, says, "I'd like to know—how in hell you did that—to me."

It appears that Round Three has ended with the

Opponent down, if not quite out. So far as conflict is concerned, there is, in fact, little to carry tense interest over into the last act. However, the referee's decision has not yet been formally announced; and for this reason—among others—the spectators are entirely willing to stay on.

For the last time at the witching hour we find ourselves in Brookfield's library. When Clay Whipple is tempted to revenge himself on Hardmuth by reporting for a newspaper the former prosecutor's trial on the murder charge, Jack rebukes the young man and tells him of the mental poison engendered by hatred. In spite of the women's protests, Brookfield by suggestion cures Clay of his senseless antipathy to the cat's-eye and sends him to fetch to the house Hardmuth, whose hiding-place has been discovered by Ellinger. While waiting, the Proponent first practically buys his antagonist's release from Ellinger and then demonstrates, to the latter's profound amazement, that it is possible by telepathy to read the cards in another player's hand.

When Clay returns with Hardmuth, Jack declares his resolve to help the attorney flee the state. "Hardmuth planned the assassination of the governor-elect exactly as I dreamed it," Brookfield explains; "and a guilty thought is almost as criminal as a guilty deed. I've always had a considerable influence over that poor devil that's running away tonight, and I'm not sure that before the Judge of both of us the guilt isn't mostly mine." And Helen promises to stand by Jack as he has stood by her boy.

Simplicity and Adaptation

In considering this basic narrative, here so roughly sketched, the student will note first of all its simplicity and its adaptation to both thesis and characters. Brookfield and Hardmuth fight over Clay Whipple's life and happiness. The protagonist's advantage lies largely—if by no means entirely—in the fact that he employs the potency of dynamic thought in his style of warfare. The antagonists clash first over Viola and immediately thereafter over her lover. The attorney's profession and position give him unusual opportunities of offense and defense. It is true that luck comes to the gambler's aid, in the matter of coincidence already noted; but we feel that, even if Justice Prentice had not happened to be the man who had once loved and fought for Clay Whipple's grandmother, nevertheless the resourceful Brookfield would have found means material or psychic of overcoming his opponent. Winning the youth's freedom, moreover, the gambler wins back his own self-respect and the love of the woman his heart desires.

Three or four characters are used to conduct the fundamental action; the others are essentially minor figures, some of them, like Justice Henderson, Colonel Bagley, and Emmett, existing merely for purposes of exposition and atmosphere. Mrs. Whipple's onslaught on the mind and sensibilities of Justice Prentice in Act II is obviously under the explicit direction of Brookfield. Tom Denning comes into the piece solely to bring out Clay's congenital antipathy, and, by dying, to tie the first hard knot in the

web of conflict. Lew Ellinger, as has been noted, is for comic relief. Furthermore, he shares with Justice Prentice the rôle of "Attorney for the People" prescribed by the author. Viola is only a temporary bone of contention; her mother, too, merely a pawn in the game.

Jack antagonizes Frank, who wants Viola. Clay, who is to have her, puts himself in Frank's power. Jack gains his friend and fellow-psychic, Prentice, as a potent auxiliary. Jack strikes a knock-out blow with his murder charge against Frank. Frank in his extremity would kill Jack, but the latter by sheer strength of *thought* completes his conquest over his opponent. Then Jack rounds out his achievements in the realm of the pseudo-scientific by abolishing Clay's fear and hatred and by taking on himself a share in Hardmuth's guilt. That is the plot in its bare essentials. The student will have no difficulty in tracing its movement, the crossing of its strands, the disentangling of its threads.

It will be observed that in this somewhat extended discussion of a single example, little has been said of the all-important elements of characterization and dialogue. Both, however, may well be studied in the case of "The Witching Hour." Here we have been concerned as exclusively as possible with plot and its complication. There may be better plots in modern drama than the one here analyzed: certainly there are many worse. At all events, the student should diligently familiarize himself with the mechanism of many typical plays, to the end that the art of plotting may be mastered by the best pos-

sible means next to the actual construction of plots themselves, and—for this is important—with a view to making original plots, in due time.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

NOTE: Skill in plotting comes from much plotting, even in those who are born intriguers. Therefore practice a great deal. Do not now concern yourself with *preparation, suspense, climax*, and such other elements of good plot-work as are discussed later, but use these ideas only as you now understand them. Later you will be able to perfect these preliminary plot-drafts by revision.

1. In about three hundred words, make an outline of a plot in which the whole action is *manifestly* preparing for a great struggle in the last act, with a swiftly-brought-about result.

2. Briefly outline a plot in which the complication occurred before the play opens, and in which, therefore, the whole play is made up of the conflict of forces resulting from the complication.

3. Briefly outline a plot in which the complication occurs almost at the outstart of the first act.

4. Briefly outline a plot in which you handle the complication to suit yourself.

NOTE: In the foregoing four plots do not overlook the value of *contributory* minor complications, but do not let them in any sense rival the major complications—make them actually *contributory*.

5. Point out the complications in five modern plays.

6. Briefly outline the plots of three modern plays, showing clearly how the pivotal points are placed and how the determining forces move.

7. In "The Witching Hour" find fourteen references to the basic idea of the play.

CHAPTER VII

THE EXPOSITION

He [Alfieri] adds that he has made it an invariable rule to introduce the action by lively and passionate dialogue, so far as is consistent with the opening of the piece, and between personages who have a direct interest in the plot.—J. C. L. de SISMONDI, *The Literature of the South of Europe*.

It is Scribe's habit, in the plays which are to extend through five acts, to employ the whole of the first one in patiently and ingeniously laying out the strands of the intrigue to follow. For the time being he does not concern himself with amusing the public; he contents himself with putting it in touch with the situation. It is necessary that such and such events be known—he relates them; to a first account of them succeeds another. It is necessary that you make the acquaintance of the personages who are to conduct the action—he presents them to you one by one: this is Mr. So-and-so; he has such and such a character; he is capable, things falling out thus, of behaving himself in this or that manner.—FRANCISQUE SARCEY, *Quarante Ans de Théâtre*.

I remember reading somewhere that "the comedy of 'Richelieu,' which has held the stage for seventy years, contains action, story, character, situation, suspense, contrast, and picture, and it blends humor and pathos; while the central character is unique, sympathetic, essentially human, and continuously interesting." That description would at first glance seem to epitomize all that is most desirable in drama; though, on reflection, one might reasonably add such elements as surprise, climax, harmony, logic, and truth to life.

Undoubtedly the fundamental qualities are action and feeling. As the rhymester puts it:

“If you desire to write a play,
Then here’s the vital notion:
Each act and scene should well display
Both motion and emotion.”

And again:

“In plays, you see, Demosthenes’ old law
Once more will fit the case without a flaw.
Upon the rostrum and the stage, we find,
'Tis action, action, action chains the mind.”

The playwright, having selected his starting-point and his main characters, and having in fancy and in plan allowed these latter in their juxtaposition naturally to work out a certain progressive action, which will include a complication of motives and conflicting lines of conduct, reactions and clashes—having come thus far, he must set to work to reduce this movement to a definite plot, and then to body forth the plot in the most effective and stirring manner.

The Route of the Play

As Mr. Augustus Thomas puts it, there is the route of the play to be considered, and this route is “much like a trajectory. It springs upward and outward in a fine, easy, even curve, mounts higher and higher to a final sharp crest, and then, very close to the end, drops suddenly off.” It is the path of the sky-rocket.

“This route,” continues Mr. Thomas, “this line, is made up of short scenes that partake pretty much of the nature of the whole. Each must have its similar rise and stroke. At first, when the story is unfolding, when the audience is not yet thoroughly keyed up, and there are at the same time so many new things to grasp, these scenes will be relatively long and thin curves. As they reach the summit of the route, they will thicken and shorten. Their importance, their weight, the blow that they give, will be steadily greater.”

Let us suppose that the playwright has reached that stage of his work when, having mapped out his drama, time-scheme and act-division, and being certain that he has sufficient material for an evening's diversion, he finds that he must make a beginning in the actual writing of his play. His first problem is that of setting forth his characters and conveying to the audience such preliminary information concerning their past history as is necessary to a speedy comprehension of what is to follow. This is what is commonly called the *exposition*.

An American novelist is quoted as asserting that “there are two types of modern play: one in which the hero and heroine marry, and all their troubles are over; and the other in which they marry, and all their troubles begin.” At any rate, hero and heroine, or at least leading male and female characters, the dramatist must deal with; and they and the conditions in which they exist, to begin with, must quickly be made clear.

“The playwright has no time to lose after the curtain

has once risen," Professor Bliss Perry tells us,¹ asserting that "every moment of opening action counts heavily for or against his chances of interesting the audience in the personages of the play." Conversely, other writers on the subject assure us that it is futile to say anything of importance during the first five or ten minutes of the play, since that period will be one of disturbance caused by late-comers and by the various processes of self-adjustment on the part of the spectators. However, the whole matter depends pretty largely on the play itself. Late-comers not only will fail to disturb the audience greatly but will, indeed, be inconsiderable in number, if the drama is from its earliest moment sufficiently absorbing. It is said that, during the first season of "On Trial," spectators often ran down the aisles in order to reach their seats before the curtain rose. The play was so constructed as to grip the audience from the opening instant. Five or ten minutes of preliminary sweet nothings, on the contrary, will inevitably be accompanied by seat-slamming, programme-rustling, and the buzz of whispered conversation.

In connection with a recent vaudeville playlet, there was printed in the programme the following note: "The audience is requested to follow very closely the dialogue from the very beginning of the play, as it all has bearing on situations following later in the act." Such an admonition would seem to confess an inadequacy in the exposition. The opening speeches in this particular sketch, by the way, were no more indispensable to a

¹ *A Study of Prose Fiction.*

comprehension of the plot than is usual in one-act plays. The note was merely a bit of over-cautiousness. In good dramaturgy the only way for the author to obtain the general attention is by his skill to command it.

Methods of Exposition

An old-fashioned method of presenting the exposition utilized a conversation between two characters, perhaps a pair of courtiers or of menials, who told each other facts which they and the audience well knew were familiar to both speakers. Such a device, in fact, is employed in so recent a play as Thompson Buchanan's melodrama, "Life." And in even so carefully constructed a piece of dramaturgy as Mr. Edward Knoblauch's "Marie-Odile," we find the novice and the Mother Superior re-informing each other—for our benefit—of the circumstances of the young girl's upbringing in the convent.

Formerly, French drama provided a *confidant* for the hero, a *confidante* for the heroine, largely for expository purposes. Various critics, including Mr. William Archer, have remarked how, in "His House in Order," Sir Arthur Pinero hits upon the scheme of having a reporter interview the private secretary of a leading character—a device similar to that employed by Mr. William Dean Howells in "The Rise of Silas Lapham." Since the journalist lacks the information to begin with, we can listen while he acquires it and not feel that probability has been strained. The scene, however, is none the less non-dramatic; though the arrangement is more admirable than that of the traditional footman and the parlor-maid, who

have opened such hosts of plays by gossiping about master and mistress. Many a first act, too, has been wearisomely delayed while two characters have sat on a bench or a log, and one has told the other "the story of his life." No matter that they rose and "crossed" from time to time, nor even that the orchestra at certain emotional moments in the narrative discoursed "creepy" music; the story-telling was only narrative and not drama.

In recent years the telephone has supplied so facile a substitute for the *confidant* that its use in a new play now is likely to arouse ridicule, especially since the device was satirized, along with many others equally overworked, by Sir James M. Barrie in "A Slice of Life."

Mr. Brander Matthews¹ truly says that the exposition "is one of the tests by which we can gauge the dexterity of a dramatist, and by which we can measure his command over the resources of his craft. Some playwrights have to perfection a knack of taking the playgoer right into the middle of things in the opening scenes of the first act, with a simplicity apparently so straightforward that he has never a suspicion of the artfulness whereby he has been supplied with all sorts of information." These attainments are certainly the ones most worth striving for in expository writing: to get *in medias res* with the least possible delay, and to convey the information "sugar-coated."

Time and Manner of Exposition

The exposition belongs, of course, as early as possible in the first act. In the beginning the audience is naturally

¹ *A Study of the Drama.*

patient and willing, if need be, to wait a while for the action to get under way. Later, when the story has been fairly started, anything that obviously holds it up will be resented. Of course, the amount of exposition required varies with the play; but it stands to reason that the sooner the dramatic struggle can be broached and the emotional interest of the audience aroused, the better will be the chances for success.

It is true that a number of successful dramatists still employ something of the more leisurely method of Scribe, which gives over much of the first act to the process of simply laying the foundation; witness "The Hawk," "The Phantom Rival," and "Outcast." More and more, however, it is becoming the fashion to combine the exposition with the action, or at least to start with a scene of real dramatic movement and then to convey the needed information, disguised as action. Commentators rarely fail to point out that Shakespeare begins "Romeo and Juliet" with a quarrel between the servitors of the Montagues and the Capulets, which concretely illustrates the feud of the two houses. Thereafter the characterizing dialogue of Montague, Lady Montague, Benvolio, and Romeo proceeds apace with a conversational exposition.

First of all, then, the exposition should be clear; second, it should be brief; and, third, it should, if possible, be emotionalized by combination with the action. Failing this last, there is the device of the general conversation between shifting characters, like that which Mr. George M. Cohan employs in "Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford." The fragmentary and frequently interrupted dialogue at

least gives the impression of movement and of actuality.

An excellent example of this sort of exposition is afforded by Mr. Augustus Thomas's play, "As a Man Thinks." The problem before the writer is, first, to introduce Dr. and Mrs. Seelig, their daughter Vedah, and her betrothed, Benjamin De Lota, all Jews; and Vedah's other lover, Julian Burrill, and Frank Clayton and Mrs. Clayton, Gentiles. Second, to make it known that Clayton, who has already been forgiven by his wife for one infidelity, has since been involved in an affair with a Parisian model. Third, to convey the further information that De Lota, not only was formerly a suitor of Mrs. Clayton's, but also has served a term in a French prison after conviction on a criminal charge. The author, to the expressed delight of many critics, deftly manages the revelation of this information bit by bit, through a series of fragmentary conversations, allowing the significant facts to reach the audience at the same time that they impinge upon the consciousness of certain characters in whom they must necessarily produce a strong emotional reaction. It is, accordingly, of interest not only to know that De Lota was once a prisoner, but also to observe the effect of the revelation upon his *fiancée*; not only to learn of Clayton's second lapse from marital fidelity, but also to note the manner in which his wife receives the information. Furthermore, the exposition is skilfully unified through connection with Burrill's figurine of the dancing girl, for which Mimi, the French model, posed. As the statuette is new, all comers are instigated to discuss it and so to refer to its original, who is further identified by means of a photograph brought by Burrill.

Disregarding for the moment the question of the coincidence involved—which will be considered in a later chapter—we cannot but realize that Mr. Thomas's method of exposition in this play is masterly in its effectiveness. An even more striking instance is to be found in Mr. Elmer L. Reizenstein's "On Trial." In fact, it would be hard to cite a parallel for the gripping tenseness of the opening instant of this melodrama—the scene in the courtroom, the trial in full progress, the prisoner on the verge of conviction. While admitting that in a sense "On Trial" is a "freak" play—"a story told backward"—and therefore abnormal, we should feel nevertheless that its example is worth imitating in respect at least of this initial interest and clarity.

There is, indeed, no valid reason why almost any play nowadays, whether of story or of characters, should not set off its indispensable sky-rocket plot within a very few moments after the curtain first rises. We have passed the period of lazy devices in this process, and of leisurely and patent procedure. Exposition not only should be clear; it should be brief and *dramatic*.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Draw as carefully as you can a diagram of your conception of Mr. Thomas's "trajectory," pages 76 and 77.
2. In your own words define the *exposition*.
3. What methods of exposition, other than those noted in the text, have you observed?
4. Criticise one of them.

5. Try to suggest a fresh device for presenting the exposition.

6. Invent a fundamental opening situation for a plot; then give the exposition in outline, saying how you would present it to the audience.

7. Could your plan profitably be altered so as to work in the expository information along with the action?

8. Make a rapid but well considered draft of so much of the first act as would be required to include all the exposition.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MANAGEMENT OF PREPARATION IN THE PLOT

The liner with hastily constructed boilers will flounder when she comes to essay the storm; and no stoking however vigorous, no oiling however eager, if delayed till then, will avail to aid her to ride through successfully. It is not the time to strengthen a wall when the hurricane threatens; prop and stay will not brace it then. Then the thing that tells is the plodding, slow, patient, brick-by-brick work, that only half shows down there at the foot half-hidden in the grass, obscure, unnoted. No genius is necessary for this sort of work, only great patience and a willingness to plod, for the time being.—FRANK NORRIS, *The Mechanics of Fiction*.

There is no idle detail; not one that lacks its utility in the action; no word that is not to have at an appointed moment its repercussion in the comedy. And this word—I do not know how the thing is done—it is *the dramatic author's gift*—this word buries itself in our memory and reappears just at the moment when it is to throw a bright light on some incident which we were not expecting, but which nevertheless seems quite natural, which charms us at the same time by the fact that it has been unforeseen and by the impression that we ought to have foreseen it.—FRANCIQUE SARCEY, *Quarante Ans de Théâtre*. (The reference is to Monsieur Feydeau's "*La Dame de chez Maxim*.")

With the exposition set forth, and his chief characters introduced, the playwright is face to face with the development and the complication of his intrigue. If, in fact, he has not already largely done so, he must now proceed with the interweaving of the strands of character and conduct.

Here again logic is his chief guide. What his people are and the conditions in which they are placed will determine both what they will do and their reactions from the behavior of others. The playwright must first be sure that the personages do things that would reasonably and naturally result. But he must also select from this field of possible conduct the deeds that will develop his plot so that it may best illustrate his theme, or at least so that his story will be of the utmost interest.

At the same time that the dramatist is informing his audience of events that have happened in the past, he should be making ready for the things that are to occur in the future. This is the "art of preparation," emphasized by Dumas *fiis*, as *the art of the theatre*. I do not mean that a play should develop along a route which everyone foresees after the first few lines. Under such conditions there can be no suspense, to say nothing of surprise. But many matters that are to come up later require advance explanation, in order that, when they do happen, they may be instantly and completely understood.

In "The Whole Art of the Stage," which was written at Cardinal Richelieu's command, the Abbé d'Aubignac treats this subject at some length. He says, in the words of the quaint translation of 1684:

"But there are another sort of things, which are to be laid as a foundation to build others upon, according to the Rules of Probability, and yet nevertheless do not at all discover these second ones, which they are to produce; not only because there is no necessity they should come to pass in consequence of the first; but also because the

first are shew'd with colours and pretexts so probable, according to the state of the Affairs of the Stage, that the Minds of the Spectators pass them over, not thinking that from thence there can spring any new Incident, so that the preparation of an Incident, is not to tell or do anything that can discover it, but rather that may give occasion to it without discovering it; and all the Art of the Poet consists in finding Colours and Pretexts to settle these Preparations, so, that the Spectator may be convinc'd, that that is not thrown into the Body of the Play for any other design than what appears to him. . . .

“But the main thing to be remembred, is, that all that is said or done as a Preparative or Seed for things to come, must have so apparent a Reason, and so powerful a Colour to be said and done in that place, that it may seem to have been introduc'd only for that, and that it never give a hint to prevent [foretell] those Incidents, which it is to prepare.”

Examples of Preparation

Preparation is of various kinds. It may be an impressive prophecy, a word let fall unwittingly, a stammering admission wrung from a guilty conscience, or even a bit of “business” or pantomime. A letter is brought in and laid on the mantel, to be discovered later at a crucial instant by an involved personage. The mannerism, perhaps the antipathy, of a character is briefly mentioned at an early moment in order that, when it presently displays itself with significant consequences, we may be ready to comprehend and to recognize it. Mr. Augustus Thomas

explains how, in his play, "The Witching Hour," he prepared even his "properties" for the murder that was to be committed. "A dagger," he says, "would have been too lethal, would have startled the audience too much. So a two-foot ivory paper-knife from my own desk served instead. The audience had to learn three things about it—its position, its purpose, and its ability to kill. The first two were accomplished by having a girl pick it up to cut a magazine; the third by a woman's knocking it to the floor, where it made a resounding bump." All this preparation is merely to avoid puzzling the audience with a minor question at a critical moment—a precaution upon which may easily depend the success of a play.

In "Kick In," to cite a recent instance, not only is a revolver displayed, remarked, and ostentatiously placed in a drawer, but a hypodermic syringe filled with cocaine is discussed at length so that the spectators will promptly understand, when both are used during a fight which serves as the climax of the play.

Again, in "Under Cover" much is said in advance about a very conspicuous burglar alarm, which is to be sounded later at a crucial moment. So emphatic was this bit of "preparation," indeed, that Mr. Channing Pollock said he waited through the rest of the act to see that burglar alarm used.

The Triangle of Information

Mr. Thomas refers to what is practically another phase of preparation, when he cites examples of Scribe's "triangle of information." "In one of his pieces a priest tells a

casual acquaintance, in answer to queries as to the responsibilities of the confessional, that the first man he ever confessed had owned to a murder. Then the principal character of the play comes in, says 'Good day' to the priest, and, turning to the other man, explains: 'You know, I was the first penitent Father Blank ever had.' In a flash the audience is startled, stirred, and at the same time pleased. Little bits of recognition, such as that, make the spectator feel that he has discovered something."

On his wedding day Mr. Smith puts ten one-hundred-dollar bills in an envelope, which his "best man" is to convey to the officiating clergyman. Perhaps years afterward, at a dinner, various ministers get to naming the sums they have received as marriage fees, and Mr. Smith's rector remarks that the largest amount ever given him was one hundred dollars. Naturally Smith is startled. He questions the clergyman in private and is ready to lodge an accusation against his groomsman. The information has been conveyed by means of the dramatic triangle.

Mr. Thomas himself makes a telling use of this device in the first act of "As a Man Thinks." Burrill has told Vedah Seelig how Mimi, the model, out of gratitude to the man who had got her a place in Antoine's theatre, had dragged off her friends to the court house in an effort to free that man, when he was on trial upon a criminal charge. Some time later Benjamin De Lota, Vedah's *fiancé*, arrives and, becoming interested in Burrill's statuette of Mimi, casually remarks that he got the model her place with Antoine. Vedah, like the audience, is acquiring information in a startling, indirect fashion.

Again, in Act II of the same play, Judge Hoover, coming to the home of his son-in-law Clayton, relates how he has just chanced to see DeLota entering his lodging-house in company with a woman. This woman dropped on the pavement a libretto of "*Aida*" which Hoover has brought with him. As it happens that the audience has just seen Clayton himself mark this libretto and hand it to his wife, who went off in company with De Lota, presumably to the opera, the knowledge of her apparent infidelity is thus conveyed to both husband and audience through a triangle of information. If the co-incidence here involved is credible, certainly the bit of preparation has served its purpose well.

For still another example of this device, take Mr. W. C. De Mille's play, "The Woman." A political boss and his son-in-law have set out to ruin the reputation of an unknown woman once the mistress of a rival. This woman's identity is revealed to both the hotel telephone operator and the audience when, first, her former lover calls her up to warn her, and, a few minutes later, the boss's son-in-law calls up his own wife: both ask for the same number.

Explanation in Advance

Naturally there are many sorts of preparation other than those just cited. The general principle is that, whatever is to be abruptly utilized at some important later moment in the play—whether character, "property," or fact—must in advance be made clear and memorable to the audience, but not destructive of surprise. A crucial

instant in a dramatic conflict is manifestly no time for explaining comparative trifles. Necessary explanations should always be made while there is yet leisure, and when emotional tension need not suffer by interruption.

The thing for which the preparation is made may be, for example, simply a bit of dialogue. The most pleasurable moment in that interesting play, "The Dummy," comes when the sleeping lad, whom the unsuspecting crooks are harboring as a deaf-mute, suddenly exclaims, "I'm a detectuv!" The audience's delight, however, is dependent on the fact that already at other important moments in the play the boy has consciously used the same amusing phrase.

Again, the preparation may be made in advance of the introduction of a character: witness Ragueneau's speech descriptive of the grotesque and terrible Cyrano, which smoothes the way for an instant recognition of that doughty Gascon when he abruptly rises above the heads of the crowd in the Hôtel de Bourgogne and shakes his menacing cane at the actor Montfleury. As a matter of fact, stage heroes rarely walk on before they have been talked about.

Preparation, it will be seen, in a sense merges with exposition. This is markedly the case in "On Trial," for instance, where the courtroom prologues are ingeniously contrived to prepare us for the scenes of melodrama to be enacted before our eyes instead of being merely described by the witnesses.

Readers of plays and theatre-goers can readily identify innumerable examples of every sort of preparation. As

has been made clear, the "art" in its simpler forms at least, is one which the dramatist dare not neglect; while in its subtler phases it becomes one of the most valuable aids to the expert craftsman. First of all, the beginner must make sure that no sudden bewilderment can arise at a crucial moment when distracted attention would be fatal. He will find in practice that a frequent procedure is to work back through the play—or, better, the preliminary scenario—and to insert, where it best fits in, the preparation demanded by later developments. Ordinarily this should not prove a difficult matter. But the precaution is indispensable.

As for the more complicated forms of preparation—the kinds referred to by Sarcey in the second quotation at the head of this chapter—manifestly no rules can be laid down for their practice. It is "*the dramatic author's gift*," and it probably can be neither developed nor cultivated by any means other than the study of great models and much laborious exercise in invention.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Cite as many instances as you can of "preparation" in plays.
2. Cite one or two from novels.
3. How do the forms differ in the two literary types, if at all?
4. Invent two complete "triangle of information" situations, giving one in rough outline, the other in full dialogue.

5. Devise the necessary "preparation" for lending effectiveness to any tentative play climaxes you may have in mind.

6. In several noteworthy plays show how a lack of careful "preparation" would have proved a serious drawback.

CHAPTER IX

SUSPENSE AND SURPRISE

To sum up: when once a play has begun to move, its movement ought to proceed continuously and with gathering momentum; or, if it stands still for a space, the stoppage ought to be deliberate and purposeful. It is fatal when the author *thinks* it is moving, while in fact it is only revolving on its own axis.—WILLIAM ARCHER, *Play-Making*.

There are two theories in the theatre: the theory of expectation and the theory of surprise; in other words, some authors want the public let into the secret of the play, while others prefer that the spectators should not be initiated, but should guess if they can or be surprised if they cannot guess. I am of the latter party.—ALEXANDRE DUMAS *fil.* Note to "*Le Demi-Monde*."

The interest of the story must not simply be *maintained* after the "exciting moment:" it must be constantly ened, rising step by step, pausing only at the minor climaxes which mark the breathing-spaces, and then taking up its ascent again until the main climax is reached.

It would be only too easy to cite good examples of this ever-increasing tension toward climax. To tell in a general way how to attain it, on the other hand, is no simple matter. There is no power on the part of the dramatist that depends more completely upon a native endowment than this ability to screw up the emotional interest in a play from point to point, without ever allowing the key to slip in one's fingers and the tension to slacken.

Suspense the Chief Element of Rising Tension

The element upon which interest in the drama chiefly depends is that of suspense. Suspense is largely an anxious curiosity—emotional, of course—to know what is going to result from certain given causes and what in turn will happen as the consequence of these results.

A and B are bitter enemies whom circumstances have for long kept apart. A leaves the room on a brief errand, and B, not knowing where he is, enters. The evident question is: What will happen when A returns? Undoubtedly some form of conflict, for this has been clearly indicated. Woe be to the playwright who fails to gratify such an expectation, once he has aroused it! And when the conflict has come and gone, it must leave in its train other still more absorbing possibilities of struggle—unless, indeed, it be the end of the play.

It is not to be understood that the process of continued and rising tension must be hastened forward with never a moment of delay from the first curtain to the last. On the contrary, the element of suspense itself may often be best heightened by means of pause. To play on the word justifiably, expectation is held up—suspended. One must simply make sure that whatever delay is admitted has been carefully calculated with reference to its possible effect: it will either whet general curiosity as desired, or dissipate it.

An Example of Suspense

Supreme suspense is best revealed through a highly emotionalized situation that is held, revolved, viewed from

one angle after another, rather than hastily terminated, and that inevitably gathers force from the very process of delay, always providing the movement is constantly upward from a lower stage of tension to a higher. For a striking example consult the bedroom scene of "The Gay Lord Quex," which has been practically duplicated, by the way, in "Under Cover." In "*L'Ange gardien*" of Monsieur André Picard there is a remarkably similar instance of tension. Thérèse Duvigneau has discovered the *amour* of Georges Charmier and his hostess Suzanne Tréart, whose husband Thérèse has threatened to inform if Georges does not instantly leave the Tréarts' château. Determined to silence this strange guardian angel, Charmier forces upon her a tête-à-tête the outcome of which the audience naturally awaits with keenest interest. During this interview, little by little the true character of Thérèse, hitherto unguessed, reveals itself; and a conflict which started in mutual hatred terminates in the most unexpected manner possible. In "The Gay Lord Quex" we assist at a stubborn battle of wits, relieved at the end by a touch of chivalry; in "*L'Ange gardien*" the struggle is one of intense passions, and it is by so much the more dramatic. At the end of Monsieur Picard's gripping if morbid climax, moreover, we are left in the utmost eagerness to learn the outcome of the bizarre situation.

In this connection, too, the novice, whether aiming at the more artificial or the serious drama, may well consider the method of Monsieur Henri Bernstein, who always works up his *crescendo* to an apparent climax of revelation, only to seize it afresh and carry it on up to still loftier and

more thrilling heights. Thus, in "*L'Assaut*," the hero, alone with his *fiancée*, forcefully refutes the charges against his integrity, only to break down at what seems the grand climax and confess his guilt. Or, in "*Israël*," the tortured mother succeeds in persuading her son to call off the duel he is involved in. The curtain seems just on the point of falling, when an idea suddenly strikes him and he begins the gradual extortion of the confession that the Jew he hates is his own father. These last instances are here cited for their technical skill, without regard to the question of their artificiality—of which more later.

Surprise

This leads us naturally to a consideration of the element of surprise, which furnishes a delicate problem for the dramatist, since it depends upon a certain degree of mystification. Mr. George M. Cohan, in his "Hello, Broadway!" amusingly satirizes the professorial warnings against keeping an important secret from the audience, a procedure said to account for the failures of numerous plays. Everybody knows that, in spite of the objection raised by Lessing and other critics, one of the chief pleasures of the theatre results from the shock which follows an unexpected revelation or turn of events. "*Arsène Lupin*," for instance, is chiefly concerned with the pursuit of a certain bold and mysterious burglar; and, though the audience is kept in the dark as to the thief's identity until some time in the third act, the interest of the play does not suffer.

In the case of "Under Cover," as has been remarked, it is not until the last few minutes of the piece that we learn that the "smuggler" hero is in reality a secret service detective who has been following the trail of a grafting customs official. The validity of Mr. William Archer's contention¹ that the majority of subsequent audiences will be apprised of the startling disclosures and mechanical *trucs* of the first night of a play is certainly discredited by the success of this "daring innovation." As a matter of fact, Mr. Archer greatly overestimates the amount of advance information possessed by the average playgoer. He assures us that "the clock-trick in 'Raffles' was none the less amusing because every one was on the lookout for it." Personally, I must subscribe myself as a chronic playgoer who was entirely unprepared for this ingenious method of escape adopted by the "amateur cracksman." Moreover, it was apparent that the great majority of the audience shared in the complete surprise. One perhaps reads about such matters in the reviewer's column, but does one generally retain them in memory? As for "Arsène Lupin," the masked lift similarly utilized at the close of that similar play was also entirely unexpected. The identity of the burglar, however, was vaguely recalled in advance. And the chief trouble with "Under Cover" is precisely that the experienced playgoer, knowing that the hero of a melodrama, in love with an honest girl, cannot possibly be permitted to remain a crook and cannot be satisfactorily "reformed," and having heard mention of a mysterious "R. J." as a world-beating sleuth, instinctively

¹ *Play-Making*.

senses from an early moment what the author is at such pains to conceal—that Stephen Denby and R. J. are one and the same. In other words, for the sophisticated at least, the surprise is diminished, if not defeated. I for one would certainly be far from grateful to a neighbor at the performance of “Under Cover” who would take the trouble to warn me in advance of Denby’s real business. And I am no more grateful to the critic who details to me the plot of any new play that I am likely to have an opportunity to see performed. “Within the Law,” I remember proved quite tame to me, because I had read the plot—the principal part of melodrama—so often before I saw the production.

In another recent play in which Mr. Roi Cooper Megrue has had a hand, “It Pays to Advertise,” there are some effective bits of surprise. One comes when the apparently stern father, who has violently antagonized the girl of his son’s choice, suddenly proves to be merely conspiring with her to stimulate the youth to enterprise. Much more delightful is the totally unexpected moment when the Parisian “countess,” before whom everyone has spoken so freely on private and personal matters in the belief that she cannot understand English, abruptly drops her voluble French and starts talking in Bowery lingo.

Although “crude surprise” is, indeed, to be avoided, a story play that gave the spectator no gentle shocks at unexpected turns would be unquestionably handicapped in its bid for favor. Knowing the story of a new play before one sees it does not prevent one’s taking pleasure in it, as one often does in a second performance; but the

pleasure then is somewhat different. The main source of interest, of course, lies in watching the reaction of events upon the given characters. Still, we always take keen delight in unguessed means of escape from seemingly blind-alley situations, especially when skill has entered into the preparation for the surprise.

In "The Playboy of the Western World," for example, when the swaggering Christy Mahon, just arrayed in his new clothes, has—in words—deepened the wound he gave his father to the point where the old man was "cleft with one blow to the breeches belt," it is certainly pleasant to behold without warning the supposedly dead Mahon Senior suddenly appear in quest of his son. Fortunately, however, this shock of surprise is not kept for the climactic moment of Christy's triumph in the sports, but occurs some time before. In consequence, we have the added pleasure of anticipation in watching to see what will happen when the conquering hero is confronted with his battered "Da," and how Pegeen Mike will take the unexpected downfall of a poet-lover robed by her in romantic illusion. We have the double delight of surprise, again, when after being "killed in Kerry and Mayo too" old Mahon comes to life a second time. "Expectation mingled with uncertainty is one of the charms of the theatre."

How Much to Keep from the Audience

As for keeping a secret from the audience, this tentative rule, nowadays often cited, may possibly be of service: If the information withheld be essential to an understand-

ing of what is happening on the stage, failure is probably inevitable; but, on the other hand, if the concealment takes place without obscuring the action or unduly bewildering the spectator, it may prove a source of added pleasure at the moment of revelation.

The skill of exposition, as we have seen, often manifests itself in the way the author parcels out the information to his audience bit by bit. Meanwhile, he is keeping secret after secret, for a longer or a shorter period; and his entire play will, in a sense, have to proceed upon the same plan. "On Trial" is a remarkable example.

In all drama some eventualities are predicted, others are merely foreshadowed, while still others are abruptly presented without preparation. In many cases, nothing short of the innate dramatic instinct could be relied upon to determine which of the three courses ought to be followed.

One common failing is the practice of telling too much in advance, which generally results in useless repetitions as well as the blunting of the dramatic point. For instance, in Messrs. Paul Armstrong and Wilson Mizner's melodrama, "The Greyhound," a climacteric scene in which the detective outwits the sharper in a game of cards is rendered tame because it has already been explained just how the scheme will be worked. The reader will doubtless be able to multiply similar instances from his own experience as a playgoer.

In that extraordinary psychological comedy already referred to in the present chapter, "*L'Ange gardien*," these matters of surprise and mystification, in their relation to

the element of suspense, are well illustrated. Frédéric Tréart and his pretty young wife Suzanne are entertaining a house-party at their château, including the latter's lover, an impetuous artist, Georges Charmier, and his good-natured friend, Gounouilhac. In the course of the first act, the "good Gounou," having been mercilessly bantered by Georges, repeatedly threatens him with a practical joke by way of revenge. Presently the guests go for a stroll in the night air, after turning out all the lights by means of a switch located just inside the door. A few minutes later Madame Tréart and the painter meet clandestinely in the pitch-dark room, and presently the lights are switched on for the space of five seconds, after which someone is heard rapidly retreating along the path. The consternation of Suzanne and Georges is naturally shared by the audience. Who was it that turned on the lights? Not Monsieur Tréart, probably; for he would not have gone away. But, then, it must have been someone who has gone to inform him! Georges, however, recalls the threat of Gounouilhac and insists that they are simply the victims of the latter's promised vengeance.

The unsolved problem, of course, carries the keenest interest over into the second act; but the author is too skilful to weary his audience by a prolonged mystification. Though there is at first some difficulty in getting any reassurance from Gounouilhac, he presently makes it known that he was not responsible for the tell-tale illumination, and that none of the others of the party followed Suzanne to the rendezvous. So the thing is narrowed down to Thérèse Duvigneau, who very soon

acknowledges that it was she who manipulated the electric switch.

The judicious employment of this frank device—the careful preparation for the sudden shock of the brilliant illumination after the total darkness, with all its implications and the consequent alarm—may perhaps seem to smack of artificiality and the melodramatic. However, "*L'Ange gardien*," far from being primarily a mere story play, is in reality a profoundly subtle study in psychology, comprising, in addition to a group of cleverly drawn types, at least one full-length portrait, so remarkably complex, so *nuancé*, indeed, that Monsieur Henri de Regnier, commenting on the piece, was led to suggest that such minute characterization belongs rather to the novel than to the play. The point is that wise and competent dramatists do not scruple to devise fresh theatrical expedients and to make the best use of all the possibilities of plot, even when engaged in the sincerest and most thoroughgoing realism. The interest in "*L'Ange gardien*" passes quickly to the psychological—if, indeed, it were ever primarily anything else; but it is cunningly fostered and heightened step by step through scenes of suspense to a powerful climax and an equally moving conclusion.

Danger of Misleading the Audience

If it be dangerous to mystify your audience, it is usually fatal seriously to mislead it. To set forth manifest incitements to expect certain important developments, and then not to furnish them, will scarcely be forgiven. What-

ever reasonable anticipation is aroused must be fulfilled. Among the things the audience has a special right to expect and demand, as most writers on the drama have pointed out, are those incidents which are of such vital importance that they must not be allowed to take place off stage—what Sarcey called the *scènes à faire*. Here again the inborn gift is the final guide. What may be narrated? What must be actually shown? I remember that, when Mr. Booth Tarkington's interesting and popular story, "The Gentleman from Indiana," was presented in a stage version by the gifted Edward Morgan, the play failed quite obviously because the crucial events were not exhibited in action, but merely described in dialogue. It is a mistake to let *essentials* happen "off stage," whether prior to the play, or between acts.

Finally, in this connection, be it remembered that the audience is entitled not only to the scenes it has been led to anticipate, but also to the treatment indicated from the beginning. Many an author has really made a promising start and got no farther, usually because the temptation to let drama degenerate into melodrama, or comedy into farce, has been irresistible.

Dramatic interest, then, is best maintained and heightened by means of suspense, the very nature of which indicates delay, but delay without relaxation. Surprise also serves the playwright's purpose in this respect, though it is a means which must be handled with caution, owing to the often dangerous element of mystification it involves. Coleridge has pointed out that Shakespeare—in contradistinction, one sees, to Dumas *filis*—relies rather on

expectation in his dramaturgy than on surprise. "As the feeling with which we startle at a shooting star, compared with that of watching the sunrise at the pre-established moment, such and so low is surprise compared with expectation."¹ Nevertheless, this lower expedient, so long as it is not overdone, has its effectiveness and its legitimate place in the drama. And more than one noteworthy character-play or play of ideas has gained excellent advantage from the employment of this device as of all the others.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Commit to memory the first sentence of this chapter.
2. Make a diagram of any play plot, showing the progress of suspense and surprise.
3. Do the same for one of your own plots.
4. Point out the use of suspense in any modern play.
5. Show how augmented suspense is used to work up to a climax.
6. What do you understand by a minor climax, and the resolution of suspense, as a part of the main action?
7. Cite an instance in which the expectation of the audience is favorably disappointed by introducing a surprise.
8. What do you understand by *crescendo* in a plot?
9. Is it permissible to mislead an audience for a short time in order to effect a surprise? Support your answer by giving examples.
10. Is there any safe middle ground between misleading an audience and mystifying them for the sake of a surprise?

¹ Literary Remains.

CHAPTER X

CLIMAX AND THE ENDING

The climax must seem inevitable, though perhaps unexpected. The reader [the spectator, in the theatre] will almost surely look back and trace the movement of forces in the story which lead from the first causes up to the climax, and he demands that the climax be what its name implies—a ladder; and he is keen to note missing and unsafe rungs. It is important to remember that while one may slide down a ladder, he must ascend it step by step. The gradation toward the climax is no small matter.—J. BERG ESENWEIN, *Writing the Short-Story*.

The "highest point" or "climax" of a typical drama marks the division of the two processes out of which the plot of a play is made. These processes are frequently described as the "complication"—the weaving together of the various threads of interest—and the "resolution"—the untangling of the threads again. "Tying" and "untying" are still simpler terms; and the French word for untying, the *dénouement*, has grown familiar to us, though it is often used for what is technically known as the "catastrophe," rather than as descriptive of the entire "falling action," of which the catastrophe is only the final stage.—BLISS PERRY, *A Study of Prose Fiction*.

The tension of emotional interest in drama should be gradually increased from the beginning up to the highest point, known as the climax. To be sure, the rate of speed is not always the same. At first, the movement will necessarily be more leisurely; but as the summit is approached the pace should be quickened.

Nevertheless, as has been indicated, there are resting-points on the way—particularly at the end of the first act,

in a three-act play, and also at the close of the second in a four-act play. As a rule, however, a sort of temporary spurt—a minor climax—just before each of these minor rests is attained, serves to compensate, as it were, for the short delay to come.

Naturally, such other minor pauses as occur during the acts must be skilfully handled lest they result in actual lapses of interest and that broken-backed effect produced where the attention is alternately gripped and relaxed. In proportion as the earlier, and therefore minor, climaxes are high, the danger of flat reactions becomes greater.

The climax is "the scene where the dramatic forces which are contending for the mastery are most evenly balanced. One cannot say whether the hero or the intriguer, the protagonist or the antagonist, will conquer. It is the point of greatest tension between the opposing powers."¹ Generally speaking, it is the function of climax in a play to illustrate with accumulated and electrifying brilliancy the theme, or at least the central incident or character, by exhibiting it in the moments when the struggle can grow no more tense, but *must* be decided.

Climax and the Falling Movement

The climacteric moments at the ends of acts are often referred to as "curtains." Modern dramaturgy has shown a distinct dislike to "curtains" whose artificiality is glaringly apparent. "Formerly," Sarcey observes, in dis-

¹ *A Study of Prose Fiction*, Bliss Perry.

cussing the "*Francillon*" of Dumas the younger, "the author tried to end an act on some effective speech which gave impetus to the piece and aroused curiosity as to the next act. In this business Dumas *père* was inimitable. At present we like to end with some trifle which, insignificant in itself, suggests the image of real life."

Radicals like Mr. Galsworthy and Mr. Barker take special delight in closing their acts upon comparatively commonplace speeches or pantomime. Analysis in such cases, however, will generally show that there has merely been appended to the climax a little added dialogue, the effect of which, like the delayed final curtain of "*The Thunderbolt*," is intended to suggest this indefiniteness of reality. Of course, this is not an actual gain in truth, but simply the substitution of one artificial device for another. Dramatic structure, when it exhibits itself over-boldly, is doubtless reprehensible; its labored concealment, on the other hand, may prove equally repellent. Clyde Fitch, always on the lookout for the startling, was among the first to drop his curtains at unexpected moments. The greater the surprise, of course, the more effective the expedient. But, naturally, this device is not adapted to much repetition.

"In a tragedy the grand climax is usually preceded or followed by what is called the 'tragic moment,' the event which makes a tragic outcome unavoidable and foredooms to failure every subsequent struggle of the hero against his fate. The speech of Mark Antony, the killing of Polonius, the escape of Fleance, are examples of the 'tragic moment,' and it will be seen how closely this is associated

with what the Greeks named the 'turn,'—the beginning of the 'falling action.'"¹ Usually it is *after* the climax that we find the falling movement, the catastrophe, the solution, the dénouement, the untying of the knot.

Modern plays in four acts, with the climax at the end of the third, devote Act IV, or at least the latter portion of it, to bringing matters to a conclusion. A moment's thought will show that this decline after the high point is a necessary part of most dramatic actions and is therefore not to be confused with the bungling anti-climax, or flattening of interest, against which a warning has just been uttered.

The Ending

Doubtless the simplest way to put an end to a fight is for one of the antagonists, human or otherwise, to withdraw—as it were, to "holler 'nuff." But it frequently happens that neither of the contestants is of the quitting kind, in which case one or the other must be definitely "knocked out," if there is to be any satisfactory termination of hostilities. In the old Greek drama the *deus ex machina* would sometimes descend from Olympus at the last moment and straighten out an apparently hopeless situation by superhuman means. Later on, the playwright himself all too frequently employed a supernatural power in making his characters belie their innate selves that the story might terminate, "happily" or otherwise. But eleventh-hour changes of heart on the part of hero, heroine, or antagonist are distinctly out of fashion on the

¹ *A study of Prose Fiction*, Bliss Perry.

stage to-day. Just as there is an effort to avoid even the semblance of artificiality in the matter of climaxes, so there is an even stronger—and far more praiseworthy—determination to abolish the unmotivated and illogical about-facing that has made possible so many last-act reconciliations, marriages, and general rightings of wrongs.

The last act, though it follow the climax, should sustain the interest to the end. Generally speaking, it should be brief and compact. In tragedy there will, of course, be the death-scene, or at least its modern equivalent—separation, or other recognition of the futility of the struggle. In comedy there will be the reconciliation, the rehabilitation, the betrothal, or perhaps simply the quiet termination of a contest or an intrigue now definitely ended. In any event, there should be a disentangling of the complication, but the untying of the knot should be so managed that suspense is continued, based on doubt as to the outcome, or the manner of its accomplishment, and, if possible, re-enforced by skilfully manipulated surprise.

As has lately been demonstrated in "Under Cover" and "On Trial," for instance, nothing gives a drama a more effective ending than an abrupt and resourceful, yet wholly probable, *dénouement* held practically till the last curtain.

In one farce that comes to mind, wherein two different persons have in turn pretended to be a certain noted foreigner, with seemingly insoluble resultant complications, the unexpected arrival upon the scene at the last moment of the foreigner in person straightens matters out in a jiffy. The two impersonators are simultaneously

unmasked and rendered agreeable to compromise. This is, of course, a trite form of the expedient.

Playwrights of to-day avoid antiquated solutions like the unexpected will that turns up at the last moment and leaves the estate to the hero, as in "The Lights o' London" and others of its ilk. Arbitrary conclusions are more tolerable in farce than elsewhere. We feel no resentment, for instance, when, in Mr. James Montgomery's "Ready Money," Stephen Baird's dubiously exploited mine ultimately turns out really rich in gold; but when in a play of serious comedy intent like Mr. Thompson Buchanan's "The Bridal Path" the heroine, having unmercifully flouted and ignored her newly acquired husband, about-faces at the very first intimation that even this worm might turn, we sense the puppet-master pulling his strings.

Sarcey¹ wrote in 1867: "Real life has no *dénouements*. Nothing in it ends, because nothing in it begins. Everything continues. Every happening reaches back at one end into the series of facts which preceded it, and passes on at the other end to lose itself in the series of facts which follow. The two extremities fade into the shadows and escape us. In the theatre one must cut at some definite point this interrupted stream of life, stop it at some *accident du rivage*."

Brunetière, on the other hand, regarded such a theory as a jest and not a very pleasing one. As an excuse for

¹ Compare *Studies in Stagecraft*, Clayton Hamilton, pages 164-165. And again, *The Theory of the Theatre*, Clayton Hamilton, page 169.

Molière's illogical "happy endings," it did not satisfy the author of *Les Époques du Théâtre*. Mere concessions to popular demand,¹ which insists that comedies should end with marriages, were these terminations, asserts the second critic, adding, "If we are not incapable of comprehension, we shall have to postulate the contrary in order to have the true thought of the poet."

As for the termination that is neither of comedy nor of tragedy, but the "deliberate blank," according to Professor A. W. Ward it is a "confession of incompetence." The exponents of naturalism will, of course, quarrel with this dictum. They will insist that as life has no "endings"—other than death, and not even that—there may be none in a drama which aims at the closest possible approximation of life. They will continue the play for two hours and then chop it off in the midst of a speech, as Mr. Barker does with "The Madras House." Presumably a plotless play will no more require a conclusion than it will need a beginning. But it has not yet been generally agreed that an absolutely plotless play is a play at all, by the commonly accepted definitions of the term.

At all events, the rule in our day is that the playwright should by all means seek an ending that *is* an ending and at the same time the logical and convincing outcome of the facts of character and action that have preceded it.

Illustrating Climax and Ending

Purists are fond of reiterating that the word "climax"

¹ Compare *A Study of the Drama*, Brander Matthews, pages 195, 196, 197.

means only the series of gradations by which a culmination is reached, and not the culmination, or acme, or apex itself. Authoritative use and dictionary makers, however, fail to bear out the purists on this point. But since the top of a ladder is reached—as Dr. Esenwein suggests—only by means of the series of rungs leading up to it, these steps themselves are necessarily presupposed even when our reference is to the apex alone. A climax in drama is a high point of emotional interest that has been attained by climbing upward by degrees.

For the sake of illustration let us refer to “The Witching Hour,” which we have already discussed with regard to its plot complication. To begin with, the student will note how in Act I the atmosphere is established, and the characters are introduced. Properly enough, both elements are inherently interesting. The gradual exposition is disguised, for the most part, in characterizing dialogue. The theme is first casually referred to and presently defined by Justice Prentice, whose visit also prepares us for the developments of Act II.

When Clay questions Viola as to Hardmuth’s proposal, we scent the battle. Soon thereafter the antagonists themselves clash before our eyes, and our emotional interest is fully aroused: we are taking sides, hoping and waiting. Then comes the abrupt, swift, upward step to the primary climax: Clay, taunted to the verge of madness, kills Denning—and we are left in suspense as to the consequences of his deed.

After the curtain has risen for the second time, there is some necessary explanation of inter-act developments by

means of the conversation of the two Supreme Court justices. Pleasing surprise, with increased interest, results from the coincidence that Clay's fate now rests largely in Prentice's hands. The student will note the deft "atmosphere" and theme-emphasis introduced by the Bret Harte reference, which is at the same time by way of *preparation* for what is to follow. A much greater surprise, connected with the more significant coincidence, further absorbs us when Helen produces Prentice's old letter to her mother, telling of his cat's-eye duel. We are held in suspense for a time until the resentment of the Justice at this attempt to influence him is overcome. Then expectation leaps forward, when he promises a new trial and his own testimony in Clay's behalf. The act ending is extremely effective, with its moving and picturesque *résumé* of the theme.

In the beginning of Act III the suspense felt by the characters is passed over the footlights to add to that of the audience. Immediately the hand-to-hand fighting is resumed before our eyes, the combatants now in a death grapple. The hero who has so completely won our sympathies we now see in imminent danger of his life. We watch him fight on unflinchingly, battering down his opponent. Moment by moment more and more swiftly and certainly the *good thought* is driving out the *bad*. Suddenly, in a shock of welcome surprise, Clay bursts upon our sight, a free man. Then the main antagonism is bodied forth in a tense moment of climacteric conflict—and brute force is finally cowed by the power of mind.

With the climax of the play at the end of the third act, the author must exert his skill to hold complete interest throughout the "falling movement," the *dénouement*, the "untying," of Act IV. Even here some further inter-act exposition is necessary, but it is swiftly conveyed and is made to serve the play's thesis now so freely and frequently in evidence. Act III has left at least Hardmuth's fate in some doubt, as it has left Clay still the victim of his own weakness and of a bitter hatred. Let the student observe how the playwright utilizes these few loose ends to create fresh suspense, first, when Brookfield forces Clay to look unflinchingly at the cat's-eye the influence of which had wrought so much evil; and especially—second—when Jack sends the boy to fetch his persecutor. What will Brookfield do with his conquered enemy? No danger of our not waiting to see! Meanwhile, by means of Ellinger, the author entertains us with some skilful character humor which is not only amusing but also intensely illuminating. As Prentice has summed up the play's thesis in serious terms, so Lew Ellinger presents it from the angle of epigrammatic whimsy: "God A'mighty gives you a mind like that, and you won't go with me to Cincinnati!"

Then Clay returns with the fugitive Hardmuth; and we have the swift, telling, theses-clinching termination, definite, logical, and satisfying. Brookfield has shared in the evil thought, if not in the actual deed, that has put Scovil out of the world. Relentlessly abiding by his conviction as to telepathic responsibility, the ex-gambler determines to help Hardmuth flee the state—and the

woman Jack loves, now also convinced, declares she will aid him in this act of generosity to the relentless prosecutor of her son.

The beginner will find it decidedly worth while to dissect out and study minutely the framework of many notable plays. He will readily see that methods of construction vary widely; that there is no rigid form of climax-building to be exactly followed in every instance; that plans differ according to the purpose involved, the period of the writing, the playwright's degree of orthodoxy, and many other considerations. Nevertheless, the student will observe, the trajectory or sky-rocket path is rarely neglected by any play that wins for itself a large measure of popular approval. And such a scheme of movement necessarily involves the onward, upward, culminating course of climax.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Formulate a definition for *Climax*.
2. Define *Motivation*.
3. Pick out the grand climax (*a*) in any play of the Elizabethan period; (*b*) in any modern play.
4. In a short sentence for each, trace the various minor climaxes, in any modern plays, by which the author step by step increases the tension of interest and expectation. *This is an important question because it discloses one of the dramatist's most useful devices in bringing a story gradually to its high point.*
5. Show, in any play, how a minor (lesser because only

a contributory) climax is followed by a short period of easement.

6. Can you point out in any play a place where the dramatist lost his grip on his audience by too great a reversal of interest after such a minor climax?

7. Though climax and *dénouement* are never identical, point to a story or a play in which the resolution follows the climax so quickly that they are almost simultaneous in time?

8. What is the difference between a crisis and a climax?

9. Cite a play in which the ending is artificial because the *dénouement* has been forced—badly motivated.

10. What is your opinion of “the happy ending?”

11. In what sort of plays are we less insistent on a well motivated *dénouement*? Give examples, if you can.

12. Revise one of your old plots, in view of the principles of this chapter. In presenting it, show what changes you have made.

13. Briefly summarize the first two acts of an original comedy, farce-comedy, or farce, and then describe fully the grand climax and *dénouement*, without giving the dialogue in full form.

CHAPTER XI

DEVICES AND CONVENTIONS

The drama ought not to correspond in every respect with the scenes which we daily witness in real life. The mimic powers of the art are not without their bounds; and it is ever necessary that its deceptions should not be altogether concealed from our view.—SISMONDI, *The Literature of the South of Europe*.

The dramatic art is the *ensemble* of the conventions universal or local, eternal or temporary, by the aid of which, in representing human life on the stage, one gives to the public the illusion of truth. . . .

I shall not cease to repeat it: the theatre—like the other arts, after all—is only a great and magnificent deception. It has not at all for its object actual truth, but verisimilitude. Now, verisimilitude exists much less in the reality of facts than in the impassioned imagination of the spectators before whose eyes the dramatic author exhibits these facts.—FRANCISQUE SARCEY, *Quarante Ans de Théâtre*.

Before proceeding to a discussion of the characterization, it would seem advisable to consider certain devices and conventions by means of which plots are erected, sustained, or relieved.

Time was when a sub-plot or secondary fable was a familiar element in play structure, a story within the main story, emphasizing the latter by similarity or by contrast, but not directly building it up in a vital way, and therefore not strictly part and parcel of the main action of the play. Thus the love affair of Lorenzo and Jessica mirrors that of Bassanio and Portia, and the tragic experiences of Laertes

parallel those of Hamlet, but are not really essential to either story. Nowadays, however, it is generally assumed that neither playing time on the stage nor unity of impression allows for secondary development. Exceptions to this almost axiomatic principle are rare.

The Element of Relief

Perhaps the chief relic of the sub-plot may be found in the element of relief. As everybody knows, characters such as comic servants, quaint old people, and juvenile lovers, have long been employed to furnish a humorous or a sentimental contrast to the main action, particularly when it has been deeply serious. Neither hero nor villain, however, is at present considered above contributing to mirth, and the youthful amorists are now given something more to do in the story than mere billing and cooing.

After all, the best relief possible is that of contrast. The scenes of a drama ought to be as carefully varied as are the constituents of a concert programme, and such variety is to be obtained by changing the number of characters participating in the scenes, as well as by alternating the graver incidents with the gay.

Humor

Humor is displayed in drama by means of verbal witticisms, which retain their flavor even when detached from the text; of lines that are amusing because they illuminate amusing traits of the speaker's character; and

of situations or *contretemps* depending on the development of the story. In other words, there is a type of humorous effect peculiar to each of the three elements—dialogue, character, and plot.

Humor of dialogue is merely a facile means of provoking laughter, and is dependent solely on the author's ability to devise and to insert his jests or epigrams in such a manner as neither unduly to delay the action nor seriously to belie the characters that utter them. The plays of Oscar Wilde are even overloaded with dazzling collections of this superimposed ornamentation. We know, when we hear them uttered, that they are the achievements, not of the personages giving voice to them, but of the brilliant author only. Less clever writers run great risks in imitating the manner of "Lady Windermere's Fan" or of "Fanny's First Play."

Above all things, certainly, the dialogue humor of a drama should be original. A few years ago a play was produced in New York which boldly repeated many of the best epigrams of Wilde. Every really experienced theatre-goer promptly recognized them. And it is so with most of the "pickings from 'Puck'" with which some authors are prone to lard their stage works. In "Under Cover," for example, to quote a single instance, one notes the interpolation of that antique bit of dialogue wherein the "juvenile" with the "tango mustache" says, "Something's been trembling on my lip for weeks;" and the *ingénue* protests, "Oh, please don't shave it off, Monty!" It must be confessed that though this good old jest has been circulating in the public prints since before the days

of Joe Miller, everybody seems willing to laugh at it just once more.

Plot humor, and especially character humor, are much more valuable in the drama than is mere detached verbal cleverness. It would be easy to cite no end of examples of both, alone and in combination. Plot humor is, naturally, the principal ingredient of farce; character humor of comedy; though each is often found in melodrama, and even in tragedy. The absurdly simple-minded Sam Thornhill's remark in the last act of "A Pair of Silk Stockings," that he thought his wife knew he was "a subtle sort of chap," is a rich instance of character humor. And when the young Assyriologist in "The High Cost of Loving" greets a conscience-stricken pillar of society as "Father," we have an obvious illustration of humor of plot.

Coincidence and Probability

As has been seen, events may occur, on the stage as in life, either inevitably, as in the case of pure comedy and tragedy, or arbitrarily, as in the case of melodrama or farce. It is the mingling of these two kinds that makes for much of that confusion of the *genres* elsewhere considered. The arbitrary determination of plot, moreover, is illustrated in the matter of the forced "happy ending," the sudden and incredible conversion of a character, the overnight reform or reconciliation. Of course, at *any* point in a drama the arbitrary may intervene at the sacrifice of inevitability.

One prominent example of this intervention takes the

form of the greatly over-worked *coincidence*. There are, doubtless, frequent strange accidents in real life which wholly upset all rational courses of events. On the stage, however, the workings of chance—at least in serious drama—are regarded with suspicion. Time, that arch satirist, as Mr. William Archer and others have reminded us, has his joke out with Tess of the D'Urbervilles because a letter slipped under a door happens to slip also under a carpet. In the employment of this expedient in his novel Mr. Hardy is as usual doing the thing best fitted to his purpose. On the other hand, critics have often pointed out that arbitrarily controlled action on the part of a main character in a comedy or a tragedy, to bring about a desired plot development, necessarily renders the personage unconvincing. And likewise, if the intervention of chance be utilized to produce a major movement in the plot, the audience will be apt to lose faith and interest in all that follows.

This is, of course, merely going back to our fundamental principle of logic, here traveling under the name of probability. In real life a long-lost daughter, reared among gypsies and ignorant of her parentage, *might*, indeed, by pure chance stroll one evening unawares into the home of her unsuspecting father; but nowadays, when such an event occurs upon the stage, we grow restive and suspicious of the author's inventiveness or his good faith. Time was when important coincidence was accepted in the theatre as a matter of course, or even of preference. To-day, however, it has been for the most part consigned to that limbo of antiquated devices and conventions which,

for the present at least, has swallowed up the soliloquy, the "apart," and the "aside," along with eavesdropping behind portières and letters fortuitously left lying about.

One recalls how purely coincidental it is that Paula Tanqueray's former lover should become engaged to her step-daughter. In Mr. Augustus Thomas's play, "As a Man Thinks," it is pure coincidence that discovers to Vedah Seelig, in Act I, that her *fiancé* De Lota has been in serious trouble: De Lota *happens* to have been involved with the very model Burrill employed and whose photograph the latter is exhibiting because he *happened* to have sold to the father of Vedah the figurine of which Mimi was the original. Moreover, this coincidence is doubled—in strangeness as well as in usefulness—when it is also made to serve as the means of apprising Elinor Clayton that her husband, who *happens* to have become involved with this self-same model, is justifying her fears as to his infidelity. Again, in Act II of this play, Clayton learns of the apparent infamy of his wife through the highly improbable coincidence which leads her father, on his way to Clayton's home, actually to see her entering with De Lota the apartment building in which he lodges. Perhaps it is the effectiveness of Scribe's "triangle of information," which the author employs in each instance, that reconciles us—if we *are* reconciled—to this bold use of the arbitrary.

This explanation, however, certainly does not apply in the case of the telephone incident in Act III. For the purposes of the plot it has become necessary for the Seeligs to learn of De Lota's evil record. The only person

who could inform them, however, is Julian Burrill; but, as an honorable rival of De Lota for Vedah Seelig's hand, Burrill would be going contrary to his character if he were to turn informer. So the author has De Lota, who is alone with Burrill, start to answer a telephone call and then, when the receiver is off the hook, admit his guilt in full. It *happens* that the confession is heard not only by Dr. Seelig, answering the call on a branch instrument, but also by Frank Clayton, who is the husband of the woman with whom De Lota is involved, and who *happens* to be at the other end of the line. Thus a third astonishing coincidence is utilized, and the common sense of De Lota is belied by his stupidity in making damaging admissions into the connected transmitter of a telephone.

In Mr. Haddon Chambers's "Passers-by," the female waif who is called in from the London night turns out to be the mother of the hero's child. In Mr. Augustus Thomas's play, "The Model," the girl the Frenchman urges the painter to make his mistress, it develops, is the Frenchman's own daughter. In Messrs. John Stapleton and P. G. Wodehouse's farce, "A Gentleman of Leisure," the hero on a bet goes with a burglar to rob a house and enters the home of the very girl he has just been flirting with from the second cabin of the Lusitania. In Mr. W. C. DeMille's melodrama, "The Woman," a political boss and his son-in-law set out to ruin a woman unknown, who proves to be the former's daughter and the latter's wife. Each of these plays has won its measure of success, I am sure, not because, but rather in spite of this sort of expedient.

One hastens to admit that it is evident from the box-office records that this frequent use of coincidence—let the critics rail as they will—is condoned. In that exceedingly popular play, "The Man from Home," for example, the personage whom the unsuspecting hero makes friends with and thereafter addresses as "Doc," turns out to be the very Russian grand duke whose intervention can save the Kokomo lawyer's protégé. When presently, moreover, this fugitive proves to be the former husband of the woman who is conspiring to ensnare the hero's ward, the agglomeration of the fortuitous becomes fairly bewildering. When Victor Hugo abuses the arbitrary, as in "Ruy Blas," Sarcey explains that it is no great matter, since over "this strange fairy tale" is flung "the purple of his poetry."¹ The French critic finds excuse in the fact that "Ruy Blas" is "precisely a marvel of style and of versification . . . *Et quel vers! comme il est toujours plein et sonore!*" It would be interesting to consider the possible excuses that might be offered in the case of "The Man from Home."

In the writing of serious plays, by all means the beginner should avoid the fortuitous coincidence that makes dramatic problem-solving over-easy.

Generally speaking, the expedient may be safely employed in the serious modern realistic drama only—to adapt Sarcey's familiar and often quoted principle—when it brings about comparatively unimportant changes. Monsieur Tristan Bernard, speaking of his play "*Le Danseur inconnu*," observes that "the events in it are ordered some-

¹ Compare *A Study of the Drama*, Brander Matthews, page 207.

times through the will of the personages, as in *comédie de caractère*, sometimes by pure chance, as in *comédie romanesque*. And is it not thus, after all," he queries, "that it happens in life, wherein we labor to construct our destiny with our own energies and the collaboration, benevolent or malign, of fate?" Because it is thus in life, however, by no means makes it necessarily correct in art.

Certainly, in the more artificial forms—the variants of farce and melodrama—coincidence may be used much more freely. Time was—and that not so very long ago—when the romantic costume melodrama, with all its extravagances of arbitrary plotting, was the most popular form of stage amusement. To-day, however, when the fashion calls for an approximation of life, unexaggerated, unemphasized, even unselected, the coincidental is largely under the ban. First-nighters show their sophistication by laughing at it, in their sleeves if not openly, as they have been known to laugh at the use of the "apart," the "aside," and the soliloquy.

Weak Illusions

What future decades will find amusing in the other conventions of our present-day stage, it is, of course, impossible to predict. Undoubtedly, however, we are accepting quite soberly what will eventually serve as food for ridicule. We still allow ourselves to be startled, thrilled, emotionally played upon by all manner of childlike devices, some—but not all—depending upon an elusive

novelty for their effect. Sophisticated audiences of to-day that scorn the soliloquy, for instance, yet find little difficulty in accepting such an expedient as that employed in Mr. Edgar Wallace's "Switchboard," wherein an exchange girl hears, presumably over the telephone, the remarks of numerous actors concealed behind a thin curtain. What seems most to matter is whether the particular device happens to be in or out of fashion.

I know of few more interesting subjects connected with the stage than that of the conventions on which the illusion of the theatre is based—a subject, by the way, which Sarcey has treated at length in his "*Quarante Ans de Théâtre.*" How these conventions vary in different lands and periods, we need not here discuss. A single instance, however, may be cited. In Monsieur Rostand's miracle play, "*La Samaritaine,*" there is a scene in which various disciples hold a discussion intended to be delivered in a "stage whisper." When the Master, who is across the stage, breaks into the conversation, they are amazed at His presumably miraculous hearing. As the spectators have heard very plainly all that has been said, however, they do not share in the disciples' astonishment. Instead, at least here in America, a discordant titter passes over the audience, when Peter exclaims somewhat grotesquely, "He hears everything!"

Trite Expedients

There is a manifest distinction between stage *conventions* and stage *conventionalities*. The former are largely

necessitated by the physical conditions of theatrical representation. The latter, however, are chiefly the result of a lazy uninventiveness on the part of playwrights who prefer following beaten paths to striking out into newer territory. By dint of much repetition a vast number of stage expedients have become thoroughly hackneyed and, for the time being at least, should be regarded as taboo by amateur dramatists. Persecuted foundlings who turn out to be noblemen's heirs, hidden wills, dropped or miscarried letters, and innocent ladies caught in villains' apartments, are no longer so useful for dramatic purposes as they were when they were new—if, indeed, they ever were new. Still, they are constantly turning up, even in our modern realistic drama. The marked libretto that Elinor Clayton drops in the second act of "As a Man Thinks" is probably only a variant of the lost handkerchief or fan of ancient vintage. In "The Thunderbolt" Sir Arthur Pinero boldly—and superbly—deals with the stolen will and the cross-examined woman.

Perhaps, after all, it is impossible to go very far in drama without being obliged to make use of one or more antiques. In that event, it were doubtless better to select such as have not been especially overworked in recent days. When, for example, "The Lady from Oklahoma" was produced, it was found to deal with two conventionalities that had already been exploited during the season: the neglected wife who wins back her successful husband's interest, as in "The Governor's Lady;" and the faded woman who regains her bloom artificially, as in "Years of Discretion." The fact that "The Lady from Oklahoma"

had been written before either of the other pieces did not save it from failure. That, however, was the author's misfortune, not his fault.

The following satirical recipes for conventional plays, taken from the New York *Dramatic Mirror*, may well serve to warn the beginner with regard to several dramatic schemes he should sedulously avoid:

POLITICAL PLAY—A boss, thick-necked and large of stature, who talks in a bullying tone and smokes fat cigars at an angle of forty-five degrees, and who in the end is completely outwitted by a resourceful little girl weighing about one hundred and ten pounds.

COMEDY OF MANNERS—New twist given to Oscar Wilde's epigrams. At least two butlers. In tea scenes characters must wear summery clothes and discuss with just a trace of malice the approaching nuptials of Lady Vere de Vera Rich. In last act dress clothes are essential.

AMERICAN PROBLEM PLAY—Woman must visit man's apartment at night unescorted. Extravagance of the wife discovered at 10:15, after which there must follow a stormy repetition of "Why did you do it?" until the climax is reached by the demolition of the chamber door.

AMERICAN MELODRAMA—One Colt automatic. One stupid and heartless detective. One or more slangy women characters, who furnish comedy relief. Theme to concern the chief form of whatever vice or corruption is occupying the immediate attention of the public.

RURAL COMEDY OF PRESENT TIME—A broken-down emporium run by a lazy, shiftless individual in the first

act. A well-kept emporium run by an energetic, ambitious individual in the last act. Reason? A good-looking vixen who knows the art of flattery.

RURAL COMEDY OF PAST TIME—City chap with riding breeches. One mortgage on the farm. A ruined daughter and an erring son. One saw-mill.

If it is hard to avoid the trite in the construction of plots, it is possible to make up for such defects by means of novelty—more especially of *truth*—of characterization. Plots are necessarily artificial, but human nature is always new and always a fact. Seeking reality wherever he can find it, the latter-day playwright can follow no better course than that outlined by Stevenson in one of his essays. "Let him," writes this high authority, "choose a motive, whether of character or of passion; carefully construct his plot so that every incident is an illustration of the motive, and every property employed shall bear to it a near relation of congruity or contrast; avoid a sub-plot, unless, as sometimes in Shakespeare, the sub-plot be a reversion or complement of the main intrigue; . . . and allow no . . . character in the course of the dialogue to utter one sentence that is not part and parcel of the business of the story." And, as the root of the whole matter, continues R. L. S., whose words concern the novel but apply equally to the play, it is to be borne in mind that the work "is not a transcript of life, to be judged by its exactitude, but a simplification of some side or point of life, to stand or fall by its significant simplicity."

"The germ of a story with him," asserts Henry James

in writing of Turgéniéff," was never an affair of plot—that was the last thing he thought of: it was the representation of certain persons." The critic goes on to explain, however, that Turgéniéff realized his own defect—want of "architecture," or composition. The playwright is rather more dependent upon this element of "architecture" than is the novelist; but he is none the less obligated—if he takes his art at all seriously—to the utmost veracity in "the representation of certain persons."

It is obvious that the skilful dramatist will make full use of the many legitimate devices of his craft. He will, for instance, provide the element of relief and variety through humor and especially through contrast. He will bear in mind that humor of plot or of character is usually the most telling and certainly the most *dramatic*. He will learn to look askance on the overworked coincidence, which so often mars the logic of characterization, and which is generally regarded as "old-fashioned." In fact, he will—so long as our modern realistic attitude prevails—ignore illusion-shattering expedients of every sort and devote himself to those conventions which are the foundation of verisimilitude. Above all things, the painstaking playwright will scrupulously avoid hackneyed themes, situations, and types, and depend for his material upon first-hand observation of human nature.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. From any plays, give examples of the distinctions between humor of dialogue, of plot, and of character.

2. Do the same by giving original examples. Repeat this exercise at your own option, or that of the instructor.

3. Substitute a more natural and convincing device for any one of the weak coincidences cited in this chapter.

4. Cite an instance you have observed or read in a play in which mere coincidence is made more plausible by fresh and clever handling.

NOTE: The student of drama can undertake no more helpful exercise than the practice of inventing fresh devices to take the place of lame coincidences in plays seen, read, and offered in the class-room. This exercise should be continued until real invention is shown.

5. Devise a plan to do away with the necessity for the use of (*a*) the "aside," (*b*) the "apart," (*c*) the "soliloquy," in some definite case you may either invent or cite from a play.

CHAPTER XII

THE CHARACTERS

There is a gallery of them, and of all that gallery I may say that I know the tone of the voice, and the color of the hair, every flame of the eye, and the very clothes they wear. Of each man I could assert whether he would have said these words or the other words; of every woman, whether she would then have smiled or so have frowned. When I shall feel that this intimacy ceases, then I shall know that the old horse should be turned out to grass.—ANTHONY TROLLOPE, *Autobiography*.

The characters must be real, and such as might be met with in actual life, or, at least, the natural developments of such people as any of us might meet; their actions must be natural and consistent; the conditions of place, of manners, and of thought must be drawn from personal observation. To take an extreme case: a young lady brought up in a quiet country village should avoid descriptions of garrison life; a writer whose friends and personal experiences belong to what we call the lower middle class should carefully avoid introducing his characters into Society.—SIR WALTER BESANT, *The Art of Fiction*.

Since characters in plays are supposed to be drawn from real life, the playwright's success will obviously depend, first, on his powers of observation; and, second, on his ability to portray what he observes. Neither of these qualifications can be acquired through the study of rules. Hundreds of thousands of American collegians have had some four years of experience with the amusing types that animate "The College Widow," but only Mr. George Ade has had the gifts and the enterprise to reproduce them for

the stage. "Why couldn't I have done that?" is the question the amateur writer invariably asks himself when he has come in contact with so simple, yet so veracious and just a piece of work as the character drawing in "The County Chairman" or in "The Pigeon" or in "Outcast." Oftenest the reason lies in an inherent lack of aptitude. At any rate, without the ability to observe and the skill to reproduce, no writer can hope to learn the processes of character portrayal. One can, however, profit by certain general suggestions.

Aristotle called action the essential in drama; but, just as in literature, form, which is essential, is less important than content, so it is with story in the drama, as compared with the characterization. This is, of course, truer in the case of comedy and tragedy—character plays—than in that of melodrama and farce—story plays; though it is in any event next to impossible to insist upon either element alone, simply because character is necessarily portrayed in action, and action is ever resultant upon character.

Planning the List of Characters

In devising a drama the author will probably determine early whether he will use few or many characters, and whether they are to be portrayed in detail or merely sketched. Character plays require more, story plays fewer elaborately drawn figures. A farce or a melodrama can get along very nicely with a group of easily recognized types. A comedy or a tragedy will want at least one or more highly individualized personages to give it a reason

for being. And farce and melodrama will, in all likelihood, be lifted into the realm of comedy and tragedy by the development of the types into individuals, of outlines into portraits. Of this distinction, more presently.

It has often been pointed out that the drama relies for permanency upon its characterizations. There are, of course, some plays of plot enacted by mere puppets, which flourish for a season—or oftener less. There are other plays of slight story-interest which endure because of the real men and women that animate them. Literary qualities aside, “A New Way to Pay Old Debts” is important chiefly as the setting for Sir Giles Overreach. So “Caste” emerges from the mass of Victorian stage conventionality because of the Eccles family and their friends. What were “Liberty Hall” without the lovable old bookseller? Or “The Drone” without that preposterous fraud, Daniel Murray? “Hindle Wakes” is valuable for its headstrong Lancashire folk. “Pomander Walk” we love for its crusty admiral, its pompous butler, its figures out of Elia. “Chains” is fundamentally a human document. Truly we cherish the classics much more for their soul-portraits than for their antique fables.

The Place of Realism in Characterization

Latter-day realism and naturalism, indeed, have tended toward over-emphasis upon the element of characterization. Disdaining all the artifices of the theatre, the realistic playwright has sought a photographic reproduction of nature. Artistic selection, it has been argued, has

become excessively facile and therefore self-conscious; we must "return to nature" and throw technique to the dogs. As we have seen, to such reformers whatever savors of the theatre, even by remote suggestion, is to be avoided as the pestilence. There must be no more climax and solution; no more situation and plot; no hero or heroine even; no beginning and no end. The recipe is: Take two hours out of real life and put them—absolutely without change—upon the stage. Of course, a million chances to one there will be no plot. By the same token there will be an immense surplus of the insignificant in thought, word, and deed. This will be so, even though a crucial two hours be chosen. And it is doubtful whether extreme naturalism would really permit such a choice. Plot being eliminated, at any rate characterization will remain. Obviously it too will be without selection, if it is orthodox. And it is equally obvious that plays so written will hardly succeed in getting anywhere.

Unquestionably there has been a great need for this sort of reaction. Unquestionably, too, it provides its own automatic check. The excesses of romanticism and the artificial have been as notorious as the excesses of classicism and the artificial. The "return to nature" is the only remedy in either case. And after we have had a surfeit of nature, there will always be the return to *art*. After all, humanity loves to improve on the natural; to set the imagination to work; to combine, select, proportion; to build the ideal; to rise.

The recent Irish drama has sometimes been cited as exemplary of extreme modern realism. It is true that

character, rather than plot, is stressed in the majority of the Irish plays, for they are, most of them, either comedy or tragedy. "Lady Gregory," writes one critic,¹ "does not work the situation up to any emphatic climax; but, having opened a momentary little vista upon life, she smilingly remarks 'That's all' and rings the curtain down." This would seem to be fitting facts rather hastily to a theory. Surely there is true farce climax in "Hyacinth Halvy," true tragic climax in "The Gaol Gate," true melodramatic climax in "The Rising of the Moon," true dramatic structure and climax in an entire group of her little comedies. Moreover, there is in practically all the Irish plays not only admirable characterization, but well-defined plot, having in all cases a beginning, a middle, and an end. The fact is that the Irish dramatists—Synge and Yeats and Ervine and Murray and Lady Gregory and all the rest—instead of discarding dramatic technique, have refreshed and revived it with their simple artistry in the manipulation of the actual. Doubtless their success is chiefly founded on veracious characterization; and this, in turn, is satisfying because it is sure.

The Sources of Character Material

Where does the dramatist acquire the material he must work over into the characterization of his plays? From observation, primarily, as has been said; though also, in part, from reading, from hearsay, and from a combination of these sources. Moving through life, he notes the

¹ *Studies in Stagecraft*, Clayton Hamilton, page 133.

peculiarities, the eccentricities, the special qualities that go with this, that, or the other mental and physical make-up. He ponders and selects and rearranges. Sometimes he reproduces on the stage a figure accurately drawn from a single living model. More often he constructs harmonious combinations built of the shreds and patches of long experience. Strangely enough, characters composed after this latter plan are often the best: there are few figures in real life that can be transplanted bodily to the stage and yet remain effective. Selection and combination judiciously performed usually produce the finest results. There is no rule for this labor. One man will work marvels with materials that others can only botch into chaos. Books and teachers can say little, other than to warn against excess and to advise reliance upon personal knowledge.

The following humorous account of first-hand character observation is credited by the New York *Evening Sun* to Mr. Earl Derr Biggers. It should be most suggestive to the beginner at play or other fiction writing.

“Scarcely a single character that appears in ‘Inside the Lines,’ my war play,” said Mr. Biggers, “is a native of the Rock of Gibraltar, where the scene is laid. They all owe allegiance to countries far away, and often by wistful little speeches they show that they are thinking of ‘the old home town.’

“Of all these homesick people the one to whom my own sympathies go out most generously is *Sherman* from Kewanee. I am sure that his type—the rich old man dragged through Europe by his family—has long been a

favorite with cartoonists and humorists; but it was not from this source I took him. I have met him often in real life. And I have never known him but to love him. He is so wonderfully human.

“The first time I met a *Sherman* in real life was when I was a boy in a little town in the middle West. . . . I guess he was about the first man from our town to go abroad. He was president of the First National Bank, had all the honors that go with it, and was a happy man until his wife got the European fever.

“They went, of course. A. D. said a long farewell to all the boys along Main Street, got on a train at the Erie station, and disappeared for a season. The only word that came from him during his trip was received by a man who had a nephew in the diplomatic service somewhere on the other side. The boy wrote that A. D. was glooming his way through Europe and bemoaning the fact that he wasn’t able to meet up with a piece of squash pie.

“A. D. got back at last, and the only information anybody was able to get out of him about the ‘old country’ was the statement that ‘there’s an awful lot of room going to waste in them old castles over there.’ He lived ten years longer and referred frequently to the scandalous number of empty rooms ‘all fixed up and nobody livin’ in ‘em.’ The boys at the bank said they would often come upon him, sitting sad and disconsolate, brooding over the wasted castle room of Europe. I imagine at such times he was fixing up the Grand Trianon or Sans Souci as a first-class boarding and rooming house.

“The last *Sherman* I met,” continued Mr. Biggers,

“was a fine, sweet old character who crossed with us to Naples last spring. Like A. D., he had Europe coming to him, and he was the kind that makes the best of things. Every morning his daughter gave him a guide book with instructions to bone up on Rubens and the rest, but safe inside the smoking room he put it away and told us about the boys back in Ada, Ohio, where he came from, and how glad he'd be to get back.

“I used to come upon him late at night, smoking a cigar quietly in a corner and looking out over the water in the wake of the ship—out toward Ada. Then he'd tell me about his eldest son, who was a lawyer and 'doing fine,' and of his house, and his garden, and the neighbors, and the spring election, and the time Garfield spoke in Ada.

“He and I stood together on the deck the afternoon we came into the Bay of Naples, and saw the villas of the town lying white and wonderful at the foot of the famous mountains. Below us the steerage, mostly Italian, was like a bleachers crowd at a ball game with the home team winning—frantic with joy, climbing high in the rigging to get the first glimpse, cheering, mad.

“The Italian doctor, a silent, fat little man, came running up to us, his face flushed, his eyes shining.

“‘See, gentlemen,’ he cried, ‘that little patch of the white at the foot of old Vesuve. That is my town—my home—I go there to-night. Not for a year have I seen it—my own town so beautiful.’

“The old boy from Ada straightened up and showed more interest than ever before.

“ ‘By golly,’ he said, as the doctor left us, ‘it’s hard to realize—it all looks so foreign—I suppose he does live there. That makes the whole landscape real for me. I can just see him jumping off the train—running up Main Street—the town traveller, home again. I suppose to-night he’ll be down at the cigar store telling the boys what he’s seen on his travels.’

“I saw my friend from Ada a moment that evening after the ship had docked. It was Saturday night in Naples; the stars had begun to twinkle up above the unlovely old warehouses along the waterfront; alongside our ship amateur Carusos in leaky boats were warbling ‘*O sole mia*’ to the twang of hoarse guitars. We were watching our baggage as it was trundled down a precipitous gangplank and through a hooting mob to the customs. The man from Ada was nervous.

“ ‘They didn’t give us any checks for the trunks,’ he complained. ‘I hate to let things go without checks. How am I going to get them back from that mob of dagos that don’t speak a human tongue? I tell you we do things better out in Ada.’

“Somebody gave a shove, and we all went hastily down that gangplank into Italy.

“Four months passed, and I saw my friend from Ada again—in London it was, on the Strand. He was smiling, happy.

“ ‘Passage booked—sail to-morrow,’ he said. ‘Going back to Ada. I figure I’ll get there two weeks from Thursday—band concert night. I can sit on my porch and hear ‘em play “The Star Spangled Banner.” Say,

those boys in Naples sure was out for the tips, wasn't they?'

" 'What did you like best in Naples?' I asked.

" 'The braying of the donkeys under our windows,' said the original of *Sherman* from Kewanee. 'Do you know, it sounded for all the world like the blowing of the factory whistles at noon in Ada?'

The history of the stage is full of examples of failure due largely to the attempt to picture phases of life with which the author was himself unfamiliar. Mr. Jerome K. Jerome has given us some unforgettable portraits drawn from London boarding-house life. When he has tried to depict the less familiar environment of the New York drawing-room, in "Esther Castways," however, he has failed to convince even London critics of the truthfulness of his work. Mr. Stanley Houghton, likewise, knew his Lancashire from A to Z; but his presentation of the cabinet ministers in "Trust the People" is far from real. Indeed, the last act of this play, which returns to his own peculiar *locale*, seems strikingly true in contrast with what has gone before. Perhaps the chief secret of the success of the Irish playwrights has lain in the fidelity with which they have clung to familiar settings and people in all their work. They have made their observations of humanity always at first hand; and, in consequence, mere "stock" rôles or types have not sufficed for the animation of their stage.

"What I insist upon," wrote Francisque Sarcey, in a *feuilleton* dealing with "*Les Idées de Mme. Aubray*," "is that the personage be consistent to the end with the char-

acter the author has given him, that he have a particular physiognomy, that he be living. . . . I reproach the figures in "*La Femme de Claude*," not with being symbolical, but with being not alive. Never, no, never will an abstraction, or, if you prefer, an entity, interest me at the theatre, for the simple reason that I do not go there to see entities which symbolize ideas, but rather beings of flesh and blood, who suffer and weep as I do, in whom I find the echo of my own joys and sorrows—in a word, beings that live."

The playwright's source of material is life. From what he sees of his fellow beings in all manner of circumstances, he selects those traits of character which to him seem significant and adapted to his purpose. By a process of combination and condensation he achieves his figures, letting them develop always in strict accord with logic. If he hopes to make them in any sense credible and real, he will draw them solely from his own personal experience. And, above all things, if he have the gift to do it, from curtain to curtain throughout his drama he will make them *live*.

NOTE: The Questions and Exercises appended to the next chapter cover also the contents of this one.

CHAPTER XIII

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ AND LIFE

Addison had sketched the Tory fox-hunter, clothing him in the characteristics of the class, "that he might give his readers an image of these rural statesmen." Squire Western has all the distinguishing marks of Addison's type, and beyond this, he is individualized.—WILBUR L. CROSS, *The Development of the English Novel*.

Verisimilitude, a quality much insisted on at this time [the eighteenth century], and in origin a restricted interpretation of Aristotle's preference for the probable, was exalted into a tyrannical principle which again excluded the individual, in its fear of the abnormal or self-contradictory, and reduced the delineation of character to a simplicity which belied human nature. A king must be kingly, and nothing else; an official must be officious, and nothing else; a maid must be modest, and nothing else; and so through the whole range of humanity; until in the perfection of decorum and verisimilitude, all interest evaporated, and a dead monotony reigned.—WILLIAM ALLAN NEILSON, *Essentials of Poetry*.

Individual and Type

In all fiction, of course, the individual is very much more delimited and defined than the type, which stands for a whole species in the genus *homo*. The swashbuckler, the hypocrite, the villain are types; Falstaff, Tartuffe, Iago are individuals. "Why is it," inquires Professor Bliss Perry,¹ "that the artist allows himself to substitute

¹ *A Study of Prose Fiction*.

typical for individual traits and hence to lose the power of imparting a sense of actuality to his fictitious personages? It is often true, no doubt, that the author fails to see clearly what he wants to express. He falls into abstract, typical delineation through mere irresolution or inattention, or it may be the over-fondness for what he may like to call the 'ideal,' that is, for the abstract rather than for the concrete. . . . Then, too, the prevalence of a fashionable artistic type is often found to overpower the artist's originality. . . . In the third place, although the fiction-writer may see the individual with perfect distinctness, either as actually present before him or in imaginative vision, he may nevertheless not be able to express what he sees. He draws the general characteristics of the type rather than the individual characteristics of the person, because his vocabulary is not sufficiently delicate and precise for the task of portrayal . . . The defect is chiefly to be attributed to the lack of training in flexible and precise expression. . . . We have had certain types drawn over and over again with wearisome reiteration, but we have had few fictitious personages who have given us the impression of actuality. It must be remembered after all that the type is, in the last analysis, only a subjective abstraction. . . . If the personage be so drawn as to convey a vivid sense of reality, the individual characteristics will be firmly outlined; and if he gives . . . an impression of moral unity, there is little doubt that he will in the true sense contain the type. For the type, so far as it is of any artistic value, is implicit in the individual."

All this was said primarily of the novel, but it is equally applicable to the drama. In the theatre, for a long time now, characters have been grouped in certain familiar categories: the "leads" or "straight" parts—heroes and heroines; the "eccentrics" or "character" parts—odd and whimsical persons; the "heavies"—villains and adventuresses; the "old men" and "old women" and the "juveniles;" the "ingénues" and "soubrettes;" the "walking gentlemen and ladies;" the "utility men and women;" and the "supers," or supernumeraries. Obviously such a cut-and-dried classification emphasizes the preponderance of types over individuals on the stage.

The present-day tendency is to individualize, to give to every figure, whether heroic or otherwise, its peculiar characteristics, and especially to reproduce actuality in the matter of blending the good and the bad, the attractive and the repellent, in men and women, old and young. There is no reason, for example, why the "character old man" should not also be the hero, as in "Grumpy," or even both hero and villain, as in "Rutherford and Son."

The old stereotyped set of characters in the old stereotyped story is, in fact, no longer sufficient on our serious stage. These things were of the theatre merely—sentimental claptrap born of tradition rather than of truth. That they have been largely displaced by more worthy matter is manifestly one of the effects of modern realism. To-day the first step toward success in the drama is the careful choice and the accurate portrayal of real human individuals. Therein only, indeed, can reside the supremely desired trait of freshness and novelty.

Direct and Indirect Characterization

Scores of critics have reassured us as to the fact that the playwright is naturally limited, in his depiction of humanity, to the self-revelatory manners, words, and deeds of his characters, together with their reactions upon their fellows and their environment. In other words, the portrayal of character upon the stage may be either direct or indirect.

Always the first thing to be remembered is the truism that, on the stage as in real life, actions speak infinitely louder and more distinctly than words. We may take into account, in making up our final estimate of a man, what he tells us about himself and what his friends and enemies tell us about him; but we will be influenced in our judgment—if we are ordinarily wise, at least—far more by what we see him do. His carriage, his manner, his personal habits, and his conduct in the commonplace as well as in the crucial moments of life—observation of these things will inevitably guide us to our eventual verdict upon the individual. Of course, it will be well if his deeds and his words harmonize—unless he be meant for a hypocrite or a villain. Certainly it will be indispensable that he succeed in passing, if not for what he himself claims to be, at least for what his creator obviously intends him.

Directly, stage personages display themselves through action, speech, mannerisms, class and professional traits—through conduct in incidents which reveal character, and in situations which determine it. Indirectly, they are shown by means of their effect upon others.

The character of Weinhold, the tutor in Hauptmann's "The Weavers," briefly sketched as it is, reveals itself both directly and indirectly with striking clearness. The author does not even indulge in a long stage direction concerning him, but merely informs us that he is "a theological graduate, nineteen, pale, thin, tall, with lanky fair hair; restless and nervous in his movements." In his first remark Weinhold ventures to disagree with the smug and sententious pastor Kittelhaus, who has just opened the fourth act by observing with finality:

"You are young, Mr. Weinhold, which explains everything. At your age we old fellows held—well, I won't say the same opinions—but certainly opinions of the same tendency. And there's something fine about youth—youth with its grand ideals. But, unfortunately, Mr. Weinhold, they don't last; they are as fleeting as April sunshine. Wait till you are my age. When a man has said his say from the pulpit for fifty years—fifty-two times every year, not including saints' days—he has inevitably calmed down. Think of me, Mr. Weinhold, when you come to that pass."

"With all due respect, Mr. Kittelhaus," hesitantly replies the tutor, "I can't think—people have such different natures."

"My dear Mr. Weinhold," persists the pastor reproachfully, "however restless-minded and unsettled a man may be—and you are a case in point—however violently and wantonly he may attack the existing order of things, he calms down in the end."

A few minutes later, when the rebellious weavers are

heard singing in the street outside, Kittelhaus, approaching the window, says, "See, see, Mr. Weinhold! These are not only young people. There are numbers of steady-going old weavers among them, men whom I have known for years and looked upon as most deserving and God-fearing. There they are, taking part in this unheard-of mischief, trampling God's law under foot. Do you mean to tell me that you still defend these people?"

"Certainly not," rejoins Weinhold. "That is, *sir—cum grano salis*. For, after all, they are hungry and they are ignorant. They are giving expression to their dissatisfaction in the only way they understand. I don't expect that such people—"

Mrs. Kittelhaus, "short, thin, faded, more like an old maid than a married woman," interrupts reproachfully, "Mr. Weinhold, Mr. Weinhold, how can you?" And then Dreissiger, the tutor's rich employer, bursts forth, "Mr. Weinhold, I am sorry to be obliged to—I didn't bring you into my house to give me lectures on philanthropy, and I must request that you will confine yourself to the education of my boys, and leave my other affairs entirely to me—entirely! Do you understand?"

Weinhold "stands for a moment rigid and deathly pale, then bows, with a strained smile," and answers "in a low voice," "Certainly, of course I understand. I have seen this coming. It is my wish, too." And he goes out.

When Mrs. Dreissiger remonstrates with her husband for his rudeness, he retorts, "Have you lost your senses, Rosa, that you're taking the part of a man who defends a low, blackguardly libel like that song?"

"But, William, he didn't defend it."

"Mr. Kittelhaus," demands Dreissiger, "did he defend it or did he not?"

"His youth must be his excuse," replies the pastor evasively.

And Mrs. Kittelhaus exclaims, "I can't understand it. The young man comes of such a good, respectable family. His father held a public appointment for forty years, without a breath on his reputation. His mother was overjoyed at his getting this good situation here. And now—he himself shows so little appreciation of it."

That is all. We hear almost nothing more of Weinhold during the remainder of the play; he has spoken scarcely four lines of dialogue; and yet he stands out sharply, both on his own account and by means of the effect he produces upon other clearly drawn figures.

If one is interested to know this author's methods in full-length portraiture, let him study the acute and unscrupulous Mrs. Wolff, of "The Beaver Coat" and "The Conflagration." In these two plays Herr Hauptmann has set forth every conceivable phase of this cunning, sarcastic, iron-willed woman, one of the most completely individualized figures in the whole field of the modern stage.

Progressive Versus Stationary Characters

Should characters in drama develop or remain stationary? Briefly, that must depend on the nature of the play. Mr. Edward Sheldon's heroine in "The High Road," who traverses half a century in the course of five acts, or Messrs. Bennett and Knoblauch's initial figures in "Mile-

stones," who live a lifetime in three acts, might reasonably be expected to change. Since the majority of plays depict so much shorter periods, however, character evolution is usually obviated. To the playwright the individual is valuable only for the two hours taken out of his life, with due allowance for the effects of the indicated intervals.

This does not mean, on the other hand, that the dramatist cares nothing for his people's past careers, as Mr. Brander Matthews would have us believe.¹ "Who was Tartuffe," he inquires, "before his sinister shadow crossed the threshold of Orgon's happy home? What misdeeds had he been already guilty of and what misadventures had he already met? Molière does not tell us; and very likely he could not have told us. Probably he would have explained that it did not matter, since Tartuffe is what he is; he is what we see him; we have only to look at him and to listen to him to know all we need to know about him. . . . We find the melancholy Jaques in the Forest of Arden, moralizing at large and bandying repartees with a chance clown; he talks and we know him at once, as we know a man we have met many times. But who is he? What is his rank? Where does he come from? What brought him so far afield and so deep into the greenwood? Shakespeare leaves us in the dark as to all these things; and perhaps he was in the dark himself."

On the other hand, we have the testimony of no less a master than Ibsen himself—in "*Nachgelassene Schriften*"—that he lived decades with his characters till he knew them. When comment was made to him upon the name of Nora

¹ *A Study of the Drama*, pages 156-157.

in "A Doll's House," he replied, "Oh, her full name was Leonora; but that was shortened to Nora when she was quite a little girl. Of course, you know she was terribly spoiled by her parents." And then there is the interesting anecdote of the conversation between Ibsen and his fellow-dramatist, Gunnar Heiberg, who insisted that Irene in "When We Dead Awaken" must be at least forty years old, whereas her creator sternly declared her to be but twenty-eight. Next day Heiberg received the following note:

"Dear Gunnar Heiberg:

You were right and I was wrong. I have looked up my notes. Irene is about forty years old.

Yours,

Henrik Ibsen."

In fact, the great Scandinavian in almost every instance apparently turned his theme over and over in his mind, slowly working out the psychology of his characters and never recording them permanently until "he had them wholly in his power and knew them down to the last fold of their souls." Obviously such procedure requires an imaginative acquaintance with the past history, almost with the family trees, of the *dramatis personæ*.

In Monsieur André Picard's "*L'Ange gardien*"—to cite a play already referred to in the chapter on plot—we are introduced to the mysterious Thérèse Duvigneau, a rather plain and taciturn widow of thirty, who at first impresses us—as she does the other personages—as being distinctly unpleasant. Little by little, however, as the action

progresses, this strange, complex creature reveals herself, not as the cold, repellent misanthrope she first appears, but—incredibly enough—as a woman at bottom capable of ungovernable emotional outbursts, and instinct with a subtle and imperious charm. The chief part of this revelation takes place in the course of a rapid and tense scene during which our attitude toward this character undergoes a complete change, and we pass from dislike to a sympathetic comprehension.

Individuals and Types May Balance

Of course, the inevitable penalty exacted for such complexity in the portrayal of one individual is forced contentment with mere types for the other figures. The dramatist sacrifices his auxiliary characters to the protagonist much “as the father of a family who would sacrifice his children to one among them. His play tends to be only a monograph.”

“The dramatist,” says Sir Arthur Wing Pinero, “is only the mouthpiece of his characters, plus, of course, his knowledge of the technique of the theatre, which enables him to manœuvre them. So he must assume an impersonal attitude toward them and permit them, so to speak, to develop out of themselves.” This, doubtless, means a development not during the course of the play, but rather during the long period—rarely less than a year with Pinero—of the writing of the play. It is only this intimate acquaintance with the characters as individual men and women, this living on terms of complete familiarity with

them through all the occurrences commonplace and extraordinary that go to make up a lifetime, that can guarantee absolute logic and consistency—to say nothing of freshness—of plot, and that can result in the rigid economy of materials the conditions of the theatre demand.

Naturally, it is the leading figures, rather than the auxiliary ones, that determine the action of the drama. Generally speaking, character plays utilize fewer personages than do story plays. This is, of course, because it takes time to portray character:—the method must be leisurely. Of late years compression has often been carried to the extreme. Not so long ago a prominent theatrical manager refused to read farther than the first page of a manuscript play when he saw that its cast numbered only five. Within a few weeks "The Climax," with four characters, had attained great popularity, after "The Easiest Way," with six, had already demonstrated its value. In the latter piece, in fact, there is slight reason why the optimistic showman and the negro maid should not have been omitted: neither contributes to the action or seriously bears upon the significance of the play. Of course, an undue sense of isolation is to be avoided, but there is always the possibility of producing the illusion of off-stage life by means of familiar sounds and passing figures. As a rule, the would-be playwright will be consulting his own best interests—so far as possible production of his work is concerned—by avoiding a superfluity of parts as of other expense-making elements. The four-act play with only three characters in it, on the other hand, not unreasonably excites prejudice. So, perhaps,

such a piece, if it is very, very good, had better be submitted to the manager without a preliminary list of the *dramatis personæ!*

Generally speaking, types alone are usually sufficient for the purposes of story plays, whereas character plays require individualized figures. Although to display freshly drawn personages in hackneyed situations is somewhat like putting new wine into old bottles—and new wine in new bottles is certainly best—nevertheless stereotyped figures are taboo in the successful drama even more than are trite incidents. Furthermore, as a rule, the characters, which rarely develop in the play itself, should first have undergone a complete evolution in the mind of their creator. And in most instances the fewer the *essential* figures, the better the play will be.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. From one of Shakespeare's plays—"Hamlet" suggested—make a list of the characters actually essential to the plot.

2. Why are they essential while others are not?

3. Do modern plays employ characters not essential to the plot? If so, name an instance and show briefly why.

4. What sort of names do you find given to characters in plays of today?

5. Are the symbolic names, like Colonel Bully and Molly Millions, in vogue in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in good taste today?

6. Take one of your own plots, used in a previous

assignment, and make a list of the characters, with outlines of their relations each to the other.

7. Criticise the characterization in any recent play from the standpoint of reality or of symbolism, as the case may require.

8. What do you understand by an *individualized* character and a *typical* character? Cite examples.

9. Which sort do you find most common in present-day plays? Cite examples.

10. Give the full dialogue of so much of an original scene as may be necessary to delineate a character indirectly, in the manner of Hauptmann, page 148.

11. In brief outline only, give the biographical and personal details of a character, real or imaginary, who is individual enough to be the big figure in a play.

12. In your own way, show how you might make him live on the stage.

13. In psychological character drawing we are taken into a human soul and enabled to see how it works in given circumstances. Write a dialogue scene psychologically showing a woman struggling with the problem of whether she will sacrifice the interests of her second husband in order to further the interests of her son by a former marriage.

14. Outline the same character before and after the great crisis in his life which has involved marked character change.

15. In the case of this husband, would you show his character directly or indirectly?

16. Clip five items from magazines or newspapers containing material for dramatic characterization.

17. For practice, take *all* the central characters in these five accounts and weave them together into a plot. What were your chief difficulties?

18. Make a list of the sources for character study open to you personally.

19. Should characters be modified, or even combined with others, for stage use? Give reasons.

20. Draft a plot around "The Man from Ada," page 138, taking care to avoid any similarity to Mr. Biggers's play, "Inside the Lines."

21. Cite any instance you can of plays in which characterization was badly done because of imperfect knowledge of the subject.

22. Briefly describe six characters all of whom might well appear in the same play. Do not overlook the principle of contrast.

23. Invent two dramatic situations which result in character changes in the characters. Note the distinction between "*character*" and "characters."

24. Invent two dramatic situations which result *from* changes in character of the characters.

25. Describe the actions of five comedy characters.

NOTE: Invention assignments of this sort should be multiplied indefinitely. Special emphasis should be laid upon small self-revealing actions and remarks by the *dramatis personæ*; and also upon remarks by one character about another which connote more than they say.

CHAPTER XIV

PLOT-AND-CHARACTER HARMONY

The plea that otherwise the plot would have been ruined, is ridiculous; such a plot should not in the first instance be constructed.—ARISTOTLE, *Poetics*.

Though the subject of the imitation, who suggested the type, be inconsistent, still he must be consistently inconsistent.—*Ibid.*

It may be observed, too, that although the representation of no human character should be quarrelled with for its inconsistency, we yet require that the inconsistencies be not absolute antagonisms to the extent of neutralization; they may be permitted to be oils and waters, but they must not be alkalis and acids. When in the course of the *dénouement*, the usurer bursts forth into an eloquence virtue-inspired, we cannot sympathize very heartily in his fine speeches, since they proceed from the mouth of the selfsame egotist who, urged by a disgusting vanity, uttered so many sotticisms . . . in the earlier passages of the play.—EDGAR ALLAN POE, *Mr. Longfellow, Mr. Willis, and the Drama*.

The fundamental problem of the dramatist, as has been said, is the problem of plot-and-character harmony—which, being reduced to its lowest terms, amounts merely to a strict observance of natural logic. Observation may be most just and acute, and as a result men and women in plays may be exhibited with all manner of skill in contrast and grouping, as well as with sympathetic individual portraiture; and yet, if what they are fails to accord with what they do, they most likely amount to no more than

wasted effort. In spite of this fact, however, a common defect in drama is the tendency to "plot-ridden" personages, who, for the sake of the fable, are forever belying their own selves.

To repeat, in the best serious plays everything of importance occurs as the result of an obvious and reasonable motive. We are never content to see a bad man do good deeds, or a good man bad ones; a wise man work stupidity, or a stupid man wisdom—merely that the story may easily advance. Such contradictions are always occurring in everyday life, but people act so for reasons of their own which are rarely apparent. In the play, however, we must be more than merely natural—probability is a *sine qua non*.

Lack of Harmony Between Plot and Character

In "The Big Idea," for instance, we are actually asked to believe that a New York theatrical producer would pay an unknown playwright twenty-two thousand dollars for an untried play. If the sum named had been a reasonable one—say five hundred dollars at the utmost—then the postulate upon which the extravaganza hangs—that the banker father cannot raise so much money to avoid ruin—would have fallen to pieces. In "A Pair of Silk Stockings," we must do the best we can to harmonize with the eccentric but straightforward character of Sam Thornhill the fact that, when piqued at his wife's preference in motors, he ostentatiously took up with a disreputable woman just to show that he was "a bit knocked."

Doubtless this difficulty is largely a matter of opinion; certainly it does not suffice to diminish the charm of the bright little comedy.

One notes the obvious fact that when these credulity-straining postulates deal with matters antecedent to the play itself—as Sarcey and others have pointed out—the spectator is usually willing to swallow the whole affair without much protest, providing that, these fundamentals being granted, the characters thereafter seem probable and consistent. In other words, resentment is likely to be aroused only when during the progress of the piece the characters are made to do what we feel they—being what they are—could not do, and all for the mere sake of furthering the advancement of the plot. Thus the character of the hero in Mr. Hubert Henry Davies's "Outcast" is belittled by his obstinate clinging to the inferior creature, who once heartlessly threw him over for a rich old suitor, in the face of the vastly more desirable love and personality of the girl his kindness has helped to develop into a woman of the strongest charm. In fact, the hero of this drama, in marked contrast to the heroine, is throughout a vague, indefinite figure. And the chief reason for this state of affairs is that Mr. Davies has not enough plot for a full evening's play. Certainly, if Geoffrey had been a convincing human being, in all the circumstances, the piece would have ended one act earlier than it did. Yet, whatever its deficiencies, "Outcast," at least for the character study of its heroine, is most moving and effective.

The unconvincing is always turning up. In Mr. B. Macdonald Hastings's arbitrary and conventional play

"That Sort," reminiscent as it is of "East Lynne," "Miss Moulton," "Lady Windermere's Fan," "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," and even others, the ultimate self-sacrifice of Diana Laska is wholly unacceptable. In Mr. Henry Arthur Jones's "Mary Goes First," a political leader, among other personages, is portrayed as of an incredible stupidity merely in order that the cleverness of the heroine may be emphasized by contrast.

It should be understood that, in such criticism of specific defects as is offered here—and elsewhere in this book—sweeping condemnation of the plays mentioned is neither always nor often intended. Practically every drama referred to could be cited as exemplifying also innumerable excellences of technique and matter. Many of these pieces have won a deserved popularity: the point of the criticism is simply that they might have been even better. There are, of course, plays almost totally devoid of merit, but they have been generally so short-lived and so little known as to be useless for purposes of illustration.

In Mr. Augustus Thomas's "Arizona" a sensible army officer, having been told that his former friend, who is accused of attempted murder, has, at the noise of an unexpected shot, merely fired his pistol mechanically into the floor, does not, in seeking evidence, even think of probing there for the bullet that fits the prisoner's weapon. In Mr. James Forbes's play, "The Traveling Salesman," when a question of vital importance arises, a supposedly intelligent heroine is made to put implicit confidence in the obvious villain, refusing to believe the manifestly honest hero. In "Nobody's Daughter," the parents of an

illegitimate child, though young, prosperous, and in love, do not marry—for no apparent reason except that the heroine would then be *somebody's* daughter. In Mr. Arnold Bennett's "The Great Adventure," an artist with the fame and skill of a Titian is made to give up his art as well as his name and state of life for no credible reason other than the purposes of a highly improbable plot.

These are all in a sense instances of the "plot-ridden" character in the drama: in each case somebody is forced by the exigencies of the fable to do what he could not possibly have done in real life and so to incite the immediate resentment of the thoughtful spectator, because, in asking him to believe the unbelievable, the playwright casts an inferential slur on the playgoer's intelligence. Often enough, too, it is for the sake of the most conventional melodrama that these distressing compromises occur.

More frequently still, as has previously been noted, the dramatic personage is made to barter his birthright of actuality for that most specious mess of pottage, the "happy ending." For example, the American adaptor of Miss Elizabeth Baker's "Chains," made the monotony-mad clerk, about to escape from the deadening bondage, hail with joy that news of his prospective paternity which in the original was the death-blow to his last hopes of relief. Obviously this tampering merely perverted not only the character of Richard Wilson, but also the entire purpose of the play.

A few years ago, on the other hand, when Mr. Joseph Medill Patterson's play, "The Fourth Estate," was first produced, it ended with the suicide of the hero, an idealistic

young journalist who had been baffled at every turn in his struggle to emancipate the press. Though thus invested with a specious air of tragedy, neither story nor hero was worthy of the dignity of death. Purely melodramatic, the termination was entirely arbitrary. For its probability it depended chiefly upon the exact interpretation of the protagonist's character. If he was a half-mad fanatic or an overwrought neurotic, suicide might be expected of him. But he was hardly either. As a result, when an alternative "happy ending" was substituted, wherein the hero accepted temporary defeat, set his jaw, and resolved on eventual victory, the play had not suffered in effectiveness.

But all melodrama is not capable of similar adjustment. In the case of Monsieur Henri Bernstein's "Israël," the American version was made to accord with the alleged national requirement by means of a peculiarly atrocious violation of the sense and spirit of the play. The young hero, who has been an ardent Jew-baiter, has just learned that the Hebrew he has particularly assailed is his own father. In the original version this intelligence suddenly thrust upon him drives the protagonist to suicide as the only possible relief from the terrific race-conflict that wages within him. For American gratification, in the last act there was evoked practically from nowhere a young woman who considerately married the hero to save his life. Even in melodrama strict logic of *dénouement* is more to be desired than an arbitrary conclusion which strains probability to the breaking point and destroys character consistency.

Of late years it has been fairly well demonstrated that the demand for conventional endings is not inevitable. Laura Murdock's tragic relapse into the "easiest way" is a case in point. Farce and melodrama, being chiefly dependent upon plot, require a definite rounding up of loose ends. And surely we may say, in general, that serious comedy should at least be finished and not simply stopped. Of course, if it be mere photography, it will manage to subsist without much reference to the rules of art.

Plot-and-character harmony, let it be repeated, is both the chief problem of the dramatist and the first essential of a good play. Even in sheer melodrama, if it is to be worth while, the personages must not for the sake of the story be forced into glaring inconsistency. And the popular demand for the "happy ending" is decidedly not to be regarded as a legitimate excuse for last-act insults to the spectators' common sense.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Suggest improved harmony between character and plot in any two of the cases criticised with which you are familiar.
2. In your opinion, in any of the successful plays cited, which show weakness in plot-and-character harmony, would a correction of these defects have resulted in greater success?
3. Examine two of your previously constructed plots to see if you have offended in character probability. Frankly state your view.

4. If you have found any such defect, say how you propose to correct it.

5. In your observation, do audiences easily discover defective harmony between plot and character, or are they usually blindly complacent? Give examples, if possible.

6. How have these matters previously affected you?

7. From plays you have read or seen cite other instances of a lack in plot-and-character harmony.

CHAPTER XV

THE DIALOGUE

Every phrase, with Dumas, hits the mark; as there is not in his plays an idle word, there is likewise none that is lost. His language is all muscles and nerves; it is action. And at the same time it gives to the idea a strict and decisive form, it sculpts it. If it often lacks literary purity and grammatical correctness, it has always dramatic relief.—GEORGES PELLISSIER, *Le Mouvement Littéraire au XIX^e Siècle*.

I do not know whether one could find a single *mot* [detachable witticism] in Molière. . . . In revenge, the *mots* of passion, of character, of situation sparkle on every hand. . . . You will find not a single thing that is amusing because the person who utters it wishes to be amusing. He is so, without knowing it, by the sole fact of the situation in which he finds himself and of the character which the author has given him.—FRANCISQUE SARCEY, *Le Mot et la Chose*.

After action, pantomime and dialogue are the chief means by which the personages in a drama reveal themselves and tell the story in which they are involved.

Pantomime

Pantomime I name first because, from the dramatic standpoint, it is the more effective agency. Quantitatively, it is by its nature limited. Gesture, attitude, and play of countenance aside, a hundred things are usually said for every one that is done. Yet, in a broad sense, as has often been averred, a good play should be reducible

in its essentials to pantomime: otherwise it is likely to prove upon analysis to be largely composed of non-dramatic conversation.

The pantomime element lies chiefly, of course, in the hands of the player rather than of the playwright. The author, however, must have full knowledge of all the feasible expedients of dumb show that may best be utilized in the expression of his story and characters, and he must provide for them in advance, if merely to avoid their duplication in the dialogue. Wherever pantomime may be employed, repetitive dialogue is not only uneconomical, it is positively devitalizing. What can be shown by gesture, movement, facial expression, significant pause, should rarely also be said in words. On the other hand, it must be remembered that pantomime has its limitations,—that, after all, it is not possible to “indicate by the wriggling of the left shoulder that one’s paternal grandfather was born in Shropshire.”

Kinds of Dialogue

Dialogue in the English drama may usually be classed as poetic, rhetorical, or realistic.

The poetic is generally in the form of blank verse. It belongs to a convention that is now rarely employed,—a form of the ancient assumption that the heroic personages of tragedy in particular speak an exalted and ornate language not common to ordinary mortals. Similarly the characters in grand opera, as everybody knows, discourse in song.

Rhetorical dialogue partakes of the same heightened nature as the poetical, though it is usually mere ornamented and elaborately wrought prose. At the present time neither poetic nor rhetorical dialogue is in much demand in the theatre. Dramatists like Rostand and Hauptmann and Stephen Phillips still employ verse; others, like Mr. Percy Mackaye in several of his plays, choose for their medium a decorated and highly polished prose; but the large majority of playwrights assiduously cultivate realism in the speech of their characters.

There are occasional hybrid efforts to combine the realistic content with the poetic form, to put everyday speech into blank verse, or to mingle the realistic and the symbolical in iambic pentameters. Mr. Witter Bynner's little tragedy, "Tiger," is an example of the former; Mr. Israel Zangwill's "The War God," of the latter endeavor. In both these plays, for the most part, ordinary, unheightened speech is cut into five-foot lengths. The presence of the symbolical element in "The War God" perhaps justifies the expedient. But—to me—the gutter-speech of the vile creatures in "Tiger" when put into blank verse produces the effect of a horrible burlesque and detracts from the forcefulness of the narrative. For the sake of the meter, moreover, the characters are made to use interchangeably complete forms or contractions—"I'll, I will; cannot, can't," and the like—without regard to the probabilities, and so in opposition to the very effect of realism desired.

Generally speaking, model realistic dialogue is that of which the playgoer can say that it sounds as if it were

being spoken for the first time, had not been written, and could not, on another occasion, be exactly repeated. Of course, there are plays making some pretense to lifelikeness that employ a dialogue that is frankly artificial, crowded with clever conceits and generally reflecting the tradition of euphuism that has clung to the English drama for centuries. "Half the young ladies in London spend their evenings making their fathers take them to plays that are not fit for elderly people to see," is a typical Shavian wrong-side-out witticism from "Fanny's First Play." But, amusing though it may be, it is not nearly so telling as Dora's genially impudent retort to old Gilbey's heart-broken cry, "My son in gaol!" "Oh, cheer up, old dear," she says, "it won't hurt him: look at me after fourteen days of it: I'm all the better for being kept a bit quiet. You mustn't let it prey on your mind." Or compare Duvallet's elaborate, "You have made an end of the despotism of the parent; the family council is unknown to you; everywhere in this island one can enjoy the soul-liberating spectacle of men quarreling with their brothers, defying their fathers, refusing to speak to their mothers" —with this other delicious bit:

Mrs. Gilbey. Bobby must have looked funny in your hat. Why did you change hats with him?

Dora. I don't know. One does, you know.

Mrs. Gilbey. I never did. The things people do! I can't understand them. Bobby never told me he was keeping company with you. His own mother!

The latter passage obviously appeals because of its

naturalness; it does not impress upon you the fact that it has been thought up in advance.

The Principles of Dialogue

Every line of dialogue, Mr. Augustus Thomas tells us, should either reveal character, advance the story, or get a laugh. As for the detachable witticism, it is justifiable in the realistic drama to the extent that it is probable. A clever man will say clever things; a dull man will not. And even the wit will not always be at his best—though it is no deadly sin if, on the stage, he is.

Any speech that does not harmonize with the mood or tone of the scene or with the general atmosphere is, of course, strictly out of place. Hamlet has said his say about certain villainous practices that make the judicious grieve, and it applies as thoroughly to the tasteless playwright as to the tasteless clown. In farce and fantastic plays wit *per se* will be much more welcome than in serious drama. Indeed, keynote and tone may sometimes be struck and maintained to the best advantage by means of detachable witticisms. All the rest of the dialogue, however, should be composed of that which reveals character or advances plot or does both.

The principles that chiefly apply to satisfactory dramatic dialogue are selection, or economy, and emphasis. The characters should speak in what appears to be their natural everyday language, and yet they must avoid the repetition and digression of ordinary conversation, and what they say must be carefully arranged with a view to forceful effect. Above all, the dialogue must never be

allowed to get in the way of either plot or characterization, lest one or the other trip over it.

An inevitable concomitant of naturalism has been the introduction of inconsequent verbosity on the stage. Compare the leisurely irrelevancies of a play, say by Mr. Granville Barker, with the crisp, abbreviated, fragmentary speech of the characters in, say Mr. Augustus Thomas's play, "As a Man Thinks." In the one case you find interminable disquisitions, which impede action and are at best only slightly revelatory of character—sometimes not at all. In the latter case you are more likely to come across a page like this:

VEDAH

I don't want Mr. Burrill and Mr. De Lota to meet.

SEELIG

Not meet—?

VEDAH

Just yet.

SEELIG

Why not?

VEDAH

I haven't told anybody of my engagement to Mr. De Lota.

SEELIG

Well?

VEDAH

Well—he carries himself so—so—

SEELIG

Proudly?

VEDAH

So much like a proprietor that it's hard to explain to others—strangers especially.

SEELIG

By "strangers especially" you mean Mr. Burrill?

VEDAH

Yes.

SEELIG

Is Mr. Burrill's opinion important?

VEDAH

His refinement is important.

SEELIG

Refinement?

VEDAH

Yes—the quality that you admire in men—the quality that Mr. De Lota sometimes lacks.

Here, obviously enough, we are getting swift exposition, story, and character—all with the least possible expenditure of language.

The amateur playwright will find that, in first drafts at least, superfluous words, speeches, even scenes, will creep in with an amazing facility. His only defense is eternal vigilance coupled with a tireless blue pencil. I fancy the original page of the dialogue just quoted was considerably more elaborate. But the useless has been rigidly eliminated, with a distinct gain, not only in speed and effectiveness, but also in the realistic approximation of life.

As for emphasis, the dramatic line, it has been said,

should be like an arrow—feathered at one end and barbed at the other. It is hiding one's light under a bushel to conceal the point in the unemphatic middle of a sentence, no matter if that be the habitual practice of the average conversationalist in real life.

Things Taboo

On the other hand, it is well to avoid the needless repetition by the second speaker of the emphatic word last uttered by the first. Thus:

JOHN

Don't you remember about to-morrow?

MARY

To-morrow?

JOHN

To-morrow is my birthday.

MARY

Your birthday?

Necessarily this makes for monotony and, if continued long enough, for madness.

Equally reprehensible is the use of long and involved sentences, where short staccato abbreviations and fragmentary phrases are indicated by both the characters and the situation. As a matter of fact, very few of us speak much in full-rounded sentences: a word or a phrase does ample duty, and what is suggested suffices without being actually said. "Create characters that are human beings," was Clyde Fitch's formula for success in the drama;

“place them in situations that are reflections of life itself; make them act—and, above all things, have them *talk* like human beings.”

The soliloquy, the monologue, the “aside,” the “apart,” as we are so often reminded, are practically taboo on the stage of to-day. It is not worth while to spend time in a discussion of the reasons and justification for their banishment. The would-be playwright should simply avoid them. As a matter of fact, in view of our universal leanings toward strict realism, he would do well also to discard certain related devices which, though still in fashion, are essentially unnatural. Such, for example, is the dialogue carried on “down stage” by two characters, which the audience can distinctly hear, but which is supposed to be inaudible to the other actors on the scene. Cases in point are the restaurant scenes in “The Phantom Rival” and “Life.” Similarly, the pantomime conversation indulged in “up stage” and letters read aloud purely for the benefit of the audience are artifices which the ultra-realistic might reasonably regard with contempt. Occasionally some of these conventions actually lead to a deplorable absurdity, as in the case already cited of “*La Samaritaine*.”¹

Connotation in Dialogue

Naturally, the best dramatic dialogue of all is that which is not merely denotative but also connotative—that which implies and suggests a freightage of emotional significance it could not possibly carry in actual expression. For ex-

¹ See page 127.

ample, in "*L'Ange gardien*" the audience as well as several of the characters are eager to ascertain who it was that for five seconds turned on the electric switch beside the outer door and so discovered Madame Trélart *tête-à-tête* with her lover, Georges Charmier. At length, in the presence of Monsieur Trélart, when direct speech would be out of the question, Thérèse Duvigneau, Madame's self-constituted guardian angel, remarks—in reply to another's platitude, "So many things can happen in half an hour,"—"Even in half a second. The instant of a flash of lightning is long enough to change a destiny."

"Very true," observes someone.

"And very banal," adds Thérèse with a smile.

Georges Charmier watches her narrowly as he suggests, "Banalities sometimes have a very specific meaning."

"That," replies Thérèse, sustaining his gaze, "which one wishes to give them."

And a moment later she casually remarks to Georges, apropos of his quarters, which are under discussion, "You don't even have electricity here!" adding, "Though I'm quite sure you have had plenty of it!"

In the fourth act of "*Cyrano de Bergerac*," after Roxane has arrived at the camp with her carriage-load of provisions, the famished cadets of Gascony, who have been stuffing themselves, observe the approach of the unpopular Comte de Guiche. Quickly hiding victuals and drink, they proceed to make merry at his expense. He has just signalled for an attack of the enemy, which is to be directed at their position, and he announces that he has had a cannon brought up for their use in case of need.

"As you are not accustomed to cannon," he adds disdainfully, "beware of the recoil."

"Pfft!" sneers a cadet. "Gascon cannon never recoil."

"You're tipsy," says Guiche in surprise. "But what with?"

"The smell of powder!" is the proud reply.

Earlier in the play, it will be recalled, the Comte, angered at Cyrano's defiance, demands, "Have you read 'Don Quixote?' "

"I have," replies Bergerac, "and I take off my hat to him."

"Meditate, then, upon the episode of the windmills," says Guiche, going; "for when a man attacks them, it often happens that the sweep of their great wings lands him in the mud."

"Or else," retorts Cyrano, "in the stars!"

In "Within the Law" Mary Turner marries Richard Gilder as part of her scheme of revenge for the wrongs done her by his father. When in the Gilder home a "stool pigeon" is shot by an accomplice of Mary, the police at first accuse her of being guilty. This she denies; whereupon the officer, pointing to her husband, asks, "Did *he* kill him?"

"Yes," she answers.

Naturally, the immediate suggestion is that she intends to add the disgrace and possible death of Richard to her revenge upon the elder Gilder.

However, the next moment Mary adds, "The dead man was a burglar: my husband shot him in defense of his home."

Perhaps these examples are not the most apt; but they will probably suffice to illustrate connotative dramatic dialogue. Mastery of this medium is, of course, to be gained only through much practice and an infinite capacity for revision, as well as through the most complete imaginative grasp of character and situation.

Connotation in Pantomime

As may readily be understood, this element of connotation or suggestiveness in the drama does not confine itself exclusively to speech. Pantomime, "business," depends largely on the same quality for its effectiveness.¹

"Cyrano de Bergerac" is rich in instances. The proud cadets, unwilling to let Guiche see that they suffer from their hunger, pretend absorption in their playing and smoking, as he enters the camp. When he boasts of his trick in escaping the enemy by throwing away his white scarf, asking, "What do you think of that for a stroke?" the other Gascons feign not to be listening for Cyrano's reply. But they keep their cards and dice-boxes poised in the air, and the smoke of their pipes stays in their cheeks, till Bergerac answers, "I think that Henri IV would never have consented, even though the enemy were overwhelming him, to have stripped himself of his white

¹ "The objective writer tries to discover the action or gesture which the state of mind must inevitably lead to in the personage under certain given circumstances. And he makes him so conduct himself . . . that all his actions, all his movements shall be the expression of his inmost nature, of all his thoughts and all his impulses or hesitations.—GUY DE MAUPASSANT, Preface to *Pierre et Jean*.

plume." Then there is silent delight among the cadets. *The cards fall, the dice rattle, the smoke is puffed out.*

"The ruse succeeded, though!" Guiche maintains. And there ensues the same general suspension of play and of smoking.

"Still one does not lightly resign the honor of being a target," retorts Cyrano. And again cards and dice fall, and smoke is exhaled.

Bergerac's superb "*gestes*"—the tossing of the purse of gold to the discomfited comedians; the flinging at the feet of their employer, Guiche, of his vanquished bravos' tattered hats; the unexpected production of the white scarf which the Comte had said no man could retrieve, and live—these and many others are obvious examples of connotative pantomime. And, to repeat what must be often said, dialogue in the drama should never begin until after pantomime has left off. That which the "business" has so emphatically expressed is only weakened by repetition in words.

Sarcey, writing of the "*Fédora*" of Sardou, tells us, "This whole first act is a marvel of *mise en scène*. It is made up of nothings, and yet there issues from it an inexpressible emotion. It is life itself, real life, placed upon the stage. The author, in his malice (I use this word purposely), has set the inquest on the front stage, while the wounded man is being cared for behind a closed door. Each time this door opens for some detail of service, the image of the dying man appears to interrupt the investigation, which a moment later is resumed."

It all springs from the fundamental fact which Sarcey

himself more than once avers he will not cease to repeat—and which his followers have often enough reiterated: “*Tout est illusion au théâtre.*”

Dialogue Not a Substitute for Character or Plot

So far as dialogue is concerned, above all else the playwright must remember that no mere verbal felicity will ever substitute for character and story in the drama. There are, as I have said, whole scenes of scintillant epigram-making in Wilde, but there are also brilliancy of characterization and ingenuity of plot. There are many lines of fresh and captivating music in “The Playboy of the Western World,” but there are humanity and struggle in generous measure besides.

In the plays of lesser yet able playwrights action often lags while dialogue flourishes. It is thus even in so interesting a conception as Mr. Israel Zangwill’s “The Melting Pot,” where at times declamation too greatly predominates over dramatic incident. It is so, too, in “The Trail of the Lonesome Pine,”—oddly enough, dramatized by that arch-realist, Mr. Eugene Walter,—in “The Winterfeast” of Mr. Charles Rann Kennedy, and in the “To-morrow” of Mr. Percy Mackaye.

“The work of the theatre,” Sarcey avers, “is above all a work of condensation. The mind of the author must make all the reflections, his heart must experience all the sentiments the subject comprises, but on condition that he give to the spectator only the substance of them. This phrase should sum up twenty pages; that word should contain the gist of twenty phrases. It is for the playgoer,

who is our collaborator much more than we realize, to find in the little that is said to him all that which is not said; and he will never fail to do so, so long as the phrase is just, and the word true."

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. From one of your own plots, describe a situation and give explicit directions for the "business"—all pantomime.

2. From any printed modern play quote a specimen of excellent poetic dialogue. Be sure to choose a play that has had actual stage production.

3. Similarly, give a good specimen of rhetorical dialogue.

4. Similarly, of realistic dialogue.

5. Write two specimens of realistic dialogue based on one of your own plots.

6. Write a specimen of dialogue using either epigram or delicate humor.

7. Write a bit of dialogue intended to reveal character.

8. Write a bit of dialogue intended to advance the plot. Base it on one of your own plots and explain your object in using the dialogue.

9. Cite as many instances as you can of (a) connotative dialogue; (b) connotative pantomime.

CHAPTER XVI

KINDS OF PLAYS

If the struggle is that of a will against nature or against destiny, against itself or against another will, the spectacle will generally be tragic. It will generally be comic, if the struggle is that of a will against some base instinct, or against some stupid prejudice, against the dictates of fashion, or against the conventions we call *social*.—FERDINAND BRUNETIERE, *Les Époques du Théâtre Français*.

It is true that the tragic fused with the comic, Seneca mingled with Terence, produces no less a monster than was Pasiphaë's Minotaur. But this abnormality pleases: people will not see any other plays but such as are half serious, half ludicrous; nature herself teaches this variety from which she borrows part of her beauty.—LOPE DE VEGA, as quoted by LESSING, *Dramatic Notes*.

Under the general division of *story plays* will naturally fall melodrama and farce. As *character plays*, comedy and tragedy may be classified. Nondescript dramatic pieces in which story, character, or neither, may predominate may be conveniently designated—when they at all deserve the title—as *plays of ideas*.

Dr. Hennequin, in his "Art of Playwriting," mentions the following different kinds of plays: tragedy; comedy; *drame*, or *Schauspiel*; the society play, otherwise known as the *pièce*, or the emotional drama; melodrama; spectacular drama; musical drama; farce comedy, or farcical comedy; farce; burlesque; burletta; comediotta. And

he further subdivides comedy into ancient classic comedy, romantic comedy, comedy of manners, and comedy drama.

At least when considering the drama historically, we have to take into account also the mystery, the morality, the miracle, the interlude, the chronicle, the history play, the tragedy of blood, the tragi-comedy, the comedy of humors, and the heroic play. And nowadays the satire—such as “What the Public Wants,” or “Fanny’s First Play;” and the fantasy—“Chantecler,” “The Yellow Jacket,” “The Poor Little Rich Girl,” “The Lady from the Sea,” “The Legend of Leonora”—have almost assumed the proportions and distinctiveness of separate forms.

Obviously, these are all to a large extent overlapping categories. Moreover, when we boil the entire nomenclature down to its essentials, we find that only comedy and tragedy are fundamental, and the principal distinctions arise according as the stress is laid on characterization or on plot.

Dramatists of to-day frequently hesitate to classify their works. They call their pieces “plays” and leave it to the critics to be more specific. Often enough, too, the dramatists are amply justified by the critics’ disagreement. As a rule, the tendency has been to put on the loftier interpretation—to speak of farce or farce-comedy as comedy, and of melodrama and its variants as tragedy.

It must not be inferred, however, that it is unimportant for the playwright to be reasonably certain as to the proper classification of his work. On the contrary, one of

the principal sources of failure is the "romantic" mingling of the *genres*¹ in drama, the variation in the same piece from true comedy to mere farce, and *vice versa*; from comedy to melodrama; from character stress to strictly plot emphasis. As has been pointed out, this does not mean to say that farce and comedy, farce and melodrama, melodrama and tragedy, comedy and tragedy, may not be combined in successful plays. But such blendings are full of risk, except where managed with the utmost skill. Nothing is more confusing to the spectator than an abrupt and awkward shift of emphasis or key. Yet such an effect is only too easy for the playwright who has ill considered his characters, and who accordingly is prone to slip into conventional grooves of story-telling.

Tendency toward Melodrama

Since the public likes plot, and the *muthos* is really more essential than the *êthos*, and, furthermore, because it is easier to tell a story than it is to portray character effectively in the play, the tendency is always toward the predominance of farce and melodrama. In fact, realistic melodrama is the classification that blankets the majority of successful American plays. Our "romantic dramas"—all the cloak-and-sword pieces of the end of the last century—are sheer melodrama. So is most of our "tragedy." Now there is distinctly no shame attached to the writing of the melodramatic, at least not when it confesses its identity frankly. The harm lies merely in the

¹ For definitions of, and distinctions among, the various kinds of plays, see the glossary which prefaces this volume.

tendency to excess, the temptation to disregard truth and logic to the point of absurdity and to produce a lying "picture of life" capable of misleading the unsophisticated while it grieves the judicious. This is not to inveigh against idealism and fictional dreaming. By all means let us gild the dull realities of life with innocent illusions. But let us not deceive ourselves into accepting impractical visions for truth, since by so doing we are likely to lead ourselves into hypocrisy and sloth.

It has already been noted how dramatists have often exhibited a tendency to get away from reality into theatricism somewhere about the middle of a play. Mr. Porter Emerson Browne, for example, began his melodrama, "The Spendthrift," with an excellent portrayal of the extravagant wife who heedlessly ruins her husband. In the second act, however, he departed incontinently from material inherently of true drama and plunged into an artificial melodramatic situation, for the purposes of which he had to bring on a character that had scarcely been named theretofore and that was utterly unreal. Frankly fabricated stage fables, like Mr. Browne's "A Fool There Was," or "Madame X," or "The Master Mind," or "The Hawk," have their place; but authors—and we—should know what it is.

Improvement in Melodrama

An inevitable result of the workings of the realistic movement has been the moderation and general improvement of the tone of both melodrama and farce. We are forcibly struck with this fact when we read—and more

especially when we witness revivals of—old specimens of these *genres* and compare them with the modern product. The old-style melodrama was a fabric of what we now consider absurd fustian and bombast. The hero was outrageously heroic, the villain incredibly villainous, and the heroine unspeakably guileless and naïve. Obviously they were but puppets: when their strings became inextricably tangled, the Master of the Show appeared in the character of *Deus ex Machina* and swiftly straightened them out. For example, after George R. Sims, in “The Lights o’ London,” has made his hero lose wife, liberty, and fortune, he restores all three at the final curtain by means of a sub-villain turned state’s evidence and an unsuspected will that gets conveniently discovered.

In our melodrama to-day we require unconventional complications, soft-pedalling upon the arbitrary,¹ and at least some pretense of inevitability, together with a naturalness of dialogue directly opposed to the stilted rhetoric of the early Victorian period. In other words, we are elevating our melodrama, at least in some respects. We certainly are not impressed as we used to be, in the theatre, with blood-and-thunder mountain feuds and Wild West primitivism—witness the recent experience of “The Battle Cry” and “Yosemite.” Heaven knows, we get more than enough of this sort of claptrap in our motion pictures.

However, the fact of this change of attitude does not mean that we are not still willing to swallow almost

¹ See page 121.

unlimited doses of the arbitrary, particularly when the dialogue is fairly realistic and there is a superficial pretense of actuality in the characterization. We strain at a gnat like "Rosedale," but we make no bones of swallowing camels like "The Nigger" or "*La Rafale*." In Mr. Sheldon's piece we have a hero who happens to be of the proudest and most conspicuous family in a Southern state and at the same time of negro blood. The envious villain happens to discover a letter that reveals the taint. The hero's negro cousin happens to be in danger of lynching and to appeal to him for protection. And when, in Act I, this cousin's mother goes to the very verge of revealing to the hero this undesirable consanguinity, the hero happens not to grow curious enough to ask her what she is so obviously on the point of disclosing. All this is of the theatre merely and wholly foreign to life as everyone knows it. Yet "The Nigger" gets a much more respectful hearing than "The Lights o' London"—gets almost the hearing, in fact, that it would have deserved had it been the great tragedy its theme implies.

As for Monsieur Henri Bernstein, his popular pieces are all artificial specimens of theatrical joinery, built often of specious materials: he is obviously Scribe plus Sardou plus the trappings of modern realism, and his contribution to the drama is a renewed emphasis on the climax which delivers "the punch" by seeming to reach its height and then resuming its activities on a still loftier emotional level. The device is similar to that of the idolized tenor of the hour, who wins and holds favor through reserving a super-high-note for the moment when the top

of human lung-power would already appear to have been reached.

After all, the legitimate business of melodrama, like that of the astonishing tenor, is to furnish thrills. At the Grand Guignol in Paris the thrill is founded upon horror. In our popular detective-and-criminal shockers—"The Conspiracy," "Within the Law," "The Deep Purple," "The Argyle Case," "Jim the Penman," "Arsène Lupin," "Raffles," "Sherlock Holmes," "Under Cover," "Kick In"—it is audacity and the narrow escape that make us grip our chair-arms and lean forward in our seats. Melodrama, then, will be successful in proportion as it provides ever-heightening suspense and a series of pulse-quicken- ing situations in the order of climax.

Farce

As for farce, its business is to provoke hilarity, not merely intermittent and casual, but continual and increasing. Its situations must be always more and more excruciatingly funny up to a grand climax of mirth, and thence quickly to a still laughable solution. No mere aggregation of verbal felicities and inserted jests will suffice: the humor must chiefly arise from the complications of the plot, like those in "Twin Beds" or "A Full House," and whenever the fun lags disaster is imminent.

Amateur melodramatists usually err on the side of excess, amateur *farceurs* on the side of insufficiency of situations. There is less necessity, indeed, for humanizing the figures in farce than there is in melodrama. The puppets must be dexterously manipulated every moment.

And success usually depends upon the spectator's willingness not to look for any actual relation between the play and life. Everyone knows that as a rule in farce the story would end almost any time that one of the characters became human enough to explain to his fellows the point of mystification upon which the entire action turns. And likewise one may be interested in the violent manoeuvres of the figures in a melodrama like "A Fool There Was" or "To-day" or "The Story of the Rosary" only so long as he makes no effort to see in it a reflection of life. When one does that, the whole preposterous fabric becomes intolerably grotesque. Illusion—voluntary illusion—is the spectator's only passport to enjoyment.

Character Plays

If an excess of plot with a deficiency of characterization is likely to fail of public approval in the theatre, so also mere stage galleries of portraits, even though of distinct individuals, if unrelated in an interesting fable, are ill calculated for success. Many of the pundits of to-day would doubtless be pleased if drama demanded nothing more than casual revelations of human nature, but the populace persists in requiring that these revelations be made through stories. And primarily the theatre depends for its existence on the populace.

Of course, there have been character plays of very slight plot that have won a deservedly large measure of success. One readily recalls "Pomander Walk" and "The Passing of the Third Floor Back." But one can also remember many plotless plays that have regularly "died a-bornin'."

There is, to be sure, the so-called "comedy of atmosphere," which is a mere representation of some specific phase of existence, without emphasis upon either plot or character. "The Weavers" of Hauptmann and "The Madras House" of Barker belong in this class—neither of them calculated to make a popular appeal in the theatre. In view of the attitude common to the mass of playgoers, the dramatist certainly should select from the lives of the real men and women he is putting into his comedy or his tragedy those possible incidents and episodes of conflict which not only best reveal the characters themselves but can also be arranged in an orderly and climacteric series adapted to the maintenance of suspense. Beyond doubt, it requires much skill and patience to do this well—far more, indeed, than merely to troop the personages cinematographically across the stage in insignificant disorder—but the effort is richly worth the while.

"To combine as much as possible of the theatric," says Mr. Henry James,¹ "with as much of the universal as the theatric will take—that is the constant problem, and one in which the maximum and minimum of effect are separated from each other by a hair-line. The theatric is so apt to be the outward, and the universal to be the inward, that, in spite of their enjoying scarcely more common ground than fish and fowl, they yet often manage to peck at each other with fatal results. The outward insists on the inward's becoming of its own substance, and the inward resists, struggles, bites, kicks, tries at least to drag the outward down. The disagreement may be a very

¹ *The Critic*, November, 1901.

pretty quarrel and an interesting literary case; it is only not likely to be a successful play."

Plays of Ideas

Doubtless the recipe for writing the play of ideas begins "First catch your idea." And when it has been captured, it will have to be mirrored by means of more or less human personages, in at least some semblance of a plot. As a matter of fact, almost any *good* play is a play of ideas plus a play of characters plus a play of plot. It is the piece that is deficient in the last two ingredients that often enough falls back upon its ideas for its only means of support. A play that is most readily and exclusively classifiable as a play of ideas is likely to be a very poor play, if, indeed, it does not turn out to be no play at all. It may be a mere series of scenes, with almost no story and the merest types for personages. In that case, it is really an animated tract—little more than a modern Pseudo-Augustinian sermon—dependent for its success upon the moral it involves, and therefore not amenable to the ordinary canons of art.

Much is being said nowadays about this "new" drama, which is in reality only the result of an increased effort on the part of the theatre to relate itself to the characteristic social and political unrest of the times. After all, the very term "drama of ideas" is in a sense self-contradictory, since the drama is essentially not a matter of intellectual, but of emotional appeal. And so far as morals are concerned, and as for problems individual or social, the theatre is far more available and effective as a

teacher by example than by precept. The play of ideas is usually only a masquerading preachment; and, of course, if there is an ass in the lion's skin, sooner or later he is recognized by his braying.

We are told that in Paris, which is the home of cubism and futurism and every other bizarre and *outré* pretense of artistic evolution and reform, the "new" drama has been carried even to the point where silence or mere general talk about the weather is to be employed for conveying the impressions of the most violent passion—since in real life people who are angry or jealous usually remain silent or employ language only to conceal emotion! After all, this preposterous undertaking is only the logical outgrowth of Monsieur Maeterlinck's mystic endeavors to "express the inexpressible by means of that which does not occur."

Perhaps the only thing of significance about the "new" drama is the fact that it is urging forward the slowly developing popular feeling for character and for the spiritual and the psychological, rather than for mere physical action in the theatre. As the masses grow in discrimination, they will naturally put less and less emphasis upon mere narrative, more and more upon the significant facts of human nature and experience. But this process may be easily urged too far, with consequent reaction and perhaps retrogression. Certainly there is no possibility of abruptly wrenching the drama out of the emotional and into the intellectual realm. When that can be done, drama will, in fact, have ceased to be drama.

What is chiefly desirable in the theatre is not so much

plays of ideas as plays *with* ideas. As men like Huxley have frequently reiterated, the emotional and the intellectual processes are not separate and distinct; and the higher the degree of general civilization the more completely will these two phases of self-activity coalesce and coöperate. The great questions of human conduct and relationships are nearly all worthy, not only of debate, but also of dramatic treatment. Character in conflict with environment and heredity is at the bottom of all our chief individual problems, and such conflict is essentially dramatic in the extreme.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. From all the sources at your command, make as full a list of kinds of plays as you can.

2. Adopt some general scheme of grouping and place each kind in a suitable category.

3. In a sentence or two, describe the essential nature of each. Try to differentiate each kind from others akin to it.

4. Without forcing, try to find a play that illustrates each kind, but remember that many popular and entertaining plays overlap as to kind. We are now trying to differentiate types with technical accuracy, not condemning plays as worthless because they contain technical defects. They would be *better* plays technically had their authors observed more carefully these well-known laws—that is the viewpoint to take in trying to fulfill this assignment.

5. After you have succeeded in completing this table as

well as possible, copy it in a note book, being careful to leave room for additions.

6. In a considerable number of plays point out the passages embodying exposition, characterization, conflict, situation, complication, increased suspense, crisis, contrast, connotative dialogue, humor of plot and of character, surprise, climax, dénouement, and the expression of the theme.

7. It is now time to be about writing your full-length play. Reread this volume, note-book in hand. Decide on a theme or a foundation incident, outline your plot, sketch the grouping of characters, develop your characters by description for your own guidance, determine on their relative prominence, and assign the space to be given to each act. Before beginning the actual writing, however, study carefully the next two chapters and leave the material gathered for the longer piece of work until you shall have labored faithfully at the writing of several one-act plays, both adapted and original. Take plenty of time to revise and re-revise; study the stage-books of successful modern plays; and lay your work aside to cool.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ONE-ACT PLAY

In both the short story and the play the space is narrow, and the action or episode must be complete in itself. In each case, therefore, you must find or invent scenes which put the greatest amount of the story into the least space: in more technical words, scenes which shall have the greatest possible significance.—J. H. GARDINER, *The Forms of Prose Literature*.

I prefer commencing with the consideration of an *effect*. Keeping originality *always* in view—for he is false to himself who ventures to dispense with so obvious and so easily attainable a source of interest—I say to myself, in the first place, “Of the innumerable effects, or impressions, of which the heart, intellect, or (more generally) the soul is susceptible, what one shall I on the present occasion choose?”—EDGAR ALLAN POE, *The Philosophy of Composition*.

The one-act play is to the play of three, four, or five acts much as the short-story is to the novel. And, as there are novelists who fail at short-story writing, and *vice versa*, so there are dramatists qualified to deal in full-evenings’ entertainments who are helpless in the realm of the playlet, and the reverse.

Singleness of Effect and Economy

It will be remembered that Edgar Allan Poe’s theory of the short-story is summed up in the word “effect.” The fiction writer labors from the very first sentence of his story to the very last with an eye single to the working

out of "a certain unique or single effect." "If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design."

As much may be said for the one-act play. Within the limits of a half-hour or less—and oftener less—the author can produce by means of a single incident only a single effect, and to that purpose all else must be subordinated. Therefore if it is dangerous to mingle the *genres* in ordinary drama, it is next to fatal to do so in the one-act piece.

After unity or singleness of purpose, economy is the most vital principle. Every moment between curtains is precious. There is little enough room for being leisurely in the long play, and certainly none at all in the playlet. For the same reason, there is no possibility of character development. All must be swiftly drawn—connoted—suggested. There is little time for exposition. A one-act play cannot succeed if much preliminary information is requisite to a comprehension of the plot. The initial situation must be set forth in the first few moments by means of broad and telling strokes. Here more than ever is there need of that perfect dialogue which both reveals character and tells the story. The mere detachable jest that ventures to impede either process must be extraordinary not to be excessive. In general, selection of details operates most effectively in the short play.

A Desirable Vehicle for the Playwright

Obviously the one-act piece offers the amateur author the easiest opportunity for testing his skill. The time and labor involved in its composition is perhaps less than a fourth or a fifth of that demanded for the four- or five-act drama. Beginners will do well to practice the various forms of composition in the brief sketch, before venturing upon the full-fledged play. There are numerous important collections of playlets available for study, including Sudermann's *Morituri* and the noteworthy work of the Irish dramatists. For one-act tragedy what can surpass Synge's superb "Riders to the Sea"? And the other *genres* are well exemplified in the work of Lady Gregory, of Mr. William Butler Yeats, and of their distinguished colleagues.

On the other hand, the opportunities for securing the production of one-act pieces is, particularly in America, exceedingly limited. Our better vaudeville houses use a considerable number of sketches, a few of which are worth mentioning as drama—such, for instance, as Sir James M. Barrie's "The Twelve Pound Look," Mr. Austin Strong's "The Drums of Oude," or Mr. George Ade's "Mrs. Peckham's Carouse"—but most of which are either mere slapstick buffoonery or penny dreadfuls. Occasionally an American theatre follows the English custom and precedes a longer piece with a one-act play, or "curtain-raiser." Still more rarely there are programmes of one-act dramas, and the example of the Grand Guignol at Paris has been followed in one or two instances.

Range, and General Qualities

The horrible can be successfully utilized in the short play as in the short-story, whereas it is not adapted to the longer drama or the novel. "If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly."

In fact, the range of subject-matter open to the one-act play is almost unlimited. A taste of anything is often acceptable where a mouthful would be repellent. Certainly whatever is presented should be given with the utmost emphasis. The conclusion, in particular, requires forcefulness; and nothing is more effective than a novel or unexpected climax, followed, as it should be, by a next-to-instantaneous dénouement. The ironical termination of Mr. Booth Tarkington's "Beauty and the Jacobin" is a specimen of excellence in this respect.

In "The Drums of Oude" the hero and the heroine are waiting in an Indian palace for the sound of a bugle which will tell them that the Sepoys are commencing a massacre. There is powder stored under the floor of the room, with a fuse attached. When the bugle call comes, the hero lights the fuse and holds the girl in his arms. Then they hear the pibrochs of a Scotch regiment to the rescue, and the fuse is extinguished at almost the last possible instant. Obviously, this little melodrama concentrates suspense and concludes with telling effect.

In "The Man in Front," which is said to be the work of Mr. Alfred Sutro, a husband is informed by his wife that his friend is her lover. The husband is on the point of strangling the friend, but at the crucial moment the wife explains that her story was merely intended to make the

husband himself disprove his own theory that, in such an instance in real life, the lover would be in no special danger. In reality, her motive has been anger over her lover's announcement that he is affianced. In the end she offers him the whispered choice between remaining a live bachelor and suffering the consequences of her husband's rage. The lover promptly chooses the former alternative.

In a playlet of similar basis, "The Woman Intervenes," by Mr. J. Hartley Manners, the lover is saved from the husband's wrath through the heroic offices of an old flame, who announces her engagement to the lover and so makes apparent his innocence. The means of suspense in both pieces is the same—that, indeed, which is at the bottom of the "eternal triangle" situation. In "The Man in Front," however, there is novelty in the expedient adopted by the woman to save her lover's life, with a consequent surprise which greatly heightens the effectiveness of the little play. Especially in vaudeville is this sort of final knock-out blow a *sine qua non*.

Certainly there is even less excuse or hope for the conventional in the short drama than in the long. This naturally follows from the fact that in the playlet there is no opportunity to redeem triteness of plot with excellence of characterization. Mr. Richard Harding Davis is the author of a sketch entitled "Miss Civilization," which is a case in point. In this piece we encounter such ancient friends as the young woman in a dressing-gown, alone in a country house, entertaining three serio-comic burglars until rescuers arrive—whereupon, in accord with the

feminine tradition, she faints. One sees readily that she would have to be an extraordinarily accomplished and facile young person to entertain, not only her burglars, but also the audience during the considerable interval while she is waiting for help. Here characters and situation alike are too antiquated to win sustained interest.

The Ironic Playlet

The one-act play has often been successfully employed in satire. In fact, brevity is the soul of irony. Prolonged ridicule soon loses its effectiveness: it is a seasoning which, unless used sparingly, dulls the palate. In any case, the successful dramatic satire is that which utilizes the distinctive means of the drama, making its points concretely in illustrative action rather than in mere talk. One can find amusement in a trifle like Mr. William C. DeMille's "Food," which is scarcely more than a dialogue of clever exaggeration, but one's pleasure becomes indefinitely heightened at sight of the travesty figures, in Sir James M. Barrie's "A Slice of Life," really acting out his exposure of what is most absurd in our modern realistic problem drama.

In Mr. Bernard Shaw's "How He Lied to Her Husband," the student will find much delightful and telling paradox in both the talk and the behavior of the "Candida" triangle in miniature, but little in the way of distinct characterization.

That the one-act piece affords a large opportunity for dramatic portraiture, however, has been frequently proved. A recent example is Mr. Willard Mack's "Vindication,"

so excellently acted in vaudeville by Mr. Frank Keenan and his company. Except for some brief expository talk intended to reveal the impulsive warm-heartedness of the governor, the play is largely a sort of interrupted monologue, in the course of which the old Confederate soldier, waging a valiant and almost hopeless fight for his boy's good name, sets himself before us in all his weakness and strength, pitiful, laughable, lovable—as wholly “sympathetic” a figure as one could well imagine. Throughout, the little drama grips us with its spectacle of a brave, frank, shrewd struggle against big odds, as well as with its representation of a human soul.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Outline, analyze, and criticise any one-act play you have seen.
2. Solely for practice, and not with a view to production, map out a playlet from a well-known short-story.
3. Invent two or three themes or situations for one-act plays.
4. In the manner outlined on page 193 (Exercise 7, Chapter XVI) set about writing a one-act play.

CHAPTER XVIII

SCENARIO MAKING AND MECHANICAL PROCESSES

The scenario or skeleton is so manifestly the natural groundwork of a dramatic performance that the playwrights of the Italian *commedia dell' arte* wrote nothing more than a scheme of scenes, and left the actors to do the rest. The same practice prevailed in early Elizabethan days, as one or two MS. "Plats," designed to be hung up in the wings, are extant to testify.—WILLIAM ARCHER, *Play-Making*.

Hand-script is difficult to read at best and irritates your very busy judge; the manuscript reader cannot give full attention to your work if the act of reading becomes laborious; unconsciously he regards hand-script as the sign manual of inexperience. . . . Neatness counts for as much in a manuscript as do clean cuffs on a salesman.—J. BERG ESENWEIN, *Writing the Short-Story*.

There is a relation between the one-act play and the scenario, if only a quantitative one. The scenario is in reality a condensed version of the longer play, partaking of the tabloid features of the playlet. Practice in writing either form should help in the other. Certainly the ability to devise a good outline is the natural precedent of successful play writing. It is an idle fear that taboos the scenario as restricting the author's and the characters' freedom in the development of the play. After the personages have been conceived and thrown together under the basic conditions, it can be a question of but a

short time until the playwright will want to cast, in at least some definite, if tentative form, the sequence of events that issue from the combination. And even though he map out a detailed story, incident by incident, act by act, even though he include bits of dialogue or whole scenes, there is no valid reason why, should he later see fit, he should not revise the entire programme or rewrite every word of it. On the other hand, unless he have an extraordinarily retentive memory, he will find it difficult to bear in mind the many threads of conduct and character it is his business to weave together.

In the preparation of the scenario for use in the actual writing of the play, every freedom is, of course, available. During the fine frenzy of invention, ideas will be jotted down pell-mell; and even when the first effort at the establishment of order takes place, the author will pay little heed to strict proportion and emphasis.

Having his environment and characters and the first indefinite intimations of the trend of the plot, he will probably begin by mapping out a scheme of time and place, which will depend upon or result in the preliminary division into acts and scenes.

General Suggestions

In planning the one-act play it will usually be best to employ only one scene and to make the time of action continuous. Latter-day realism demands that acting-time and actual time should be identical. The stage clock that strikes ten-thirty six minutes after it has struck ten

is likely to excite derision. Besides, in nearly every instance, a little ingenuity should suffice to synchronize with actuality the time of any single scene.

Furthermore, in the drama to-day the author must take into consideration the events and changes that may have occurred during the periods intervening between the occasions represented in the different acts. Thus each act following the first will often require a brief exposition of its own, which will account for the *entr'acte* developments, somewhat after the fashion of "Lennox and another Lord" and "Ross and an Old Man" in the intervals between Acts II and III and Acts III and IV of "Macbeth." Much, indeed, may occur off-stage in the drama—particularly scenes of violence—and be the more effective for the invisibility, always providing that there shall be omitted from actual representation no incident that is vitally illustrative, that has been deliberately prepared for, that is, indeed, a Sarceyan *scène à faire*, or scene—that—*must*—be—shown.

Actual Scenario Making

Once the rough plan is drawn up, the procedure of scenario making will continue apace with the process of thinking out the play. Unless one is a follower of that advanced "technique" which abhors rising and falling action as over-artificial, he will naturally build up to a climax. He will also prepare for a solution not devoid of suspense and surprise clear down to the final curtain. Of course, at every step the plot should be tested by the characters in strictest logic; and, wherever it exceeds or

falls short of consistency and probability, it should be halted indefinitely for ruthless alteration.

Eventually the working scenario, when it has been copied into legibility, will probably be a rather chaotic conglomerate of first and third person remarks. Here and there, in important scenes especially, there will be passages in dialogue; though, for the most part the outline will be chiefly composed of narrative and description, probably in the historical present. In this form and at this stage the scenario offers almost every opportunity for that preliminary self-criticism which may be as productive of the greatest progress as it will be saving of hasty and ill-considered labor. In many cases, in fact, it will be found both expedient and profitable to put the work aside to "cool," in order that a fresher and a more detached and impersonal attitude may be adopted by the author later on, when he considers his project anew.

Preparing the Scenario for the Producer

As for the scenario which is intended to set forth the gist of a drama to one who may possibly be interested in its production, that is quite another matter. To begin with, it is written not before but after the actual composition of the play itself. Generally it will aim to interest a busy and critical manager or actor, in the hope of arousing his desire to read the completed play. The theories in this regard seem to vary. One producer refuses to read a play by an unknown author until a scenario has been submitted; another will perhaps return the scenario with a statement to the effect that, while it appears interest-

ing, one can form no satisfactory estimate without a consideration of the entire play. Perhaps the only safe policy is to submit both play and scenario, and let the reader take his choice.

At all events, this finished outline of a finished play requires care in its construction, if it is to interest and satisfy. To begin with, it must be brief. That means that the writer will have to exercise his sense of proportion in laying out his account of characters and incidents. He will have to blue-pencil the non-essential in all ruthlessness. Yet, on the other hand, he must avoid a sketchy summary which produces vagueness and uncertainty in the reader. Moreover, really good ideas are valuable in the world of the theatre. Stated baldly in brief scenario form, they are perhaps more at the mercy of the unscrupulous than when they have been worked up into finished plays, or at least into complete outlines which represent plays written and capable of copyright.

Above all, the scenario should be *dramatic*. Upon the manner in which one selects and emphasizes in the outline the significant moments of one's play will its general quality be judged.

When a play has been finally completed to the full satisfaction of the author and, so far as possible, has had such reliable criticism as he may have been able to obtain, it is then put in form for submission to producers and for copyright. Of course, it is typewritten in duplicate. Three or even more carbon copies, in addition to the original, can readily be made. The size of manuscript sheets should be about eight by ten and a half, or perhaps

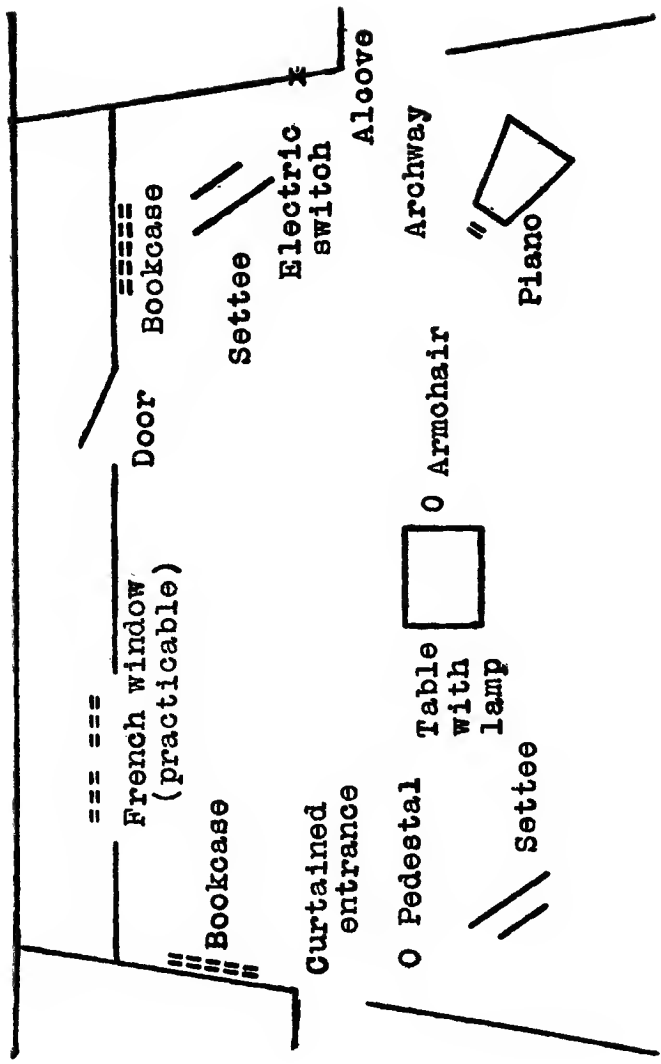
eight and a half by eleven inches. The first copy should, if possible, be typed in two colors: all the dialogue should be, preferably, in blue or purple; all the stage directions, in red. In the carbon copies the stage directions should be underscored with red ink. Do not use a "copying ribbon" on the typewriter—the script smudges too easily and annoyingly stains the fingers of the reader.

Stage Directions

There are various plans for arranging directions and dialogue on the typewritten page. Most writers place the name of each character in the center of the line above his speech. Any direction concerning the speech is then placed in parenthesis on the line following. Stage directions, by the way—except perhaps the description of the setting at the beginning of the scene—should all be enclosed in parentheses.

A few writers adopt the plan of placing the name of the character, followed by any required direction, at the beginning of the first line of his speech. Name and direction are either typed or underscored in red; the speech, in purple, blue, black, or some other contrasting color.

Longer stage directions than the mere phrase that characterizes a single speech are generally arranged in a sort of reversed paragraph, all the lines *after* the first, instead of the first, being indented, and typed or underscored in red. The left-hand margin for stage directions should be placed an inch or more to the right of the ordinary type-margin. The dialogue should be double spaced; but single spacing



===

French window
(practicable)

Bookcase

Curtained
entrance

Door

Bookcase

Settee

Electric
switch

Aloove

O Pedestal



Table
with
lamp

O

Armchair

Archway



Settee



"
Piano

for the stage directions may serve as an additional means of convenient contrast. Appended to this volume will be found fac-simile pages of play manuscript that will illustrate the most common usage.

It should be borne in mind that the arrangement of the manuscript is for the benefit of the reader. In these days of multitudinous scripts and leisureless producers, many a play probably fails of a hearing because of a disorderly or confusing appearance.

Each act of a play should be preceded by a description and a diagram of the setting. Both should be complete yet simple. The description notes the details of the *mise en scène* and their relative locations. The diagram still more definitely places them, indicating walls, doors, windows, entrances, and exterior and interior surroundings of every sort. The best usage requires that the name of each object be written on or beside the representation of the object in the diagram.

The present-day movement is toward a simplification of stage terminology. The old manner of describing entrances as "Right first," "Right third," or "Left upper"—except for generally locating positions in exteriors—has passed with the passing of the old-fashioned wing-and-groove settings. Nowadays interiors are completely boxed in, the side walls being as solid, the side doors and windows as "practicable," as the rear ones, with usually a solid ceiling in place of the unrealistic "borders" of other days. The stage, however, still retains its general divisions, Right, Left, and Center, customarily designated as R, L, and C. "Right" and "Left" on the stage are, of course,

the *actor's* right and left as he faces the audience. Moreover, the terms "up stage" and "down stage" are still employed to indicate locations toward the rear and toward the front of the stage respectively. Similarly, one speaks of a chair as being "above" a table; though there is no earthly reason why "behind" should not be equally expressive—only, it is not used.

However, an extensive knowledge of stage terminology is not actually requisite to the preparation of play manuscripts. What is essential is that the author should thoroughly know the capabilities of the stage for producing or heightening the effects at which he aims. Flies, rigging-loft, dock, stage-cloth, tormentors, traps, drops, flats, set-pieces, wood-cuts, runs, bunch-lights, dimmers, foots, strips, olivettes, flood lights, spotlights, stage pockets, gridiron, lines, battens, tabs, jogs, etc., etc., are all characteristic and interesting terms; but, for the most part, they may be left to the players, more especially to the manager and the stage hands. At all events, the entire special terminology of the theatre can be learned by any ordinary mind with a half-hour's application. And this in spite of the fact that schools of acting and of playwriting sometimes detail the subject in their catalogues as though it were one of the full courses of instruction.

In writing the stage directions, it is customary to give at the first entrance of each character a brief description of his personal appearance and dress. This usually suffices for the entire play unless some marked change in an individual is to be indicated. Napoleon in the first

act of "*Madame Sans-Gêne*" is, naturally, a very different-looking person from Napoleon in the third act.

At the beginning of the play there should be prefixed for convenient reference a list of the *dramatis personæ*. The growing and rational usage is to name the characters in the order of their appearance. This list is, of course, to be printed in the programme. And it should include no more than the names of the personages, without explanation other than an occasional descriptive word. "Manson, a butler" and "William, his son" would perhaps not be out of place; but any detailed description or explanation here of a character, his business, or his relations to other characters, is nowadays interpreted as a confession that the play itself does not succeed in conveying the necessary information as it should. In fact, the stage directions in the version of the play intended for the purposes of theatrical production should usually confine themselves, with regard to the characters, to the simplest essential account of the appearance and conduct of each personage. Monsieur Rostand may embalm his stage directions in the form of sonnets, but he does it, of course, with an eye on the reader of his play, not on the producer. When the professed naturalistic playwright adopts a similar custom, even though he write in prose, he is certainly guilty of an inconsistency.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Revise the outline asked for in Exercise 6, Chapter XVI, in accordance with the instructions of this chapter.

2. For exercise, prepare a scenario of any modern play whose full text is available.

3. Referring to Exercise 7, Chapter XVI, proceed with the writing of your long play. When you have finally done this work to the best of your ability, you should revise painstakingly according to the suggestions in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XIX

SELF-CRITICISM

Others may tell him whether his work is good or bad; but only the author himself is in a position to know just what he was trying to do and how far short he has fallen of doing it. . . . Suppose, for instance, that an author's trouble is plot construction. It may be easy to tell him where his plot is wrong and explain to him the principle that he has violated. But if he is to obtain any real and lasting profit, he must find out for himself how to set the trouble right. Of course, you might construct the plot for him—but then it would be your plot and not his; you would be, not his teacher, but his collaborator; and his working out of your plot would almost surely result in bad work.—FREDERIC TABER COOPER, *The Craftsmanship of Writing*.

The paramount danger is haste, with its resultant carelessness. . . . To exhibit the superficial aspects of a situation, to invent melodramatic incidents that obscure the solution, and to express half-baked views in place of thoughtful convictions, if indeed the duty of thinking out the problem be not dodged entirely, is so often quite sufficient to win applause and pelf, that it is perhaps a counsel of perfection to ask our playmakers, in the present infancy of their art, to do more. And yet, more they must do, in time, if our theatre is to be reckoned as a national asset; the appeal to history settles that.—RICHARD BURTON, *The New American Drama*.

Before the dramatist takes his trusty typewriter in hand or—if he be so opulent—turns his play over to the typist, let him submit it to the most patient and searching process of criticism, beginning with the first fundamentals and not ending till he has taken into account the last

details. Let him read his work carefully, read it aloud for the detection of cacophony and other faults still more vital. Preferably, first of all, he should lay the manuscript away for several months and try to forget it. Then he should assume and cultivate the most detached and impersonal attitude possible, putting himself imaginatively in the place not only of the average playgoer, but also of the manager and the actor.

Testing the Amount of Dramatic Material

The fundamental question that he should relentlessly ask concerning his work is, Is this drama? Or perhaps we should word it, *How much* of this is drama, and how much merely dialogue, narrative, descriptive, didactic? Too often a few bright lines and interesting situations that could readily be condensed into a vaudeville sketch are spread out thin over the surface of a whole evening's performance. Mr. George M. Cohan's "Broadway Jones" occupies four acts when it might as well have been confined to three. Mr. A. E. W. Mason's play, "Green Stockings," indeed, was thus condensed after its first production and for some time appeared in three acts while its original "paper" advertised it as "a four-act comedy."

Naturally, few plays are drama from the very start. The exigencies of exposition usually require a preliminary narrative dialogue. Sometimes this extends throughout the entire first act. Too often it never ceases till the final curtain. Purely expository beginnings should be disguised by means of interesting movement, manoeuvres,

and characterization. In other words, the exposition should be contrived so as to *hold the attention* of the spectator with the least possible, if any, voluntary effort on his part. It has previously been pointed out that the exposition may often be sprinkled along in small doses throughout the first act, or even throughout the entire play, instead of being massed at the beginning.

Testing the Interest

In reviewing his completed work, the playwright should be able to determine at exactly what point the *emotional interest* commences. And, if this point be long delayed, he should labor to condense what precedes it, to shift the order of revelation, and by all available means to maintain attention from the beginning of his play.

Where does emotional—that is, dramatic—interest begin? Briefly, it starts with the struggle that underlies the play. The moment we see persons actually engage in a conflict, with each other, with society, with circumstances, with fate, with themselves—in short, with any conceivable antagonist—that moment, being human, we are inspired with a feeling of suspense as to the outcome of the fight. We are curious as to who shall win, and—meanwhile—as to how the battle will be fought. It behooves the dramatist, therefore, to dispense with useless preliminaries and let his antagonists come to the grapple with the least possible delay.

Having determined the matter of the dramatic start, the self-criticising playwright will proceed to make certain that he has maintained the initial interest he has

aroused. It is distinctly his business not to allow this emotional curiosity to lag. In fact, it is distinctly his business to be constantly heightening it toward his climax. One of the easiest faults to commit in play-writing is that of continually raising and dropping the tension from situation to situation, that is, of presenting a series of incidents, each dramatic in itself but not carrying over the final interest to what follows and proceeding ever up and up on higher levels to the summit. The prognosis for this broken-backed structure is usually most unfavorable. It should be avoided from the scenario stage. In any event, it should be carefully sought out in the final self-criticism and, when found, eliminated even at the cost of an entire recasting and rewriting of the play.

This process of self-criticism further includes a determination as to whether the structure itself is actually climacteric—always excepting plotless photography—and as to whether the climax—indeed, the plot in general—is illustrative of the theme. Then comes the question of the *dénouement*. It is perhaps a natural tendency to construct plays so that the interest both culminates and concludes at the same moment. In such a case, however, an appended act merely to tell us that They were married and lived happily ever after, or that, having been definitely conquered, He gave up the struggle, will be a matter of supererogation. Final self-criticism must determine whether a sufficiently important part of the story has been left to be told in the last act. In fact, every act but the last should be concluded in such a way as to carry the spectator's interest over into what is to follow. Where

this procedure is found to have been neglected, recasting is again obligatory.

Testing the Characterization

When these matters of story have been disposed of—or, rather, simultaneously with the process—the characterization and its relation to the plot must be painstakingly scrutinized. It is assumed that from the beginning every effort has been made to avoid the conventional. The playwright has modelled upon real life as he knows it, rather than upon the artificialities traditional to the theatre and fiction generally. It is more than possible, however, that, in the haste of composition, he has admitted to his work defects of probability and complete motivation. He has made A, who is ordinarily a hard-headed, shrewd man of affairs, incredibly commit some carelessness or omit some caution. In other words, *everything* has not always been taken into consideration when a character has been made to say or do things. With the final self-criticism comes the playwright's opportunity to remedy any such possible oversights, and so to avoid the condemnation that is sure to descend upon even the most trivial improbabilities of conduct among his *dramatis personæ*. Indeed, the more accurate and thorough the characterization, the more glaring will be the smallest inconsistency.

There must be, then, every attention given to such matters of detail. The entrances and exits of the characters, for example, must be carefully, though not obtrusively, motivated. It is repeatedly necessary to get this or

that person on or off the stage; and in our day their comings and goings may not simply happen arbitrarily. In "As a Man Thinks," for example, Dr. Seelig comes home at tea-time and finds his daughter alone in the drawing-room. Several friends have been invited in—they are already late—and so we are prepared for their coming presently. Mrs. Clayton calls to speak with the doctor professionally; this gets her into the house; and then, in order that Vedah and her father may continue their confidential expository chat a little longer, Mrs. Clayton's desire to see Mrs. Seelig, who is upstairs, gets the former off the stage again. Later, to leave Vedah and Burrill alone together—after the apparently casual, but of course carefully calculated announcement by her father of her engagement to De Lota—Dr. Seelig carries the two vases into the library. And, a short time afterward—to give De Lota and Elinor an opportunity for confidential dialogue—Dr. Seelig calls to Vedah and Burrill to come to him in the library.

So it goes. People do not drop in by chance or disappear without reason: every movement is rationalized—made the effect of an obvious, though never obtrusive cause.

Testing the Play for Action

And always what must be borne steadily in mind is the importance of *action*. A play is a play, and not merely a narrative, by virtue of this element alone. You have a theme: it must be shown in action. You have a story: it must be related in action. You have characters: they must be portrayed in action. Whatever there is in your

drama that is worth while must be illustrated concretely by things done, and not merely said.

For an example consider Mr. Rudolf Besier's "Don" in contrast with Mr. George Bernard Shaw's "Fanny's First Play." At bottom, the theme of both is the same: the helplessness of middle-class respectability in the face of the unconventional. But "Don" illustrates this problem in terms of concrete action, while the other piece presents it chiefly in the form of debate. In fact, with Mr. Shaw there is so much scintillant dialogue that there is no time left for the doing of things. When we eliminate this verbal felicity and substitute "the great realities of our modern life—meaning, apparently," as Mr. William Winter puts it, "photographs of the coal-scuttle, and other such tremendous facts of actual, everyday existence," we no longer draw the playgoer's attention away from the fundamental lack of action. Indeed, "Fanny's First Play," as a play, was only what might have been expected of so youthful an amateur as Fanny, and consequently had to be eked out not only with Shavian girdings at middle-class morality, but also with the resurrected device of a satirical prologue and epilogue forestalling the critics.¹

Testing the Play for Finish

Finally, there will remain in this process of self-criticism, the ultimate condensation and polishing of the dialogue,

¹ Much the same sort of comparison might profitably be made between Mr. Shaw's "Pygmalion" and Mr. Hubert Henry Davies's "Outcast." In the matter of structure, however, "Don" surpasses "Outcast," and "Pygmalion" is better than "Fanny's First Play."

and even of the stage directions. It seems almost endlessly possible to eliminate superfluous words and phrases and to improve diction and form. Of course, all must be done with an eye single—in the realistic drama—to that compact and selective kind of speech which yet gives the illusion of the ordinary.

Above all, the dialogue must be kept consistent with the characterization; and the last test, again, will determine whether anybody has been made to say what he would not probably have said in real life.

After everything possible seems to have been done by way of improvement, a final reading *aloud* will invariably discover unguessed imperfections. In fact, it is doubtful whether any playwright who types his own manuscripts ever does so without numerous pauses to reconstruct a line or to delete a phrase.

Important General Tests

There are, of course, many special considerations other than those mentioned that must enter into the process of final self-criticism. Authors will perhaps ask themselves whether they have provided the sort of leading rôle that will appeal to the particular player or manager that it is hoped to interest; whether opportunity has been provided for necessary changes of costume; whether the scenes and the time-scheme have been devised so as to give occasion for a desirable sartorial display in certain types of drama; whether general ease and inexpensiveness of production have been made possible—in fact, scores of eminently practical considerations will come to mind.

There is the important matter of the unity of tone, since plays, as has been seen, occasionally fail through a shifting viewpoint that fatally confuses the spectator. Then there is the whole problem of preparation, of advance information and suggestion that arouses suspense and makes intelligible what occurs later. And finally, there is the question of repetition and the rigid deletion of what has perchance been twice told to no special advantage.

Digest of Dramatic Rules

Perhaps the beginner will be stimulated by some of the various collections of miscellaneous rules for dramatic composition.

He will at least remember Dumas' "Let your first act be clear, your last act brief, and the whole interesting," and Wilkie Collins's famous "Make 'em laugh; make 'em weep; make 'em wait." For the rest, here are some fragments of advice from many sources, which the amateur dramatist may take for what they are worth:

1. Get a good, simple story.
2. Let it be human and appeal to all kinds of people, the gallery as well as the stalls.
3. Do not let too many important things have "happened" before the rise of the curtain.
4. Center your interest on one or two people.
5. The fewer characters the better.
6. The fewer settings the better.
7. Do not change your scene during an act.
8. Do not have more than four acts.

9. Let there be between eighteen and thirty-five type-written pages to the act.

10. Mere topics of the hour are dangerous themes, since by the time plays are read and produced their subject-matter is likely to be stale. Themes universal and eternal, yet timely, are the ones that are most worth while.

11. To-day is the best time to write about; where you live, the likeliest place.

12. Read the master playwrights of to-day:—Sudermann, Pinero, Thomas, Hervieu, Rostand—these will do to start with.

13. Technique—as in all the arts—must be mastered and forgotten. It must be at the finger-tips, like the mechanics of piano-playing.

14. “The exit of each character must bear the same relation to him that the curtain bears to the plot. Every time a man leaves the stage, the audience should wonder what he is going to do and what effect it will have on his next appearance.”

15. See that the play is always moving straight toward its goal: divagation is usually death.

16. Plays that are “enlarged fifth acts,”—that is, that present only the culminating scenes of the story—are usually the swiftest and the most compact.

17. Express as much as possible in pantomime, gesture, and facial play: by so doing you take the audience into collaboration and thus tickle its vanity. It is worth while to develop the significant “business” for the player.

18. If it is consistent with story and characters, give the women opportunities to dress—and more than once.

19. Remember that interior settings are usually less expensive than exteriors. Moreover, entrances and exits are more clear-cut, definite, and effective in interiors.

20. Work to bring about a logical conclusion dimly foreseen and ardently desired, by surprising yet thoroughly convincing means.

21. "The essence of the play's entertainment is surprise—the pleasant shock which breaks the crust of habitual thought in which each spectator is imprisoned and releases him into a new and more spacious world."

22. Base all your work ultimately upon Spencer's principle of the economy of attention.

23. Strive to people situation with character and to make situation significant as an opportunity for character to express itself. Character should always dominate situation. Character is destiny.

24. Avoid the didactic:—a play should point its own moral without the aid of a *raisonneur*.

25. Settings should be characteristic and suggestive of the persons and the theme of the play. The first setting ought, in some measure, to strike the keynote.

26. Ponder Ibsen's avowed purpose in play-writing:—to evoke "the sensation of having lived through a passage of actual life."

27. Remember proportion: the minor, however interesting *per se*, is pernicious when it distracts attention from the major matter.

28. "Plays aren't written; they're rewritten." "It's a wise author that knows his own play on its first night."

29. "In the matter of local color, of atmosphere, the playwright cannot spend too much pains. He must be effective in all these superficial things."

30. The first rule of the stage, as of oratory, is—to paraphrase Danton—*De l'action, encore de l'action, toujours de l'action*. The constant desire of the spectator is to see something happen.

"These few precepts" it will hardly be necessary to analyze or discuss. For the most part, they are repetitive of what has already, and more than once, been counselled in detail. Some of them, of course, merely repeat each other. Others challenge instant antagonism. They are drawn, as was said, from various sources and are offered simply with the thought that, as they stand, they may stimulate helpful reflection.

Finally, perhaps the most vital rule that could be phrased would be *Avoid haste*. Sir Arthur Wing Pinero declares that one play a year is enough. Monsieur Edmond Rostand takes as long as nine years—at least in the case of "*Chantecler*." Whatever else he produces, we may be sure, will not lack maturest consideration. Shakespeare wrote his three dozen dramas, in addition to his other works, in about twenty-five years.

"'Stop Thief,'" says Mr. George M. Cohan,¹ "was one of the most logical, smooth-running farces ever produced on any stage. *Moore rewrote it six times before it*

¹ In the *Green Book Magazine*, April, 1915.

was approved by us. He must have written at least five entirely new plays before we accepted 'Stop Thief;' but he is one of the few playwrights who work on the theory that the other fellow is likely to have some ideas, and that the author does not know everything. He is willing to take advice and suggestions—and for that reason, if for no other, I believe he will prove a greater success, and eventually become a greater craftsman, than those who will not.

"Reizenstein threw away—not literally, of course—the first manuscript of 'On Trial.' . . . I told Reizenstein to write an entirely different story into his scenes, and in three or four weeks he came back with the play as it was later produced. . . . Had Reizenstein been an older and accepted playwright, he might have turned up his nose when we asked him to rewrite what some of them choose to call their 'soul's blood.' . . . McHugh literally ripped the manuscript [of "Officer 666"] to pieces, changing it here, there, and everywhere, and then changing it again, until the play as produced would never have been recognized as the original."

Of course, many playwrights have won success while working at incredibly high speed. "*La Dame aux Camélias* was composed in eight days, to anticipate a pirated version of the novel from which it was taken. Dion Boucicault wrote four hundred plays in fifty years, one piece having been composed in forty-eight hours. Lope de Vega wrote dramas at the rate of forty-four a year until he had become responsible for more than two thousand titles.

On the other hand, when Mr. Edward Sheldon produces three plays in a single season, and only one of them is really worth while, the fact appears significant. Mr. Augustus Thomas, too, apparently suffers now and then by haste, as "Mere Man" and "The Model," to say nothing of a few other plays, would seem to indicate; and the late Clyde Fitch gave the impression of owing most of his deficiencies to the speed with which he turned out his frequently inconsequential trifles of entertainment. After all, it is much easier to scribble off new pieces at white heat than it is to subject a single drama to the long and relentless pressure of hard thinking that such an enterprise deserves and requires. As for success, one good play will certainly land its author high above what he could gain from a dozen comparative failures.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Apply the tests of this chapter to the text of some modern play. What are your conclusions, specifically?
2. Frankly say what defects you find in your own manuscripts, after self-criticism.
3. Indicate which points you think may be amended, and how.

CHAPTER XX

PLACING THE PLAY

Good plays are always wanted, and the anxiety to get hold of them is very great, the multiplicity of theatres increasing the demand. But is it to be wondered at, that a busy and harassed manager is not in a position to give serious thought to the enormous mass of written or printed matter that is being perpetually brought under his notice? . . . It is a marvel that managers are as patient as they are, when one thinks of the absolute rubbish that is constantly asking their suffrages. . . . Going "through the mill" is not a pleasant operation, but it is the only way to get associated with the grist.—FRANK ARCHER, *How to Write a Good Play*.

Don't ever send in a play without first having obtained permission to do so. Don't, when it is in, worry the manager about it too soon or too often. Don't write to the papers about your ill-treatment. . . . Do not argue with managers, but accept their decisions, and appear to be impressed with, and grateful for, their views. . . . Be guided by common sense in your tactics. Do not send drawing-room comedy to the Adelphi, and sensational melodrama to Terry's. Do not try to talk Mr. Toole over into playing a heavy, emotional drama, because you will only be wasting your own valuable time, to say nothing of that versatile comedian's. . . . Send one-part plays to the actors or actresses that they would best suit. . . . Mind, however, that the play *is* a one-part play; actors do not relish rivalry. And take care that the part suits your man all through.—*Play-writing: a Handbook for Would-be Dramatic Authors* (By "A Dramatist.")

And after you have performed the Herculean labors involved in the writing, criticising, revising, and copying

of your play, you find that your work has only just begun! Next you have to consider the task of getting the play "placed."

For achieving this highly desirable consummation—since "no man is a recognized dramatist till he is produced"—there are various procedures. You may mail your play to a manager, to a "star," or to a play agent; or you may carry the manuscript in person.

What happens to plays mailed or expressed to managers?

That depends. Write to the average producer, and he will reply that, if you will send him your play, he will read it as soon as possible. If you call on the manager yourself—and succeed in seeing him—he is likely to assure you of just that much. One producer frankly asserts that, since not one play out of a thousand ordinarily received is worth looking into, he is much too busy a man to read plays against such odds. To attract his attention the author must have first gained the interest of some noted actor, or must submit a record of some successful minor production.

Most theatrical firms employ play-readers, who perhaps occasionally recommend promising manuscripts for production. It is quite true, however, that though, according to recurrent newspaper interviews, most managers are actually on the lookout for undiscovered dramatists, they often seem unwilling to seek these elusive wheat-grains in the oceans of chaff which flow in via the post office.

Copyrighting the Play

Playwrights are frequently warned in more or less direct language that in submitting manuscripts indiscriminately

they run the risk of losing the *ideas* of their plays, when novel, if not the plays entire. Of course, modern copyright arrangements insure a certain amount of protection. By filling out a blank and sending it with one dollar, a ten-cent revenue stamp, and a carbon copy of an original play to the Register of Copyrights at Washington, the author can obtain a certificate of copyright good for twenty-eight years. This certificate, together with evidence that a producer has had access to a copy of the play, makes a basis for a damage suit against the producer, when he brings out under another title a strikingly similar piece. Perhaps this accounts for the fact that many managers carefully avoid mentioning the title of any play in their letters: "I have received *your play*," they will write, or "I have read *your play*;" but they rarely make any further identification. Anyhow, it is notorious that producers are often harassed and victimized in the matter of plagiary accusations.

Manager and Actor

The experience in submitting plays to managers, if only because of the delay, is usually disheartening. Sooner or later, the author is tempted to try the play broker. Some of these agents are reliable. If they like a play, they will say so; and sometimes they will succeed in placing it for production. Then they will charge a commission of ten per cent. of the author's profits, which is a very reasonable fee indeed, since the agent looks after the drawing of contracts, the collection of royalties, and all other necessary business. However, some play brokers also have a habit

of storing manuscripts away indefinitely, even after having warmly approved them.

There remains the actor. If he reads your play and becomes interested in it, he will of course be likely to urge its production by his manager. But actors, too, are busy people. They often carry trunkfuls of manuscripts about with them and find time to read none. And as a rule, when the actor glances over a play and finds in it no part suited to himself, his interest in it as a working possibility ceases.

The process of seeing a manager usually includes making an appointment by letter, waiting long beyond the hour named, accepting rebuffs from the Napoleonic office-boy, and at last being dismissed by the producer himself with scant encouragement. Play brokers can generally be seen with less delay. In the event of an interview, few managers, actors, or agents will do more than take a manuscript and promise to read it at some indefinite future date. And personal visits rarely accomplish more than do courteous letters toward securing immediate action. Obviously, watchful waiting is usually the only practicable policy for the beginner.

Producers' promises to read, doubtless for the most part made in good faith, are often not fulfilled before the author's patience has become exhausted. One rising Western manager, for example, agreed to consider an amateur's manuscript. After it had been in his office for some months, he replied to an inquiry that he was much interested in the play and would in all probability produce it. At the end of eighteen months, the author

requested its return. Meanwhile, the manager had written some fifteen letters of excuse for postponement, while he was repeatedly announcing through the press the acquisition of new pieces, and his desire to consider manuscripts from "unknown" authors.

In the present state of vaudeville, except for the rare one-act play theatres, there are almost no producing managers, as in the "legitimate," to whom playlets may to any purpose be submitted. Few if any booking offices or other business enterprises connected with the variety stage will consider unsolicited manuscripts with a view to production. There are, however, play brokers who frequently place sketches; and vaudeville actors are usually on the lookout for next year's "vehicle." One means of getting a sketch seriously considered for vaudeville is to arrange for a "try-out" that the booking office reviewers may witness. This, of course, is beyond the possibilities of the average author.

And so it goes. Nevertheless, the self-confident pseudo-dramatist will not allow even an apparently endless series of rebuffs utterly to dishearten him. The prize is no trivial one; and, anyhow, a good fight is its own reward. There are many interesting stories of frequently rejected plays that eventually won renown for their authors. Mr. Augustin MacHugh, for example, is quoted as saying that in at least three offices his farce, "Officer 666," was never taken from its wrappings.

The secret history of many latter-day stage successes would, indeed, make interesting reading, if all the facts were available. Certainly, if rumors are to be credited,

“The Great Divide,” “The Witching Hour,” “My Friend from India,” and “Paid in Full”—not to mention dozens of others—would each serve as the subject of a prominent chapter, as “D’Arcy of the Guards” has done for a whole book.

Meanwhile, from time to time unheard-of playwrights *do* become known through the submission of manuscripts, by mail or in person, to producers, brokers, and actors. Moreover, there remains at least one other possible opening, and that is the stock company.

The Stock Company Opening

Nearly every American city of considerable size now has its resident troupe of players. Many of these companies occasionally vary their repertoire of standard successes with “try-outs” of new plays. A proved play is, of course, a valuable property; and resident stock managers are often willing to wade through piles of manuscripts in the hope of securing a promising drama. Plays are generally produced by stock companies upon terms providing for a joint ownership of future rights, three-fourths or two-thirds accruing to the author. The manager, having demonstrated the worth of the play in stock, endeavors to place it with some regular producer and naturally in this effort enjoys unusual opportunities.

From time to time stock managers, newspapers, and various organizations conduct contests, in which the prize is a production of the winning play. These contests have frequently resulted in bringing promising work to the producer’s attention. All in all, the stock companies

probably offer the most satisfactory opportunity, though a limited one, for the young writer seeking a hearing.

Terms of Contract

When the play has at last been accepted by the metropolitan manager, there arises the question of the terms of the contract. Most producers have regular forms, which they submit to new authors with but slight variations. Some managers will offer to buy a play outright, for, say, five hundred or a thousand dollars. Others will stipulate that after the payment of fifteen or twenty thousand dollars royalty the author shall relinquish all proprietary rights in the play. Ordinarily, however, the terms of the contract give the new author from three to five per cent. of the gross receipts, with perhaps a sliding scale, following an initial success, of five per cent. on the first four thousand dollars a week; seven and a half per cent. on the next two or three thousand; and ten per cent. on all additional receipts. Naturally, dramatists of established fame get more generous terms. When a play is accepted, even from a beginner, an advance royalty of from two hundred and fifty to a thousand dollars is often paid.

The contract in any case should stipulate that the play is to be produced within a given time limit—six months or a year from date. If possible, the manager should be bound to give a definite number of performances each year to retain his control of the piece; and details, such as weekly box office statements and payments of royalty, manuscript changes, and the ownership of novelization, foreign, and stock rights, should be included in the agree-

ment. However, in view of the manifold difficulties of securing even so much as a hearing, the unknown author may well be willing to accept any honorable terms proposed.

The Play as a Collaboration

After the acceptance and the contract, there remains what many authors regard as the hardest work of all—the production. The beginner can, of course, leave his manuscript to the producer and concern himself with it no further: indeed, it is more than likely that he will be fully urged so to do. However, he may have insisted on a clause in the contract giving him the right to participate in such changes as are deemed necessary. And in any event, he knows he must stand or fall by the play as it is performed, rather than as he wrote it.

A well-known novelist, who has produced a single piece for the stage, is quoted as saying, "The reason that I do not want to write another play is simply that I want anything to which my name is attached to be wholly and entirely *mine*." On the other hand, it must be remembered that an acted play is always a collaboration, not only of author and actors, but also of producer and audience. All the possibilities in any one manuscript are rarely foreseen by any one person, not even by the author. And, while some plays have been spoiled through bungling manipulation at the hands of the incompetent, many others have been virtually infused with the breath of life through skilful and experienced production. "It's a wise author that knows his own play when it is acted;" and

certainly a foolish author that complains when his half-baked work has really been lifted out of mediocrity.

The amateur dramatist who has finished, typed, and copyrighted a new play should watch the columns of the newspapers and especially of the higher class periodicals devoted to the stage or to the writing craft, for announcements of play-reading bureaus established by managers, of prize contests of various kinds, of the immediate wants of noted actors, and of such opportunities as are afforded by the semi-professional playhouses or companies. If he feels confident that his drama is adapted to the needs and abilities of some particular "star," the author should address the player, usually by letter, asking permission to submit his manuscript. In dealing with play brokers, it is generally best to select those of established reputation. And wherever possible, the beginner should endeavor to interest in his work the manager of the local stock company.

Above all, throughout the often trying experiences of the unknown author seeking to "place" his play, let him resolutely keep a stiff upper lip in the earnest conviction that sooner or later such merit as his work possesses must be recognized.

APPENDIX A

SPECIMEN SCENARIO

CYRANO DE BERGERAC

An Heroic Comedy in Five Acts

BY EDMOND ROSTAND

Act I

The interior of the Hôtel de Bourgogne in 1640. The public begins to assemble for the play. Soldiers refuse to pay; lackeys gamble; musketeers flirt with flower-girls; *bourgeois* peer about for notables; spectators eat and drink; cavaliers fence; pages play pranks; a pickpocket instructs his young pupils; a barmaid vends beverages; foppish noblemen arrive late.

Lignière, a drunkard, brings in Christian de Neuvillette, a handsome youth lately come to Paris, who seeks here the fair unknown with whom he has fallen in love. As the *précieuses* appear in the galleries, Christian scans their faces, but in vain.

Ragueneau, a pastry-cook and poet, arriving, asks anxiously after Cyrano, who has forbidden Montfleury, the actor billed for this performance, to appear on the stage during a month. Several spectators ask who this redoubtable Cyrano is, and Ragueneau, aided by the serious-minded Le Bret, another of Bergerac's friends,

makes an extended reply. Cyrano—poet, duellist, physicist, musician—is a bizarre, extravagant, fantastic fellow with a nose of extraordinary size and a sword which menaces all who dare remark on his personal appearance.

Christian's inamorata appears in a box. Lignière explains to him that she is Roxane, an ultra-*précieuse* and a cousin of Cyrano. With her is the Comte de Guiche, who is enamored of her and would force her to wed a sorry and complaisant fellow, the Vicomte de Valvert. Lignière himself has exposed the nefarious project in a ballad which must have greatly enraged the comte. Christian instantly declares he will seek out Valvert and challenge him. However, the youth remains in rapt admiration of Roxane, who returns his gaze, while Lignière staggers off to a tavern.

Guiche, descending from the gallery, calls one of his flattering followers "Valvert." Christian feels in his pocket for a glove, but finds instead a pickpocket's hand. The thief buys his pardon by revealing that a nobleman, angered by a ballad of Lignière's, has posted a hundred cutthroats to assassinate the drunkard on his way home. Honor-bound, Christian hurries forth to warn Lignière.

The play—*La Clorise*—begins in the midst of general excitement. The Falstaffian Montfleury appears and recites three lines of the opening speech. Then a voice exclaims from the pit, "Rascal! Did I not forbid you to show your face here for a month?"

The audience is amazed. Montfleury hesitates. Cy-

rano, brandishing a cane, rises above the throng, standing on a chair, his mustache bristling, his nose terrible to behold. The indignant spectators side with the actor. Cyrano offers to fight the whole audience one by one. His challenge not accepted, he causes Montfleury, that full moon, to eclipse. When other actors complain of their loss, Cyrano tosses them a purse of gold.

At the suggestion of Guiche, Valvert seeks to insult Cyrano, who, noting the vicomte's dulness, suggests a score of witty remarks that might be made regarding his own immense nose. The throng is delighted: this Gascon is better than a play. Cyrano overwhelms Valvert, answering the latter's ultimate taunt—"Poet!"—by fighting a duel with the vicomte, and at the same time composing an appropriate *ballade*. At the end of the *envoi* Valvert is wounded, and his friends carry him off.

Cyrano is acclaimed on all sides. After the admiring spectators have departed, in explaining his conduct to his anxious friend Le Bret, the Gascon confesses that he is in love—hopelessly, of course, because of his nose—with Roxane. Le Bret encourages him; and when the lady's duenna comes to make an appointment for her with Cyrano, the latter is much elated.

Lignière, quite drunk, is brought in. He tells of the warning he has had in a note left for him at a tavern by Christian. Cyrano, in his elation, eagerly seizes the opportunity. He forms a procession of actors and officers and marches forth at the head of it to do battle single-handed with the hundred men posted to assassinate Lignière, his friend.

ACT II

The kitchen of Ragueneau's pastry shop. The poet-cook amusingly mixes his two arts, as he directs his apprentices. Cyrano comes to keep his appointment here with Roxane. While waiting he composes a love letter to her and takes occasion to warn the wife of Ragueneau against the gallantry of the tall musketeer who is flirting with her.

Roxane arrives. With tarts and cream puffs Cyrano bribes the duenna to leave them alone together. Roxane thanks him for ridding her of Valvert and tenderly binds up her cousin's wounded hand. She confesses that she is in love with a man who does not guess it, but who shall soon be told. Cyrano's hopes are inspired; but when she describes her hero as *handsome*, their knell is, of course, rung.

It is Christian that Roxane loves. She knows nothing of him except that he belongs to Cyrano's company, the Cadets of Gascony. She feels certain the youth must be as witty as he is handsome; if it should turn out otherwise, she—the *précieuse*—would die of it. She leaves her cousin proudly dissimulating his broken heart, after he has given his promise to protect her lover from duels.

The cadets come with a crowd eager to hear the account of Cyrano's fight with the hundred men. At his captain's request, Bergerac controls his feelings and improvises a set of triolets by way of presentation of his comrades to Guiche. The latter patronizes Cyrano, whose resentment is instantaneous and bitter. One of the cadets having brought a collection of battered hats left behind by the ruffians dispersed the night before, Bergerac flings

them at the feet of the comte, the cutthroats' employer, who departs with his followers in a rage.

Le Bret expostulates with Cyrano for his rashness in neglecting his opportunities; but Bergerac, scornfully asserting his independence, repudiates the compromises wherewith courtiers are wont to rise. His friend at length understands that this bitterness is largely due to the fact that Roxane does not love him.

Christian, as a new-comer to the company of the cadets, is informed by them of the danger of making the slightest reference to their comrade's huge nose. The youth, against whose courage insinuations have been made, deliberately insults Bergerac during the latter's recital of his feat of arms of the previous night. Cyrano is about to hurl himself upon his insulter, when for the first time he learns the latter's identity. Bergerac orders all but Christian from the room. The cadets go, convinced that they have seen the last of the young man.

When the two rivals are left alone, Cyrano astounds Christian by saying, "Embrace me. You are brave. I am her brother—Roxane's—at least, her fraternal cousin. She has told me all!" Informed that the *précieuse* expects a letter from him that very evening, Christian sadly confesses his inability to compose one that will satisfy her fastidious tastes. Cyrano, wishing only that he had, to express his soul, such a handsome interpreter, strikes a bargain with the youth: Christian is to supply the physical exterior, Bergerac the essential love eloquence. Between them they will make a real hero of romance. Producing the love letter he has just written, Cyrano explains that

poets always have such unaddressed epistles about them and gives it to the delighted youth to send to Roxane. The cadets, venturing to return, are amazed to find the two antagonists in each other's arms.

The immediate inference is that the terrible Gascon has been tamed. The tall musketeer, against whom Bergerac has warned Ragueneau's wife, concludes that one may now speak with impunity to Cyrano about his nose. Calling the woman to witness, the gallant approaches Bergerac, sniffing affectedly. "What a surprising odor!" he exclaims. "But you, sir, surely must have noticed it? What is it that I smell here?" And Cyrano, punning on a word that means both a blow of the hand and the gilliflower, replies, as he slaps the tall musketeer's face, "*La giroflée!*"

Act III

An open place before the house of Roxane; a balcony, a garden, trees. The knocker of the house opposite is swathed in linen, like a sore thumb. Inside, the duenna tells Ragueneau, the *précieuses* have gathered to listen to a "Discourse on the Tender."

Cyrano appears, singing, followed by two pages strumming theorbos. He is instructing them in their art. He tells Roxane how he has obtained their services as the result of a wager. Weary of them, he sends them to serenade Montfleury, commanding them to play a long time—and out of tune. When Roxane overflows with praise of the wit and eloquence of Christian's letters, Cyrano makes light of them.

Guiche comes, and Bergerac conceals himself within the house. The comte is about to depart with an army to relieve the city of Arras, which is besieged by the Spaniards. She artfully persuades him that he can best revenge himself on her boastful cousin by leaving the latter's company behind.

When the comte has gone, Roxane bids Bergerac detain Christian, should the latter arrive while she is in the house opposite. For the first time the youth in person is to speak to her of love this evening.

Cyrano calls Christian, who has been waiting outside, and bids him prepare his memory for the eloquence he is to offer Roxane. However, Christian declares he will borrow his words no longer, but will speak for himself. Roxane abruptly reappears, and Bergerac leaves them.

As night is falling, the *précieuse* sits beside her young lover and bids him speak to her in the Euphuistic strain which she adores, and in which the letters written by Cyrano have been couched. But Christian can only exclaim bluntly, "I love you," and she presently dismisses him in disappointment. "When you lose your eloquence," she asserts, "you displease me as much as if you had become ugly."

Christian in despair summons Bergerac and implores his aid. When Roxane appears in the balcony, Cyrano first whispers to the youth the words of passion which the latter repeats. Presently, taking Christian's place, in the darkness, the Gascon woos his enraptured cousin in the poetic style she so highly values. When she at length suggests that the speaker mount to her side, Cyrano

is compelled to let Christian climb the ivy and take the kiss which the grotesque hero's love-making has won. The latter's consolation is that on the lips of Christian Roxane kisses the words Cyrano has just spoken.

They are interrupted by a monk bringing a letter from Guiche to Roxane. Cyrano now makes his presence known to her as if he had just returned. The comte has lingered at the monastery, after the departure of his regiment for Arras, and desires to see Roxane at once. She pretends to read in the letter an order that the stupid monk shall at once marry her to Christian. Cyrano is posted before the house to detain any visitors, while the other three go inside for the ceremony.

Left alone, Bergerac climbs to the balcony, pulls his hat over his eyes, and wraps his cloak about him. When the anxious Guiche enters, Cyrano by means of the branch of a tree swings himself down at the feet of the astonished comte. As a pretended voyager from the moon, the versatile Gascon manages to prevent Guiche from entering the house until the newly married pair appear. "Say good-bye to your husband," then exclaims the angry comte. "I change my mind. His regiment shall go at once to Arras."

Roxane in despair confides Christian to Cyrano's protection, making her cousin promise—as he does most readily—that the youth will write to her often.

Act IV

The post of the Gascon cadets at the siege of Arras. When the tattered, half-starved soldiers at the sound of

shots stir from their early morning slumber, their captain reassures them, saying, "It is only Cyrano coming back." The latter, appearing over the breastworks, is scolded by Le Bret for thus risking his life so frequently. "I promised her," replies Bergerac, "that this handsome fellow should write often;" and he points to the sleeping Christian.

The reveille is sounded, and the cadets awaken. When they grow almost mutinous with hunger, Cyrano, at the captain's request, rallies them out of their ill-humor with his ready wit and his moving eloquence.

They observe Guiche approaching, foppishly clad, and revile him as a false Gascon. Resolved not to let him see that they suffer, they play at dice and cards. Their air of contentment enrages Guiche, who upbraids them for their criticism of his dress and conduct. He reminds them of his prowess in battle the day before, describing how he dropped his white scarf on the field and so escaped without attracting attention to his rank.

"Henry IV," says Cyrano, "would never have consented, even though the enemy were overwhelming him, to have stripped himself of his white plume. Had I been present when your scarf fell—and this is where our types of courage differ, monsieur—I should have picked it up and worn it myself. Lend it to me: I'll wear it this evening and lead the assault."—"Gascon boasting!" retorts the comte. "You know well enough that the scarf lies at a point which grapeshot has been riddling ever since, and where nobody can go to get it." Whereupon Cyrano calmly draws the white scarf from his pocket, saying, "Here it is."

By way of revenge the enraged commander gives a signal which will, within half an hour, bring an assault of the Spaniards on this point in the entrenchments. Preparations are made to sustain the attack.

Christian asks Cyrano for another letter to Roxane. Bergerac has one ready. But there is a tear-stain on it, which arouses the youth's suspicions.

Roxane arrives in a carriage driven by Ragueneau: she has prevailed on the gallantry of the Spanish officers to let her through their lines. She gives the cadets her handkerchief to serve as their company flag. They discover that her carriage contains quantities of well-concealed provisions. Guiche returns, and they hide from him the newly-received supplies. As Roxane will not leave, he determines to remain and share the danger. The cadets thereupon relent, but their commander scorns "their leavings." "You're making progress!" says Bergerac, saluting him.

Cyrano draws Christian aside and, troubled, explains to him that letters have gone to Roxane more often than the youth has known. In fact, twice a day the Gascon has risked his life to post a love missive to his cousin. It is these letters which have inspired her to come here through so many dangers. She tells Christian she loves him no longer for his beauty, but for his soul alone. She would still love him even if he were hideous. Christian, broken-hearted, bids Cyrano tell her all, that she may choose between them, and goes.

Convinced by her that Roxane now really cares only for the soul that has dictated these letters, Cyrano, trembling

with happiness, is about to reveal to her his bargain with Christian. At that moment, however, Le Bret brings word that the young soldier has been shot; and Bergerac murmurs, "It is ended. I can never tell her again!" A moment later, when Christian is brought in, dying, Cyrano whispers to him, "I have explained everything. She loves you still."

In her dead husband's bosom Roxane finds the letter; it is stained now not only with the tears of Bergerac, but also with Christian's blood.

The assault is on. Guiche carries off the fainting Roxane. Cyrano, brandishing the lance bearing her handkerchief, rallies his company. He has two deaths to avenge: Christian's and that of his own happiness. The Frenchmen charge into the ranks of the Spaniards, who are pouring over the embankment, Bergerac chanting his triolet:—

"These are the Gascon cadets
Of Carbon de Castel-Jaloux!"

Act V

The park of a Parisian convent, whither Roxane has retired to pass her widowhood; an autumn afternoon, fifteen years later than the date of Act IV. The nuns speak of Cyrano's long-standing custom of coming every Saturday to distract the grief of his cousin with his droll gossip. He is poor and too proud to accept aid, ill and broken. He is due on the stroke of the hour.

Guiche comes, and Roxane assures him that she will continue to remain here, "vainly blonde." Sometimes it

seems to her that Christian is only half-dead, that his love floats about her, living.

Le Bret in anxiety interrupts. Cyrano, he says, is abandoned and friendless. Everywhere he attacks hypocrisy and cant, thus making for himself a multitude of enemies. Roxane feels confidence in her cousin's sword. But "solitude, hunger, December entering with wolf-steps into his dark chamber—they are the scoundrels who will more likely slay him. Every day he tightens his belt one hole more. His poor nose begins to take on the tones of old ivory."

Guiche goes, unable to conceal an amicable envy for Bergerac's life of uncompromising integrity, and warning Le Bret that his old friend is in danger of assassination. A few moments later Ragueneau arrives and tells Le Bret that Cyrano has been wounded: a lackey has dropped a stick of wood on the Gascon's head. Without telling Roxane, the two friends hasten off to find the injured man.

Roxane takes up her embroidery. The clock strikes. Is Cyrano going to be late for the first time? A dead leaf flutters down upon her embroidery-frame. Bergerac is announced. She does not look up from her work. He is very pale and feeble, but he forces a gay tone of voice. He has had a most troublesome Visitor, to whom he has said, "Excuse me, but to-day is Saturday, the day I must call at a certain place; nothing can make me fail. Return in an hour." He closes his eyes in a moment of weakness and pain.

Rallied by Roxane, Cyrano teases a gentle nun, swearing he ate meat on Friday and granting her permission to pray

for him this evening. "I have not waited for your permission," replies the sister, as she goes.

Then, struggling against his pain, he rattles off his "gazette" of amusing gossip, stopping abruptly when he comes to Saturday. For the first time Roxane looks up at him. Then she hastens to his side, but he reassures her—it is merely his old wound of Arras.

Roxane produces Christian's last letter, and Cyrano claims the present fulfilment of her old promise to let him read it some day. Twilight is falling. His voice rings with passion as it did that night he spoke to her from beneath her balcony. It grows too dark for him to see, yet he continues to recite the fervent words of the letter which she, too, knows by heart. Roxane understands at last. "Why have you been silent all these fourteen years," she exclaims, "when on this letter which he did not write these tears were your tears?"—"This blood was his blood," replies Bergerac.

Ragueneau and Le Bret enter in great apprehension. Cyrano takes off his hat, revealing his bandaged head, and finishes his "gazette" with: "And Saturday, the twenty-sixth, an hour before dinner, Monsieur de Bergerac died assassinated." His friends weep, as he swiftly summarizes his life of failure: he has won the laurel and the rose only for others. One hears the organ in the chapel. The moonlight descends. "I have loved but one being," wails Roxane, "and him I lose twice!"

Delirium seizes Cyrano. He declaims scraps of his own compositions, and begs Roxane to let her mourning be "a little for him" too. With his back against a tree, he

fighters off his imaginary foes—Lies, Prejudices, Compromise, Cowardice, Folly. The Visitor he put off for an hour has returned for him. Cyrano dies, boasting that with a spotless white plume he will this night enter God's house.

APPENDIX B

SPECIMEN PAGES OF THE MANUSCRIPT OF A PLAY

As explained on page 206, there are two recognized forms for the typing of play manuscripts, both of which use red ink together with some other color, preferably black—though blue or purple is quite acceptable. Page 250 shows a manuscript page in reduced facsimile as it appears when a combination red and black typewriter ribbon has been used. Page 251 illustrates a page in which the underscoring in red has been done with pen and ink.

Act I)

Booth

Heavens! It reads like a fairy tale, doesn't it?

Henry

I don't know; does it?

Booth

Yes; and many thanks. I'll do my best not to let you regret it.---Only, in the old fairy tale, you know, it always ended with the---the young man's marrying the---the rich old geezer's daughter!

Henry

(Chuckling)

And I'm the rich old geezer, eh? Well, I mightn't 'a' been half as rich this minute if it wasn't for you!---Heigho!

(Sizes up Booth)

Now, I suppose my oantankerous daughter wouldn't have you, Piercy; not if I said anything to her about it. But if she would---and you was willin'---

(Helen and Booth exchange eloquent glances)

---why, you're just about the feller I'd want her to have.

(Helen dances a little skirt dance of delight between the door L and the screen. Then she darts into the adjoining room, being observed only by Booth)

Booth

(With spontaneity)

Say, Boss, put her there again!

(Another handshake)

Do you know, you and I are getting to be better friends

Act II

GRAVES. Yes. (Turns to dictionary) That's all.

(Ellen, though curious, continues reading in an undertone to her father, Merlin and John. Graves opens the dictionary, starts at sight of the note, snatches it up with trembling fingers, and reads it. His fury rises. After a pause, crumpling the note, he turns to Burton and speaks with an effort)

GRAVES. Burton!

(Startled by his tone, the others turn and regard Graves curiously)

BURTON. Yes, sir.

GRAVES. Where's Sam?

BURTON. He went out, sir---

GRAVES. Went out?

BURTON. Y-yes, sir. About a quarter of an hour ago.

GRAVES. Where to?

BURTON. He didn't say, sir.

(Graves turns away helplessly. Burton listens and then exits C. Graves walks up and down, wringing his hands)

MEAD. Anything wrong?

GRAVES (Lamely) No, no. Don't mind me. Marlin's proposition's all right---

(Pause. Susan enters R and is troubled at sight of Graves's emotion)

SUSAN (Approaches him) Father---

GRAVES (Unable longer to restrain himself) Hell's fire!

MEAD. Christopher!

APPENDIX C

LIST OF PLAYS

The following miscellaneous list of plays available in English includes such as would be likely to interest the student of the technique of the drama:

Émile Augier, *The Post-Scriptum*.

Émile Augier, *The House of Fourchambault*.

Granville Barker, *The Madras House*.

Granville Barker, *The Voysey Inheritance*.

Granville Barker, *Waste*.

J. M. Barrie, *The Admirable Crichton*.

J. M. Barrie, *Half Hours*.

A. Bennett and E. Knoblauch, *Milestones*.

Arnold Bennett, *What the Public Wants*.

Rudolph Besier, *Don*.

Björnstjerne Björnson, *A Lesson in Marriage*.

Eugène Brieux, *Maternity*.

Eugène Brieux, *The Red Robe*.

Eugène Brieux, *The Three Daughters of M. Dupont*.

Alfred Capus, *Brignol and His Daughter*.

C. Haddon Chambers, *The Tyranny of Tears*.

H. H. Davies, *The Mollusc*.

Richard Harding Davis, *The Galloper*.

José Echegaray, *The Great Galeoto*.

J. B. Fagan, *The Earth*.

Clyde Fitch, *The Truth*.

- J. O. Francis, *Change*.
John Galsworthy, *The Eldest Son*.
John Galsworthy, *The Pigeon*.
John Galsworthy, *The Silver Box*.
John Galsworthy, *Strife*.
Giuseppe Giacosa, *The Stronger*.
Lady Gregory, *Short Plays*.
Angel Guimerà, *Marta of the Lowlands*.
Gerhart Hauptmann, *The Beaver Coat*.
Gerhart Hauptmann, *The Conflagration*.
Gerhart Hauptmann, *Rose Bernd*.
Gerhart Hauptmann, *The Weavers*.
Paul Hervieu, *Know Thyself*.
Paul Hervieu, *The Labyrinth*.
Stanley Houghton, *Hindle Wakes*.
Victor Hugo, *Hernani*.
Victor Hugo, *Ruy Blas*.
Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*.
Henrik Ibsen, *An Enemy of the People*.
Henrik Ibsen, *Ghosts*.
Henrik Ibsen, *Pillars of Society*.
Henrik Ibsen, *Rosmersholm*.
J. K. Jerome, *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*.
Henry Arthur Jones, *The Liars*.
Henry Arthur Jones, *Michael and His Lost Angel*.
Henry Arthur Jones, *Mrs. Dane's Defence*.
Henry Arthur Jones, *Whitewashing Julia*.
C. R. Kennedy, *The Servant in the House*.
Charles Kenyon, *Kindling*.
Percy Mackaye, *The Scarecrow*.

- Maurice Mæterlinck, *The Blue Bird*.
Maurice Mæterlinck, *Monna Vanna*.
J. Hartley Manners, *The House Next Door*.
George Middleton, *Embers* (and other one-act plays).
Langdon Mitchell, *The New York Idea*.
William Vaughn Moody, *The Great Divide*.
L. N. Parker, *Disraeli*.
A. W. Pinero, *The Gay Lord Quex*.
A. W. Pinero, *His House in Order*.
A. W. Pinero, *Iris*.
A. W. Pinero, *The Magistrate*.
A. W. Pinero, *Mid-Channel*.
A. W. Pinero, *The Thunderbolt*.
A. W. Pinero, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*.
Edmond Rostand, *L'Aiglon*.
Edmond Rostand, *Chantecler*.
Edmond Rostand, *Cyrano de Bergerac*.
●Edmond Rostand, *The Romancers*.
Victorien Sardou, *The Black Pearl*.
Victorien Sardou, *Diplomacy*.
Victorien Sardou, *Divorçons*.
Victorien Sardou, *Patriel*.
Eugène Scribe, *A Scrap of Paper*.
G. B. Shaw, *Arms and the Man*.
G. B. Shaw, *Candida*.
G. B. Shaw, *Fanny's First Play*.
G. B. Shaw, *Man and Superman*.
G. B. Shaw, *Pygmalion*.
G. B. Shaw, *You Never Can Tell*.
Edward Sheldon, *The Nigger*.

- Edward Sheldon, *Romance*.
Githa Sowerby, *Rutherford and Son*.
August Strindberg, *The Father*.
Hermann Sudermann, *The Joy of Living*.
Hermann Sudermann, *Magda*.
Hermann Sudermann, *The Vale of Content*.
J. M. Synge, *Deirdre of the Sorrows*.
J. M. Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World*.
J. M. Synge, *Riders to the Sea*.
J. M. Synge, *The Well of the Saints*.
B. Tarkington and H. L. Wilson, *The Man from Home*.
Augustus Thomas, *As a Man Thinks*.
Augustus Thomas, *Arizona*.
Augustus Thomas, *The Witching Hour*.
Oscar Wilde, *An Ideal Husband*.
Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*.
Oscar Wilde, *A Woman of no Importance*.
Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*.
W. B. Yeats, *The Hour-Glass*.
W. B. Yeats, *The Land of Heart's Desire*.
Israel Zangwill, *The Melting Pot*.

APPENDIX D

LIST OF HELPFUL BOOKS

The beginner at play writing will find the following books for the most part interesting and helpful:—

William Archer, *Play Making*.

Elizabeth Baker, *The Play of To-day*.

George P. Baker (announced), *The Technique of the Drama*.

Richard Burton, *The New American Drama*.

W. P. Eaton, *At the New Theatre and Others*.

Gustav Freytag, *The Technique of the Drama*.

E. E. Hale, *Dramatists of To-day*.

Clayton Hamilton, *Studies in Stagecraft*.

Brander Matthews, *A Study of the Drama*.

H. K. Moderwell, *The Theatre of To-day*.

M. J. Moses, *The American Dramatist*.

Richard G. Moulton, *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Thinker*.

Arthur Huntington Nason, *James Shirley, Dramatist*.

Ludwig Lewisohn, *The Modern Drama*.

“Chief Contemporary Dramatists,” edited by Thomas H. Dickinson, is a convenient collection of twenty modern plays, including “The Second Mrs. Tanqueray,” “The Witching Hour,” “Riders to the Sea,” “The Vale of Content,” and “Know Thyself.”

“The Continental Drama of To-day,” “The British and American Dramas of To-day,” and “Contemporary

French Dramatists," all by Barrett H. Clark, are valuable reference books. "Three Modern Plays from the French" includes translations by Mr. Clark of Lavedan's "The Prince d'Aurec," Lemaitre's "The Pardon," and Donnay's "The Other Danger." Mr. Clark is also the editor of an important and rapidly increasing series of plays published by Samuel French. Among the authors already represented are Augier, Meilhac and Halévy, Hervieu, Tchekhoff, Giacosa, Sardou, Capus, and Bernard.

Another noteworthy series of plays is that published under the auspices of the Drama League of America, by Doubleday, Page & Company. The list now includes Charles Kenyon's "Kindling," EcheGARAY's "The Great Galeoto," Sardou's "*Patrie!*" Francis's "Change," and other interesting examples of play technique.

APPENDIX E

ADVICE TO PLAYWRIGHTS WHO ARE SENDING PLAYS TO THE ABBEY THEATRE, DUBLIN¹

“The Abbey Theatre is a subsidized theatre with an educational object. It will, therefore, be useless as a rule to send it plays intended as popular entertainment and that alone, or originally written for performance by some popular actor at the popular theatres. A play to be suitable for performance at the Abbey should contain some criticism of life, founded on the experience or personal observation of the writer, or some vision of life, of Irish life by preference, important from its beauty or from some excellence of style; and this intellectual quality is not more necessary to tragedy than to the gayest comedy.

“We do not desire propagandist plays, nor plays written mainly to serve some obvious moral purpose; for art seldom concerns itself with those interests or opinions that can be defended by argument, but with realities of emotion and character that become self-evident when made vivid to the imagination.

“The dramatist should also banish from his mind the thought that there are some ingredients, the love-making of the popular stage for instance, especially fitted to give dramatic pleasure; for any knot of events, where there is passionate emotion and clash of will, can be made the

¹ Quoted in *Our Irish Theatre*, by Lady Gregory. (G. P. Putnam's Sons.)

subject matter of a play, and the less like a play it is at the first sight the better play may come of it in the end. Young writers should remember that they must get all their effects from the logical expression of their subject, and not by the addition of extraneous incidents; and that a work of art can have but one subject. A work of art, though it must have the effect of nature, is art because it is not nature, as Goethe said: and it must possess a unity unlike the accidental profusion of nature.

“The Abbey Theatre is continually sent plays which show that their writers have not understood that the attainment of this unity by what is usually a long shaping and reshaping of the plot, is the principal labour of the dramatist, and not the writing of the dialogue.

“Before sending plays of any length, writers would often save themselves some trouble by sending a scenario, or scheme of the plot, together with one completely written act, and getting the opinion of the Reading Committee as to its suitability before writing the whole play.”

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