/A CONSENSUS OF PLAYWRITING THEORY/

by

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INTRODUCTION

Hundreds of books have been published this century on the theory of playwriting. They have had widely differing emphases and probably have been of widely differing value. Should a potential playwright wish to become acquainted with the basic principles of his[1] art he is faced with a dilemma: either to read a vast number of books (there are over forty commonly cited by the theorists in this study), or to read just one or two, and risk picking works which are incomplete, esoteric, outdated, capricious, or plainly contradictory. It would appear that the only valid artistic solution is to read a significant number of theories and attempt to distill from them a common framework. This is a very time-consuming and difficult course to follow. It is likely the playwright would waste effort on texts which were of little or no relevance because they were outdated, too extreme, or even poorly written. The aim of this thesis is to attempt to find an alternative to thus unappealing situation.

In this study, nine books on playwriting theory have been selected and a consensus[2] drawn from them. The playwright may benefit from this in several ways. In the first place, it would no longer seem essential he pore over thousands of pages and millions of words before he can be assured of a reliable, basic understanding of the rudiments of playwriting theory. This logistical advantage is an important factor for him. Seeking out theoretical works is a conscientious act probably opposed by the

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immediate and natural inclination to begin writing the play. The bigger
the job of theoretical research appears, the less it will seem appealing,
and the more likely it is his natural inclinations will triumph over his
conscientiousness. The resultant, unprepared assault would not be (in
most cases) the best way to turn out an effective drama. Consequently,
the minimization of preparatory information may be of great artistic help.

To this advantage must be added that of quality. All the books in
this examination are well respected and still read today. Good drama
libraries should carry most of them. Many of the authors have had awards
conferred upon them for their work. Another indication of quality lies
within the cross-referencing of the selected authors. Frequently one
will laud or denigrate an aspect of another's theory. The positive
criticism, and the borrowing which often accompanies it, adds to the
credibility of both theories. The less favorable comments are, at the
very least, a testament to the influence of the theorist who is the sub-
ject of the negative criticism. These advantages of quality, and the
previous one of quantity and efficiency, combine to give the consensus
theory convenience and credibility.

These are the merits of this study, but, though they are undeniable,
it is important to stress that they should not be unrealistically over-
emphasized. The selected theories are all still influential, but they
represent a minor sample of even the most respected modern works. Hence,
this study does not claim to be definitive, nor should it be treated as
such. This would not be a justified claim even if every text on play-
writing had been used to construct the consensus. The individual styles
of the authors, which may well create an impression different from that

which extracts of their theories can ever convey, cannot be captured in the consensus theory. The playwright should look to this theory for guidance, not as a place to find unequivocal answers about any matter of dramatic construction, nor as a convenient excuse to avoid reading any books on theory in the future. At the same time, it should be reiterated that most of the necessary dramatic principles with which the beginning playwright should become cognizant are to be found in this examination. Furthermore, though nine authors represents a relatively small sample, it is not unreasonably presumptuous to suppose that their consensus is backed by other theorists outside the scope of this thesis. Thus, if a playwright should look to this work only for guidance, it is fair to say he can expect the guidance to be good and largely typical of playwriting theorists as a whole.

The above conclusion is both a reinforcement of this thesis and an acknowledgement of its limitations. The same balance is apparent when the other omissions from this thesis are considered. One of the most obvious of these omissions is that the theorists in this examination only concern themselves with the dramatic constructions of Western theatre. Their implicit assumption is that this is the genre most significant to Western theatre audiences. However, many of Occidental theatre's avant-garde theorists are reluctant to agree. For writers such as Artaud, Brook, and Schechner, Eastern theatre contains the elements of universal truth Western theatre ignores or conceals. That this drama is not included in this study is unavoidable under the circumstances of the consensus and is yet another reason why it would be ridiculous to claim that this is a definitive work of any kind. Another

area excluded from this examination is an appraisal of the business side
of playwriting, as invaluable as this knowledge is. Two other omissions
are the prosaic, physical first steps in sitting down to write and advice
on the related area of the appropriate typed format of a script. As
indicated above, these omissions occur primarily because there is no
consensus on them from the theorists, not because they are unimportant.
Clearly this theory cannot replace other works, and the serious playwright
will have to look elsewhere to have every one of his questions answered.
The major asset of this thesis is that it may allow the playwright to
leave this more random search for answers until the first draft of the
play is penned.

Two other problems may loom in the nature of this consensus: the
overlooking of important areas in the individual theories, and the danger
of misrepresentation for the sake of the thesis. In regard to the former
point, it must be conceded that integral parts of certain theories have
been omitted. These omissions do not just concern advice on typing for-
mats or business packaging, but are often parts of such vital elements as
plot and character. Once again the rules of the consensus render this
inevitable. The constituents of this thesis are largely determined by
statistical factors, and according to these this type of omission is an
appropriate sacrifice. Misrepresentation is certainly a danger when one
is attempting to equate similar concepts with differing labels. The only
plausible solution is a conscientious effort not to contrive other theor-
ies to fit the synthesis. Since the effort has been made, any contrivance
is accidental and unconscious.

One final disadvantage might seem to be apparent in the supposed originality of this eclectic thesis. In the same way that the writer of a "well-made play" has often been thought of as more of a practical craftsman than a true dramatist, a cobbling together of the ideas of others may seem more the work of an applier of techniques than an original theorist. It should immediately be acknowledged that, for the most part, the original thinking which constitutes this thesis has been done by others. At the same time, although many of the ideas are simply copied, they now serve a very different purpose. The information contained here is only included because it compares and contrasts with the work of other authors; only in very rare, specified instances is this consideration ignored. Also, there are numerous clarifying comments and conclusions in this study which are not based upon the work of other writers. Finally, the simple organization and the attempted simplicity of nomenclature may have a claim to uniqueness. The layout is designed to demystify, not make arcane. This is something not always apparent in the work of the theorists.

The sources of this thesis are the following: Kenneth Thorpe Rowe, Write That Play (1935); Samuel Selden, An Introduction to Playwriting (1946); Lajos Egri, The Art of Dramatic Writing (1946); Marian Gallaway, Constructing a Play (1950); Kenneth Macgowan, A Primer of Playwriting (1951); Walter Kerr, How Not to Write a Play (1955); Bernard Grebanier, Playwriting (1961); Sam Smiley, Playwriting: The Structure of Action (1971); Edward Mabley, Dramatic Construction: An Outline of Basic Principles (1972). For the sake of convenience these books will be referred to by the author's surname.

If these books were the sum total of all the sources, this survey would be short in two major areas, relevant antecedent material and radical modern alternatives. Hence, short sections on both are at either end of the consensus. It is not within the scope of this thesis to examine these theories in depth, but some relevant books are listed and briefly discussed.

The organization of this study has been shaped by three main factors: Aristotle's arrangement of the dramatic elements (although this is not to say that all of these are discussed here), the divisions determined by the theorists, and, as indicated above, a desire for simplicity. It should be noted that the progression of sections is not intended to reflect Aristotle's implication of diminishing importance and artistic value. Also, the division of the elements should not be taken as evidence that they are independent rather than interdependent. The separation is as necessary for the full understanding of each as is their integration in the final versions of the play. Divisions are valuable in the first contacts with the principles and also in the stages of planning and preliminary writing; beyond that there has to be a gradual merging.

To underline once more the modus operandi of this thesis, it is appropriate to quote Mabley's explanation that "Reading half a dozen books on playwriting in succession is apt to leave the student quite bewildered, unless he can ignore the terminology and think in terms of concepts."[3] Uncovering and organizing these concepts is precisely the aim of the following examination.

CHAPTER 1

THE VALIDITY OF PLAYWRITING THEORY

There are certain inescapable conclusions the theorists in this study
have come to: too many mediocre plays are being written, the same mistakes
appear repeatedly in plays that fail on opening, and, conversely, the same
characteristics are common to new and old theatrical successes. All the
theorists set themselves the task of minimizing the risk of failure, and
all use a codified scheme to help achieve this. Some individuals may
present tighter schemes than others, but it is impossible not to conclude
that each recognizes that some degree of systematization is desirable and
inevitable. This would seem to pose an aesthetic problem in that the
idea of forcing any form of constraint on the artist has often been con-
demned as totally alien to the precepts of art. The very fact that the
theorists have presumed to write their books would be an indication to
some that the writers have erred. This issue provokes a great deal of
discussion among the authors themselves. Upon examination, a working
consensus of their views does emerge which resolves this artistic
dichotomy.

Rowe's solution appears initially to be a denial of the existence
of regulation and systematization in his theory. He says, "To eschew
formulas and imitation and write one's own play is the only hope."[4]
Nevertheless, although Rowe is not the strictest proponent of a singular

scheme, there are formulaic elements in his book. His antipathy is put
more into perspective when he comments elsewhere, "Creative activity
cannot be too restricted by rules. If the urge to a particular form is
strong, whatever it is, it should be followed. But make sure it is
strong enough and that it is based on knowledge."[5] Rowe's wording re-
flects a commonly held prejudice against rules since they sound overly
confining. However, the knowledge with which he would replace it must
imply a certain selectivity, and such selectivity is a basic requirement
for regulation. One might conclude that he uses knowledge because it is
seldom used as a pejorative term and because it perhaps is thought of as
less rigid. If this is the case, then rules and knowledge are not
necessarily two opposed concepts. Gallaway makes a distinction which
has many similarities. She equates knowledge with the playwright's
mastery of the tools of his trade:

> He should master them as tools, as devices to use in
> solving problems, not as rules which he must follow.
> These tools do not substitute for the qualities of the
> artist; but to master them may save the artist time,
> energy, and the heart-breaking frustration of working
> by the trial-and-error method.[6]

Gallaway and Rowe seem to be sharing two sentiments: an obvious dislike
for the connotations of rules, and an ultimate respect for the play-
wright's own inspiration. The latter is the key to the final consensus.
It is agreed that this creative impulse may be channeled, but great care
must be taken that it is not stifled or adulterated. Selden is a virtual
echo of these two writers. He wants the playwright to use his theory to
clarify thinking but never to fundamentally change the "basic discovery"
which must come from inspiration.[7] He also condemns overly regulated

theories, via a pejorative synonym, when he warns the potential playwright "that if he tries to learn by heart a list of principles already codified he will inhibit his whole urge to create."[8]

Egri appears, by contrast, to be perfectly willing to specifically support the use of rules when he comments, "We know there are rules for any manifestation of life and nature--why, then, should writing be the sole exception? Obviously, it is not."[9] Though this may seem a view diametrically opposed to those above, further investigation does reveal some common ground. Primarily, this is in his support for the other principle which links Rowe, Gallaway, and Selden:

> Great plays, written by immortal authors, have come down to us through the ages. Yet even geniuses often wrote very bad plays.
> Why? Because they wrote on the basis of instinct, rather than from exact knowledge. Instinct may lead a man once, or several times, to create a masterpiece, but as sheer instinct it may lead him just as often to create a failure.[10]

He clearly does not want to replace instinct, or inspiration, but he would like to see it guided. Egri is effectively in accord with Selden's opinion that regulation should not be used to "initiate,"[11] but to "illuminate."[12] He is, in effect, simply using "rules" where Rowe uses "knowledge" and Gallaway "tools."

The final consensus equation is most lucidly expressed by Gallaway when she quotes Percy Goestschius ("A great teacher of musical composition"):

> It is narrow-minded to assume that . . . the persistent application of 'rules' will hamper genius. They need not be executed coldly and mechanically. Subjective, personal enthusiasm may course just as hotly here as in the pursuit of any other occupation; and the student is nowhere invited to check his enthusiasm--only to control and guide it. Properly applied by the student, these exercises thus only increase the power of his genius.[13]

The validity of playwriting theory is thus in the form of a compromise.
Although artistic inspiration is to be respected, it is recognized that
without the necessary constraints of its discipline it will be formless
and functionless. Too much regulation is emasculating, but some is
essential. Finding the right degree and nature of constraint is the
ultimate and vital task of playwriting theory.

CHAPTER 2

PRE-MODERN THEORY

The most influential book on playwriting theory is undoubtedly Aristotle's <u>Poetics</u>. It is almost impossible to fully understand subsequent dramatic theory without a basic knowledge of this work. All the authors in this study make frequent references to the <u>Poetics</u>, and most still hold to many of Aristotle's principles. For this reason, the radical modern theorists who have not the time for this theatre are often referred to as "non-Aristotelian," whereas those writers discussed here generally operate within the so-called "Aristotelian" theatre tradition. These are terms which will be used throughout this thesis.

It is not the place of this study to repeat Aristotle's theory of drama--it can be easily obtained and soon read by any interested party--but where one of the modern theorists strongly propounds an important Aristotelian element, this will be noted and, when necessary, put into its historical context. Acquaintance with the <u>Poetics</u> may not quite be a <u>sine qua non</u> for total comprehension of this thesis, but it might help at times to clarify its perspective. The theorists do assume that their reader has at least a rudimentary understanding of Aristotle's theory. For this reason, all quote extracts from it, but none detail it fully. This situation is a virtual invitation for the potential playwright to seek out this theory as soon as possible.

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Two other theorists frequently mentioned are the nineteenth-century writers Freytag and Brunetière. Most often, Freytag is cited for his pyramidal theory of drama, and Brunetière because of his ideas on volition (that drama is best when a conscious will is seen to have a plan to meet a conscious goal). These aspects of their theories are explained later, but, again, the complete theories will not be detailed. From the bibliographies and footnotes of the twentieth-century theorists it appears that they have faith in the value of extracts taken from European Theories of the Drama, edited by Barrett H. Clark, when evaluating Freytag and Brunetière. Though these two theorists are important to modern dramatic thought, they do not demand as close an acquaintance with their work as does Aristotle. Where their influence is felt, it is artistically possible to consider a theoretical point independently from the balance of their ideas. From the evidence of the modern theorists, this action is valid because, as is the case with many lesser theorists, the conceptions of Freytag and Brunetière are no longer pertinent to every aspect of contemporary theatre.

Of course, all significant pre-twentieth-century dramatic theorists have some effect on modern theatre. Aristotle, Freytag, and Brunetière are, however, the most commonly cited.[14]

CHAPTER 3

THE INITIAL IMPULSE

Before the main chapters of this thesis consider the movements within
a play, it is appropriate to examine the areas in which the theorists
suggest looking for the very first inspiration for a drama. Rowe says,
"There are, in general, four impulses which lead to a play: interest in
a plot, in a character, in a theme, or in a background."[15]  Selden lists
five initial ideas: a mood, a truth, a situation, a story, and a charac-
ter.[16]  He adds that he believes almost "nine out of every ten plays start
with a character."[17]  Grebanier identifies theme, situation, and character
as forces strong enough to begin a drama.[18]  Superficially, this selection
would seem to agree only on character, but plot and theme should also be
included as initial impulses in our consensus because they are close
enough approximations of situation and truth.

More concrete suggestions are also made. Selden recommends searching
one's mind, looking for newspapers, biographies, histories, and folk tales
to find appealing initial ideas.[19]  Smiley stresses that reading, from
poetry to magazines, is a "major source."[20]  He goes on to suggest that
one concentrate on those people who have most affected one's life, on the
on the adaptation of other works, and on the playwright's own direct
experience, as potentially valuable sources.[21]

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There are inherent dangers in seeking a consensus on the question
of a play's initial impulse. The first of these is in the body of
agreement on plot, character, and theme. Smiley, for instance, agrees
these concepts may do well, but then adds that a place, an incident, or
a body of information may also suffice.[22] As can be seen from the exam-
ples detailed earlier, other theorists have similarly included other
sources outside this central core. The danger, then, is that a play-
wright will look exclusively for an interesting plot, character, or
theme. This is emphatically not the correct approach. The consensus
of these three impulses may provide the source for many plays, even the
majority, but all other suggestions made by the theorists are valid.
It cannot be a matter of right and wrong since great plays may be pro-
voked by anything. The consensus can only be used as a rough guide.
In dealing with the advice on specific sources, the danger is almost
the same. The only useful consensus which can be gleaned from this
area is the broadest one of reading, thinking, and observing. Any
potential playwright who makes an effort to do these things will stand
a good chance of uncovering a productive source. To concentrate on,
say, reading only a specific form of writing, or observing only certain
classes of people would be ludicrous. Although some fields of observa-
tion and interest may, in the end, turn out to be the most productive,
there is certainly no profit at all to be had in excluding a possible
source for what are, in the final analysis, the theorists' prejudices.

Thus, the consensus which can most readily be taken, from an aspect
of drama which is not particularly well suited to this exercise, is the
recognition that there are certain sources well-disposed to being the

starting point to a play, but also that all others, in the right circum-
stances, are perfectly feasible.  In the beginning, the playwright should
always be open-minded.

CHAPTER 4

PLOT

This examination of plot is in three sections: a preliminary
discussion of the definition of plot, a consideration of the elements
of plot in as linear a way as is possible, and finally a look at some
related areas.

## What is Plot?

Thinking in concepts rather than precise terminology is vital in
the area of plot definition. As will be seen in this section, the terms
"plot," "story," "action," and "situations" are all used at various times
as labels for a play's structure. If it could be said that all the con-
cepts could be contained in one term, this would be a very straightforward
section. However, there is a fundamental difference in two of the terms
revealed in the discussion which follows. Conceptual thinking can reduce
the number of options, but it uncovers a validity for different percep-
tions of plot and story.

"First of all," writes Rowe, "a play is a story. It is the business
of a drama, like any other work of fiction, to tell a story, that is, it
must have a plot."[23] This placement of plot and story on the same level
is echoed by Mabley, for whom the whole of the play is a specific section
of an "extended story."[24] Although Rowe and Mabley make these assumptions,

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they do not really investigate this area. When the issue is researched, however, a different view does emerge.

Smiley states the alternative opinion:

> Plot and story are not synonymous. They are, however, intimately related. Plot is overall organization, the form, of a literary work. Story is one kind of plot; it is only one particular way to make form in drama.[25]

He interprets story as the "sequence of events"[26] within the overall "organization"[27] of the plot. He believes that plays without strong sequences of events--such as those by Ionesco, Genet, and Beckett--can have little story but still an intricate plot.[28] By contrast, Rowe's definition of plot is precisely that it is a "series of events,"[29] and so a limited number of events is, to Rowe, the surest indication of a simple plot. Both Gallaway and Kerr seem to disagree with him and subscribe to Smiley's view. Gallaway sees story as only the skeleton of the play, "an apparently causal and logical system of events."[30] Kerr concurs completely.[31] Grebanier believes in a three-level system. In his scheme a play must begin with one idea or "situation." A sequence of situations, which he calls "action," is equivalent to what others call story.[32] The important relationship is that between "action" and "plot," the third level of his system. The former is clearly but one part of the latter, not its equivalent.

The consensus of all the theorists who take time to make an issue of plot definition, is that a play's story is the main sequence of events within the plot. The plot is understood to be the play's total structure. This division is important to the accurate perception of a complete plot. A playwright must not think he has created plot when he has merely thought

up a story. Story is but one constituent of a successful plot. However compelling this series of events may be, it is never more than a skeleton needing the kind of flesh which pointers and plants provide before it can become a credible, living drama. In the following sections it is obviously this limited definition of story which is being used when this term is preferred over plot. The other factors which constitute plot will all be detailed in this chapter.

## Plot Structure

This is an examination of the consensus on the elements of plot. It is presented in as linear a way as is possible, but since elements such as unity of action, conflict, and plants and pointers may occur throughout a play, they must be placed in the most appropriate and least obtrusive places. Clearly these cannot properly coincide with their locations in the final plot configuration.

### Unity of Action

Unity of action is usually addressed at the beginning of the theorists' sections on plot, so it would seem remiss not to discuss it at this point in the chapter. Aristotle saw plot as an imitation of an action which was one and whole, and where the parts were not interchangeable. Broadly speaking, the dramatic satisfaction and desirability of this completeness is generally acknowledged by the modern theorists.[33]

In contemporary theatre, unity of action is vitally linked to dramatic organization. It is achieved through economy and selectivity.[34] Macgowan's ways of securing these two qualities include the playwright

discarding all non-essential information from his play, making scenes and
speeches do more than one thing at a time, never using scenes merely to
illustrate character, keeping discursive or intrusive material to a mini-
mum, and not allowing scenes which arouse false expectations or misdirect
the audience.[35] Gallaway is one voice among many saying that the material
must be causal.[36] Rowe, too, voices a common idea when he advocates that
the playwright aim to make the play grow in a "climactic rhythm of inten-
sity" if he wants the unity of action from economy and selectivity to be
truly dramatic.[37] It is apparent also that these two qualities are
accepted by Kerr when he propounds the Aristotelian theory that a play
must have a discernible beginning, middle, and end if it is to possess
unity. This is not, he believes, an invitation to trite plotting, but
one of the secrets of a living theatre. This is because such a pattern
is "merely descriptive of such successive stages as are seen to occur in
life."[38] In this form of completeness, recommended by other authors also,
the principle of selectivity will be especially pertinent.

Of the three Neoclassical unities of time, place, and action, only
the last is now considered important. A playwright may best achieve it
by paring all his materials down to the essential, ensuring they are
causally related, and making certain they form a structure which is
dramatically complete. Failure to observe these principles may lead to
irrelevancies which can, in Mabley's words, "very quickly weaken audience
interest."[39] Mabley goes on to state one possible exception to unity of
action, its replacement by a "compensating unity of mood, of social envi-
ronment, perhaps of character relationship."[40] The idea of replacement
may be valid, but it is clearly not preferred.

Conflict

Before the linear process is discussed, it is timely to consider whether the basis of the process is, as is often stated, conflict. Rowe, expressing the frequently voiced opinion, says "The content of any play if reduced to the barest outline becomes a statement of conflict."[41] Mabley expands on this forcefully:

> Conflict is one element that seems to be an essential ingredient, the sine qua non of any forceful dramatic work. It may be taken as axiomatic to say that without conflict we are not going to have a play to which an audience will pay much heed.[42]

Conventionally, conflict is thought of as the best way of moving a play forward. Kerr expresses this most succinctly when he says "there can be no change without conflict."[43] Further support for the principle comes from Smiley when he describes the ideal opening to a play as a "strained equilibrium between two opposing or contrasting forces."[44] This is surely, in effect, rooting the play's action in conflict. In summation, the majority of the authors do subscribe to the view that conflict is indispensable. The only dissenters are Macgowan and, interestingly, Smiley.

Macgowan believes the conflict of wills is an element which has become "overemphasized" and "dogmatized." This, he complains, leads to the artificial creation of an antagonist, or of crises for the protagonist to deal with. When describing the instrument which sustains the momentum of a play he prefers the word "suspense" over "conflict." Macgowan's objections are not, in fact, insurmountable in regard to the consensus: his "suspense" is conceived by others as unresolved conflict, and his complaints of overemphasis and dogmatism may well be in sympathy with Egri's concern that conflict exist for the sake of action and movement

rather than merely provide static, battling scenes. Smiley is similarly
not willing to declare that conflict is indispensable. Even though, he
says, "conflict makes the most dynamic kind of crisis, it is not always
essential. But change, or action, is always necessary." It could be
said that other theorists see conflict as the very agent of change, but
even without this it is clear Smiley still places an extremely high value
on the presence of conflict. In conclusion, although neither Macgowan's
nor Smiley's objections can be totally explained away, it should be first
recognized that their complaints are more limited than general, and then
that they may become yet more so upon further comparison with the consen-
sus.[45]

The problems of finding the right sort of conflict and its ideal
place and characteristics are addressed by individual theorists. Egri
emphasizes, as many do, the need for a "rising conflict," but also lists
the two types to be avoided: "static conflict" and "jumping conflict."
A conflict becomes static when the characters are unable to carry through
an idea, and is called a jumping conflict when an act is committed on-
stage which appears incredible because of inadequate preparation and
transition. Egri identifies another type of legitimate conflict, "fore-
shadowing conflict," which is used to prepare for a conflict to come.
This will not be discussed here for, in essence, it is almost the same
concept as a pointer, which is discussed in depth in a later chapter.[46]
Another aspect of conflict which it is widely agreed upon is that it
should emanate from the relationship between the play's principal force
and the main opposing force.[47] A final area of accord is exemplified in
Rowe's assertion that the potentiality of conflict be apparent as soon as

possible in the play.[48] These last two consensuses are investigated more
fully in the sections on the protagonist and the beginning of a play,
respectively.

The consensus on conflict is that it is relevant and central. It is
the primary way in which the play is made to move forward. Without this
dynamic element a play is likely to be left undramatic. The various ways
in which conflict may be appropriately constructed are examined in many
of the following sections.

## The Beginning of a Play and Exposition

Now that the two constant elements of unity of action and conflict
have been established, the linear process may be broken down in the light
of consensus characteristics. The precise dramatic location of the begin-
ning of a play is a point usually of great significance and is frequently
discussed by the theorists. Exposition is the name for the device by
which the playwright must orient the audience to the action. Both of
these parts of a play are characterized here with little evidence of
disagreement. This is not because dissent among the theorists is being
ignored, but because, in this area, it barely exists.

As the curtain rises on a play a temporary state of balance is dis-
covered. As has been noted, however, this is a "strained equilibrium."
Smiley cites the case of Hamlet where the apprehension of the guards,
Hamlet's mourning, and the court attempting permanent balance in the
kingdom combine to create a situation of stress.[49] Smiley's scheme re-
quires a "disturbance" to disrupt this, "an initiating event that upsets
the balanced situation and starts the action."[50] This is commonly
referred to as the attack. Rowe defines it so:

> The attack . . . is the point of precipitation of the
> conflict ... . It is the point at which an inescapable
> action becomes evident to the audience, and a question
> demanding solution is created in their minds.[51]

In Hamlet the attack is obviously the entry of the ghost. Both Egri and

Selden share Rowe's general definition.[52] It is Egri who investigates

the point of attack in the greatest depth, yet he uncovers little which

contradicts the other theorists. In a typical instance, what Rowe calls

"an inescapable action," Egri equates to always basing the action on

"necessity."[53] Egri is of the opinion that the attack involve something

"pressingly important," putting a character at a turning point in his

life where he must face or anticipate a vital decision.[54]

One practical piece of advice often mentioned is that a play must

have impact from the very beginning. Rowe wants the playwright to try

to grab the audience's attention from the "very opening,"[55] and Egri says

similarly, "from the first line uttered."[56] In order to gain this atten-

tion from the very beginning and keep it in the play's early stages the

audience has to quickly feel involved in the characters and the action.

This is one of the major roles of exposition.

Exposition is the device used for relaying necessary background

information to the audience. In spite of what may have been implied

above, it is not, as Egri says speaking for many, "another name for the

beginning of a play."[57] In fact, as will soon become apparent, it works

best when allowed to operate throughout the play. It is certainly a

crucial tool for illuminating the opening scenes of a play, but its

overall influence is far greater.

The one point endlessly repeated by the theorists is that exposition

must not be overdone. Mabley states a typical view:

> Exposition is to be used sparingly, as a rule, for,
> being a narrative device rather than a dramatic one,
> it can be tedious on the stage. It is surprising
> how little exposition is needed in many plays, and
> how quickly an audience grasps the essentials of a
> situation without a lot of preliminary background
> material.[58]

He specifically suggests the elimination of exposition which is not
essential or will soon become clear in the natural course of the play.[59]
Gallaway urges, in the same vein, "every bit of past action" must have a
definite use.[60] Macgowan implicitly agrees with another of Mabley's
comments that the "inexperienced playwright often tries to crowd a lot
of exposition into the beginning of a play."[61] Macgowan amply illus-
trates the truth of this when he compares an early version of Ibsen's
Rosmersholm with the final version. He concludes the latter is superior
in great part because its exposition is "slowly developed throughout the
play."[62] This, of course, is not to say that in the earlier version
Ibsen was an inexperienced dramatist, but that great dramatists leave
such errors as overdone early exposition well behind them.

There are further common elements in the theories of correct exposi-
tion. Old forms of exposition, including the use of a chorus, a soliloquy,
a confidant, an explanation to a stranger, or a prologue, are unanimously
rejected unless their artificiality is specifically acknowledged. A more
important recommendation is that exposition be revealed in conflict.
Mabley states the exposition "can usually be made engrossing if it is
revealed in conflict, and this is the most widely practiced method of
handling it."[63] Macgowan praises Ibsen again, this time because Ibsen
did not provide exposition through direct information but disguised it
in dramatic complications.[64] Egri is, in effect, supporting the

desirability of this system when he says that exposition is only dramati-
cally valid when it is also a point of attack.[65] The implication of these
opinions is that the artificiality of exposition becomes needlessly
obvious, and simply undramatic, unless it is properly integrated into
the growth of the play.

The theorists make one more significant recommendation, that of
indirect revelation. Macgowan expresses it so:

> Starting exposition by a line or a piece of business
> 'one step removed' from what you want to tell is some-
> thing to study and to learn to do.
>     The secret of good exposition in the ordinary course
> of dialogue is to avoid the direct statement and provide
> the information obliquely.[66]

Smiley agrees, saying that exposition "best appears during a conversation
about something else." It is because so many of the archaic expositional
devices fail to do this that they are discounted.[67]

This section emphasizes that a play involves an audience immediately
when a dramatist is making best use of his theatre. The audience's
orientation to the action must be efficient and subtle, and will be if
the dramatist can make his exposition seem to come out of the play's
action, not vice versa.

## Complications and Crises

Selden calls the main body of the plot the "struggle" between con-
flicting forces. More often the theorists term this part of the play the
"complications."[68] In examining what is meant by complications though,
a strong sense of struggle does become apparent.

Rowe defines complications in line with the consensus. Each is "a
new element that enters the situation after the story starts and effects

which way the conflict will go."[69]  Smiley's idea of a complication is "any factor entering the world of the play and causing a change in the course of the action."[70]  Gallaway quotes John Howard Lawson's definition which labels a complication "'The introduction of a new force which creates a new balance of power and thus makes the delay in reaching the main obligatory scene necessary and progressive.'"[71]  Complications must be strong enough to temporarily alter the order of the play, and must do so through the medium of conflict. This is an ideal recipe for a potential struggle, and gives a good indication why the introduction of each new complication is commonly described as a "crisis" point in the drama.

To understand the roles and relationship of complications and crises, it is necessary to look at the overall shape of a good drama. No longer is the pyramidal theory of Freytag being adopted. In essence, he postulated that from the beginning of a play the action should rise to a climax, and subsequently fall to the resolution and the end of the play.[72] Modern theory supports the ideal of rising action through conflict, but modifies the path due to the uncertainty inherent in a crisis. Smiley sees in a crisis "a turn in the action . . . a period of time in a story during which two forces are in active conflict and throughout which the outcome is uncertain."[73]  It is always followed by a climax in which some element of the conflict is settled. Gallaway presents a definition with many similarities:

> In this book, crisis means quite definitely one thing:
> a moment in which the underlying instability of the
> situation is evident, a moment of uncertainty, clash,
> or danger in the situation on stage, accompanied by
> tension in the audience. . . . Crisis differs from
> climax in that crisis always implies something un-
> finished, while climax is the satisfaction implying

> something finished, settled, restored to equilibrium
> and harmony. Crisis is the high point of tension;
> climax is the release of tension in emotion.[74]

Egri uses similar terminology, except that he calls the aftermath of
the climax the "resolution," when he supports the views of Gallaway
and Smiley.[75] He is clearly favoring the idea of rising action when
he stipulates that each unit of crisis, climax, and resolution is on
a "still higher plane" than the preceding unit.[76] Rowe best describes
the modern dramatic shape when he replaces Freytag's evenly rising
action with "complications of rising action," which are "saw-toothed,"
and represent a series of steadily rising units with uneven peaks and
troughs within them, which are the minor crises and climaxes. The
major crisis is the highest peak and leads to "complications of falling
action," which may be similarly saw-toothed.[77] As a result of these
definitions, a complication can be interpreted as a new element creat-
ing the uncertainty of a crisis which inevitably leads to the certainty
brought about by a climax.

If action consists of a succession of small units, a question is
raised which must be answered: how can unity result from this division
into separate complications? Rowe proposes one solution of relating
each unit to the major crisis and climax. In his words: "The answer
to each minor dramatic question points towards an answer to the major
dramatic question."[78] Gallaway expresses an opinion based upon a
quality of drama already recommended, that of causality:

> The incidents or steps of a course of action can
> usually be joined by one of three connectives, AND,
> BUT, and THEREFORE. A prevalence of AND in the
> early part of the play is likely to indicate solid
> motivation, plenty of causes; a prevalence of

THEREFORE indicates effect, logical coherence; a
prevalence of BUT means peripetia, suspense, and
is particularly good toward the end of the play.
The connective AND THEN is practically never
necessary in a well-integrated play.[79]

If a playwright examines his use of complications and finds too many
"AND THEN" incidents, it is probable that parts of his play's plot
structure will lack credibility. The desired aim of the "AND, BUT,
and THEREFORE" system is to ensure that as many of the play's incidents
as possible come out of what has already been made plausible by events
which have transpired on the stage. This is not an easy task to
accomplish by any means--Macgowan points out failures that even
Shakespeare had in this area[80]--but, in the modern theatre, it is
undoubtedly a major factor in the judgement of critical success.

The theorists have definite views on the types of complications
which should be preferred: they must be credible in the context of the
play and able to generate suspense (for a complication is partly a
delaying device). For Macgowan, this means they should be based on
character,[81] and Gallaway concedes "characters and events are the most
common devices by which plays are complicated."[82] Smiley repeats these
two and adds "circumstances . . . mistakes, misunderstandings, and best
of all--discoveries."[83] Gallaway may present the closest thing to a
consensus when she states that there are an enormous number of possible
types of complications. To those she has listed above she adds spiritual
complications, revelations, and the uncovering of past action. Just from
the examples detailed here it should be apparent there are a large number
of potential sources which may be appropriately suspenseful if put in the
right context.[84]

The frequency of complications in a play is another issue often raised. Rowe and Kerr would both like to see many of them in a drama. Rowe's basic minimum would be one complication connected with each of the beginning, middle, and end of the play.[85] Although Kerr does not confine himself to a specific figure, he implies a preference for a far higher basic level. One can see this in his perception that one of the roots of the dramatic success of the plays of Shakespeare and Moliere lies in the heavy complication of their action.[86] Gallaway, willing to be specific, states the playwright should ordinarily use between two and seven complications, with an average of four.[87] Macgowan is sure only that more than one strong complication is necessary if audience interest is to be maintained.[88] Selden thinks similarly when he prescribes adding additional complications to a play which has too straight a "line of conflict" to be consistently involving.[89] The consensus is clearly a number between two and seven complications. Probably there should be at least one for every major stage of the play.

There are some aspects of complications not dealt with in this section because they are better investigated under character. In particular this includes the important use of the complication as an obstacle for the protagonist, and the success of such plays as Wilder's Our Town and Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard when they are seemingly bereft of overt complication. In brief, this latter paradox is made possible by the presence of strongly volitional characters who can build drama by sheer strength of will.[90] These two areas are examined later mainly because they are inseparable from the passage of the major characters. Of course, all complications affect the major characters, and this section has little

value unless read in conjunction with that on character, but the issues
discussed here can be adequately evaluated in a purely structural sense
before other implications have to be taken into account. The overall
consensus on complications and crises establishes them as the plot ele-
ments which have to shoulder the burden of making the artificially
created plot both credible and involving. This entails both the proper
external shape and interior content being developed carefully and with
due regard to the numerous constraints and guidelines detailed in this
section.

## Pointers and Plants

Although complications and crises have the major role in lending a
plot structural credibility, they do not have the sole responsibility.
It is one of the functions of pointers and plants to play a support role
in this. Pointers, which will be discussed first, encourage the audience
to look forward in a play, and plants tend to provoke them to look back.
In either case, these devices should help to create the impression of a
believable environment.

Even though Mabley uses his own terminology, he is true to the con-
cept of a pointer when he describes it as "a preparatory device which
helps to weave the fabric of the play together, in the sense that it
arouses curiosity and anticipation of a coming event."[91] Gallaway and
Smiley investigate the types of pointer most thoroughly and agree on
both the definition and on several of their examples. Smiley's defini-
tion is a little fuller than Mabley's, for in addition to the arousal of
curiosity and anticipation he claims a pointer can "heighten interest,

expectation . . . or dread."[92] For these last two Gallaway substitutes the similar capacity to be a "suggestion that induces hope and fear."[93] Both Smiley and Gallaway appear to be emphasizing the audience's strong emotional involvement in many effective pointers.

The two theorists commonly see pointers in the guise of statements that something will occur, in antagonistic attitudes which are in some way unresolved, in a scenic effect, in an item or a piece of business suggesting something to come, in any kind of delay or evasion, and in assertions contradicting the obvious course of activity.[94] Many other types are cited by individual authors--even including, according to Gallaway, the legitimate use of a pointer principally to excite the audience[95]--but all are linked in giving the audience a sense of anticipation.

Gallaway has some cautionary words on pointers which, though not an explicit consensus, merit inclusion because of their relation to consensuses in other parts of this thesis. She deplores the dramatic anticlimax that occurs when a pointer points to something which does not happen, and recommends that sufficient pointers be used throughout, while the playwright at the same time be careful not to overpoint human relationships (since they are often easily perceived). A further significant piece of advice she gives is the insistence that the audience is made to wait "actively" rather than "passively" (or unemotionally) in any well-pointed play.[96]

Plants give great credibility to significant events by providing them with roots and foundations. This credibility usually becomes apparent in retrospect. Rowe, though his nomenclature differs (he calls planting

"preparation"), describes the role of the device as "the introduction of
details in advance that are necessary for immediate acceptance of some
later step in the action."[97] Gallaway says plants help to make characters
"believable and moving,"[98] but this must be achieved in tangible ways.
Consequently "There should be no need to take the word of the author or
of another character," she writes, "the audience should believe, like,
or dislike on the basis of plain evidence."[99] A final related aspect of
Gallaway's definition is that plants have the power to "create emotional
attitudes," to "remove prejudices," and "enhance sympathies that already
exist."[100]

As they did for pointers, Gallaway and Smiley agree on the commonest
manifestations of plants. This accord includes suggestive or attitudinal
speeches, a simple piece of business, an early established relationship,
auxiliary or minor characters, and the basic crises of a play when they
lead to subsequent actions or a major crisis.[101] All these can be looked
back on to provide natural precedents and clues for present action.

Gallaway once again explores some restrictions and pitfalls, and
these may be included in this study for the same reason her solitary
advice on pointers was included. "The amount of space devoted to a
particular plant," she writes, "must be determined by the importance
of the material to be planted."[102] Finally, she also has some specific
advice for the beginning playwright:

> He tends to overplant the unimportant and easily under-
> stood, and to plant important matters insufficiently.
> The inexperienced playwright also uses ambiguous plants,
> or plants which are in themselves not quite credible, or
> which have no real value for the total play. Worst of
> all, the beginner sometimes explains an event after it
> has happened, instead of planting before the event.

These faults disappear as the playwright learns the
mind of his audience. . . . Underplanting is more
common than overplanting in beginner's plays.[103]

One obvious shortcoming of the survey in this section on pointers
and plants is that there is no majority opinion from the nine authors.
Only Smiley and Gallaway write about these devices in real depth, while
Rowe and Mabley do some investigation under different nomenclatures.
Apart from the occasional remark in passing from Macgowan, this is the
sum of the sources. In one sense there is no consensus based on proper
investigation and there must be the suspicion that this situation has
come about partly because pointers and plants are not truly individually
important. In defense of this possible conclusion it can be said that
most of the investigations carried out do lead to similar theoretical
results, even though the number of authors involved may be small. Fur-
thermore, it is easy to see that those authors who (as will shortly be
seen) base their dramatic theories essentially on the mechinations of
character would be reluctant to concede that anything outside the credi-
bility of characters and their interrelationships is necessary for an
ultimately believable drama. Finally, the opinions of Smiley and
Gallaway, and their periodic supporters, cannot, of course, be summarily
dismissed due to a lack of one or two other authors to back the same
interpretation. If this section contained the work of just one theorist,
one might be more able to ignore it. However, there is always some body
of agreement, even if one has to look outside this section to find it.
There is a conclusion which can be drawn from all this which should over-
come most of the possible doubts. It must be established that pointers
and plants are very important factors in cementing the credibility of a

drama. Even if they are not consciously and individually included in the
plot, they must still emerge in the structure of a play when a character
is involved in any significant incident. This means that if the dramatist
chooses not to build pointers and plants with plot, but to leave them to
character, he must ensure that he knows the lives and emotions of his
characters intimately before he begins to write. Only then will the
character's actions appear wholly justified and believable.

## The Major Crisis and Climax

In every good play the complications lead eventually to the major
crisis and climax. This is variously referred to as the "major crisis,"
"the climax," "the turn," as well as by the above title. Whatever the
label, the constituents are generally the same. Rowe calls it "the
supreme turning point of the play,"[104] and, thinks Selden, it is the
point at which the ultimate winner fights his biggest battle.[105] Mabley
explains it most fully:

> As the struggle between the opposing forces reaches the
> degree of maximum effort, the point at which the issue
> can swing one way or the other, we have come to the
> crisis. . . . The crisis is usually followed by the
> climax, immediately or after a short interval. At
> the climax, the issue of the conflict is determined
> and the dramatic question is answered.[106]

There are several areas of agreement on the role of the major crisis
and climax. Most importantly it must decide the play's main conflict.
It must come about, states Rowe (among others), not as the result of
accident, chance, or of the action of a character introduced just for
this part of the drama.[107] Gallaway emphasizes the importance of a
forceful major crisis and climax when she says that it must be always

"dynamic," never "lyrical."[108]  One way to help ensure this is to involve the protagonist and antagonist.  Although the real place for an examination of this clash is under character, a brief comment would be appropriate here.  Grebanier is typical in requiring the crucial deed to be done by the central character, not one in which he is acted upon or one done by another character.[109]

There is a consensus on the location of the major crisis and climax.  Grebanier's view may be selected:

> The major crisis and climax, it is clear, though it occurs in the latter part of the play, <u>never occurs in the last moments of a full-length play</u>.  If it did occur near the conclusion of the play, the effect would be sensational rather than dramatic.[110]

Grebanier would, for instance, place this moment of decision in the third or fourth act of a five act play.[111]  Other theorists are not averse to placing the vital clash in the final act (though not near the final speech), but all are wary of the overly melodramatic climaxes that end so many basically awful plays.

It is safe to say that the vast majority of plays will leave an audience ultimately dissatisfied if the major crisis and climax is either weak or non-existent.  It must solve, at the appropriate place, the play's central conflict.  In doing so, it must give a result which is causal and logical in the light of all that has gone before.

## Resolution

Mabley makes a logical observation on the high point of the play:

> A characteristic of the climax is the disappearance of the will to struggle.  Perhaps the protagonist acknowledges defeat and gives up the struggle, or he may achieve his objective and have no further need to struggle.  In any case, the conflict subsides, and so does drama.[112]

Although the major crisis and climax resolve the central issues of the play, and the drama does indeed "subside," not all the issues are necessarily settled and the play does not immediately end. Still there has to be space for the resolution.

In the first place, the resolution does not have to involve the tying up of all the play's loose ends in one neat conclusion. Rowe likens the major crisis and climax to a wave at its crest, and the resolution to the effects of the wave when it breaks.[113] This image seems ideal in that it totally contradicts the ordered and trite type of resolution which is anathema to the theorists. One must, however, be sure that only the artistically right loose ends are allowed to remain. Selden stresses this when, at the same time as he implicitly rejects a falsely neat conclusion and notes that a good resolution can contain implications that look forward and outward, he urges that the audience must be satisfied the conflict has been adequately resolved.[114] The major climax should obviously not create major dramatic questions which are left unanswered. Smiley calls the ideal situation a return to "balance."[115] As at the beginning of the play, this is not an inert situation. Harmony has been restored, but it need not seem perpetual. Disturbances and attacks may still lurk, just so long as they are no more than minor, background threats.

The preferred length of the resolution can be defined partly directly and partly by implication. When Grebanier places the major crisis and climax as early as in the third act of a five act play, he appears to be leaving up to two full acts for the resolution. By contrast, Smiley notes that after the death of Hamlet--his choice for the location of the major

climax in <u>Hamlet</u>--only nine speeches are spoken before the end of the play.[116] Egri hints at a general rule when he comments, "The resolution can be as long as the playwright can sustain the conflict."[117] To clarify any possible confusion, it should be noted that Egri is talking not of the major character conflict, which of course has by this time been resolved in the major climax, but of the general, constant principle of conflict. During the resolution Gallaway is not averse to the introduction of one or two minor crises, so long as they are logical and mostly solved, to create this conflict and prolong the final acts.[118] One could perhaps use <u>The Cherry Orchard</u> as an example of the successful use of this technique. The major crisis and climax of this play occurs in the penultimate act, but such lesser crises as an aborted marriage proposal and the dying words of a servant are able to sustain consistent dramatic interest in the last act.

The resolution of a play may not be rigid in form, but it is so in content. It must be a definite end which makes the audience feel it has seen a complete work with no major business left unfinished. On the other hand, the playwright must take pains to avoid a resolution which will appear too convenient, trite, or unnatural. Such an ending might destroy the force of all the writing which has preceded it. A cognizance of these two points should at least aid the playwright in cutting down on errors of resolution and so help him to preserve the accumulated power of his drama to the very end. It is only common sense to say that the elimination of all mistakes in resolution rests not merely on understanding this consensus, but also on a great deal of practice.

The Obligatory Scene and the Subplot

There is much discussion by the theorists on both the obligatory scene and the subplot. Their location in a drama cannot be mathematically pre-planned, but there is a consensus that there are points in the plot where they can surface with the best impact, and others where their surfacing is not encouraged.

Gallaway, giving the conventional explanation, calls the obligatory scene "a focal scene, one toward which the playwright himself has deliberately aroused the anticipation of the audience."[119] This will often be the scene containing the major crisis and climax, but the concept contains other dimensions which may place it outside of this scene. Lawson is quoted by Gallaway in a definition which seems to hint at these wider possibilities of the obligatory scene:

> The idea that the plot leads in a forseen direction toward a clash of forces which is obligatory, and that the dramatist must give double consideration to the logic of events and to the logic of the spectator's expectation, is far more than a mechanical formula. It is a vital step toward understanding the dramatic process.[120]

In this sense, any anticipated clash may be thought of as an obligatory scene. Gallaway says there may be up to four or five in any play.[121] It almost goes without saying this is not the case for the major crisis and climax.

One seemingly dissenting voice is that of Egri. In his view, a good causal play will have every scene depending on the previous one, and thus every scene will be obligatory. Furthermore, he believes that if all the playwright's efforts are directed toward any particular obligatory scene

it may be forgotten that "the scenes before it need equal attention."
Egri's own alternative is evident in his personal structural scheme
which has a play leading up to "the main crisis--the proving of the
premise."[122] The premise is the underlying major theme of the play,
and its proof, according to Egri, "Lawson and others mistakenly call
the obligatory scene."[123] Two areas of Egri's dissension can soon be
dismissed. First, it would be the inept playwright who would place all
his emphasis on an obligatory scene at the expense of other scenes. No
reading of the other theorists can possibly lead to any conclusion but
that all parts of the plot should be paid the greatest attention.
Second, Egri's description of the "proving of the premise" is the pro-
viding of "'a point of concentration toward which the maximum expectation
is aroused.'"[124] If this seems similar to Gallaway's quotation, this is
unsurprising. All Egri has done is quoted Lawson's definition, whilst
saying it is invalid unless the vital scene brings out the underlying
theme. This may not always happen in an obligatory scene, but certainly
where this scene contains the major crisis and climax this is frequently
the case. Consequently, although Egri's objection cannot be totally
nullified, there is enough common ground between the "proving of the
premise" and the obligatory scene that it seems more significant that
both Gallaway and Egri are willing to base their theories on the conven-
tional definition as expressed by Lawson. Perhaps Egri is less opposed,
in the end, to the idea of an obligatory scene than he is to the denota-
tion and connotations of the term "obligatory." It is possible that his
"premise" is chosen primarily because it is a term which sounds as if it
would be more playwright-proof.

Looking through the theories, many examples of obligatory scenes may be found. The most common instance is the "decisive clash" of the "major opposing forces." Other examples are where the audience wants to see a formulated plan brought to fruition, when the action "fulfills the interest of the audience in the relationships of the characters," where "a subordinate character has aroused so much interest that the audience wants to see what will heppen to him,"[125] and where dramatic irony leaves the audience waiting for a character to discover something which they already know.[126]

Although the major crisis and climax is an obligatory scene, it is a mistake to regard the two as synonymous. Part of the reason for this has already been discussed, but another facet is that to refuse to differentiate between the two may be to falsely imply that an obligatory scene must be some sort of highly dramatic pay-off. In truth, the scene must simply satisfy the anticipation of the audience, and this may mean a violent clash is precipitated, or may equally well mean the scene turns out to be a very low key one.

Subplots are not in great favor with the majority of the theorists in this study. Often they are mentioned solely with the aim of dissuasion (notably by Selden and Macgowan).[127] Kerr and Grebanier both note that Shakespeare's plays are indeed enriched by subplots, and thus they imply that a playwright with structural skill may be able to employ a subplot profitably.[128] Grebanier is concerned primarily that each subplot have a sound proposition and its own climax. Even though it is less important than the main plot, it must yet have a credibility and unity of its own.[129] Smiley, in line with the distinction made earlier in this thesis, prefers

the term "sub-story" to subplot. Within this more limited framework, he would include generally less detail than the main story contains, the inclusion of some of the main story's characters, a major crisis and climax before or during the main story's, and action which reflects or contrasts with the main story's.[130]

The subplot is nowhere thought of as a <u>sine qua non</u>; even Smiley grants it "may or may not" be employed. However, if the above guidelines are observed, and the playwright feels adept enough to handle complex plot construction, the subplot or sub-story may add dramatic depth and breadth. This conclusion is possible, in spite of all the unfavorable comments on subplots, because no theorist anywhere says a subplot can never be to a play's advantage and so should never be used.

This chapter on plot structure contains four vital chronological sections: the beginning of a play and exposition, complications and crises, the major crisis and climax, and resolution. Although all the other sections present advised or essential ingredients for the overall plot, it is these four parts which must appear as discernible stages of linear development if a play is to be structurally successful. The stages are very similar to those identified by Selden in his "Iron Check List." This list divides plot into "Preparation," "Attack" (the beginning of a play and exposition), "Struggle" (complications and crises), "Turn" (the major crisis and climax), and "Outcome" (resolution). This similarity was not pre-planned, but it does allow the transfer of one remark Selden makes of the system he recommends, to this system. Reviewing his scheme he concludes it is a guarantee only of structural success, not artistic success. Even when the arrangement is perfectly applied, it

is but a foundation. Artistic satisfaction can only be felt by an audience when it sees a play which correctly includes all the major dramatic ingredients in addition to plot, particularly that of well-drawn characters.

CHAPTER 5

CHARACTER

Character will be discussed with respect to its traits, qualities, types, and relation to plot. Before the first of these is embarked upon, its scope and relative importance must be clearly defined.

### The Position of Character

Rowe is a voice from the consensus when he says, "The most perfect mechanics of construction will not hold an audience's attention without the human content of activity of someone's will and concern for his fate."[131] Aristotle believed plot to be the first principle and soul of drama and saw it as more important than character in the sense that a weakly plotted play would, he believed, be a certain failure, whereas one lacking in characterization might yet succeed if it were well plotted. Rowe's comment would seem to cast doubt at least on this latter assertion. Macgowan goes further in complaining that character has suffered greatly through being placed by Aristotle under plot. In encouraging the drama-tist to neglect character for plot, Macgowan contends that Aristotle's advice has helped to foster some of the worst aspects of melodrama.[132] To expose the error he believes Aristotle made in placing character in second place qualitatively, he examines the same plays from which Aristotle drew his conclusions and decides that their success is based

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on character rather than plot.[133]  He asserts that only in this way
could the limited number of plots in Greek tragedy be repeated by
various authors without generating massive boredom within the audience.
In support of Macgowan, Grebanier compares Racine's treatment of the
Hippolytus story with that of the classical dramatists, and similarly
attributes the success of the neo-classic version primarily to the
manipulation of character.[134]  Egri is perhaps the most virulently
opposed to the unconditional acceptance of Aristotelian theory.  He
is determined that character be seen as "the source of all vital drama."
He goes so far as to contradict Aristotle word for word when he argues
that character, not plot, is the "soul" of drama.  Furthermore, he hints
that ultimately a badly plotted play may be given the benefit of the
doubt if the element of character is well-realized.[135]  One last piece
of support for character over plot may come from Smiley.  When he re-
duces his definition of drama to the barest of essentials he describes
it as "character in action."[136]  Character does seem to be his motivating
force.  Taken together, these opinions on character must, at the very
least, elevate it to the same qualitative level as plot.  The theorists
share the view that a good play is impossible without effective charac-
terization, and this represents a definite shift from the position of
Aristotle.

All this pro-character feeling is not an indication that plot should
ever be sacrificed for character; even Egri does not go quite that far.
The fault which, at heart, all the authors are attempting to avoid, is
the construction of plot before character.  They desire that character
be a vital element from the very start of the composition process.  If

this can be arranged, plot and character can grow together, and in the play's final draft they will have proper unity. This aim may seem at odds with the arrangement of this study; in fact it is not. Plot and character cannot be fully combined until they are individually under-stood. This is because, though they have many points of contact, the two elements are far from synonymous. For example, the point of attack will often be linked to the protagonist, but each has certain roles out-side the other. Similarly, complications and crises appear in a play's final version as obstacles for the protagonist, but there are aspects of obstacles which are outside the conception of complications and crises. By understanding the aspects of plot and character individually, the potential playwright is able to consciously select the appropriate parts of both to combine in the final draft of the play. To neglect these preliminary efforts at comprehension may be to create an unnecessarily risky situation where the best hope for the finished play can only be accidental harmony.

## Traits

Characters may be developed at several different levels. A mere participant in a crowd scene will almost certainly be less developed than a major character. To a great extent the dramatist is able to determine the minor and background characters as he pleases, but the more complex a character is allowed to become, the more the audience expects that character to exhibit certain traits.

Smiley distinguishes six levels of traits for defining character.[137] The first four levels do not represent an explicit consensus, but the

final two do. Consequently the first four will only be described enough
to set the scene for the two highest levels. The most basic level on
which a character can be identified is "biological," which establishes
a character as a male or female human being. Then comes "physical,"
characters with significant physical features, and, above that, "dispo-
sitional," where characters are defined by a single dominating trait.
These are the three levels which are essentially determined by the
dramatist; the next three must also be constructed in line with audience
expectations. The fourth level of complexity is the "motivational" trait.
This is the first level on which characters are not merely one dimensional,
or necessarily background characters. Smiley would endow them with
"instinct, emotion, and sentiment" enough to provide clear motivation
for their behavior. The final two levels will be examined in greater
depth since they correspond to many of the theorists' views on the re-
quired traits of a full and rounded major character.

A character on Smiley's fifth level, "deliberative," is able to deal
with "expedient" and "ethical" dilemmas. Though this is not the highest
level, it may be considered as indicating a complete three dimensional
character. Here, Egri's criteria for character shaping, "physiology,
sociology, psychology,"[138] Smiley's demand that characters represent a
convincing illusion of reality,[139] and Gallaway's desire for a lifelike-
ness in characters as a reflection of a certain environment, are all
satisfied.[140] The only characteristic which those in the highest
echelon of characters possess in addition to all the deliberative
traits, is that which allows them to control rather than be controlled
by the plot: a propensity to make significant decisions.

The top level of traits is, thus, "decisive." When a character is endowed with these he is nearly always marked as a major character. Every decision he makes will be a major or minor climax in the play. Smiley believes that in moments of decision a character reveals himself most fully.[141] Rowe concludes that the greatest revelations about a character come about when he is under the greatest pressure.[142] It does not seem unreasonable to link significant decisions with intense pressure, and so conclude that Smiley and Rowe are implicitly in sympathy.

The qualities of the character on the highest level are discussed in later sections, but some should be mentioned here. As stated, he will almost certainly be a major character. According to theorists including Rowe, Grebanier, and Mabley, the playwright must construct a full biography for his characters on this level so he knows far more about them than will actually appear in the play. Since decision is seen as the fullest revelation of character, it puts a character under the greatest scrutiny. Motivations must be able to pass the closest of examinations. If they cannot do so, the plot will seem contrived, for, on this level, character is plot. A full biography of the characters will give them the illusion of truth which will enable them to survive the scrutiny and enforce the credibility of the drama.[143] The decisive character must, furthermore, be the sum of all the other five levels, include all the qualities of character mentioned below, and, if a protagonist or antagonist, contain all the aspects of those types also detailed below.

All characters do not have to be developed on all levels in every play. There have been purely functional characters from classic drama to Shakespeare to Ibsen, and there may still be without their being

thought of as poorly sketched or unfinished. Nevertheless, when a dramatist decides on a character who will be influential enough to guide the plot, he must make him appear to contain all the traits of this section.

## Qualities

The three qualities which major characters must possess are volition, attractiveness, and consistency. Since Aristotle--who desired characters be good, appropriate, real, and consistent--certain qualities have been associated with leading characters, and each theorist in this thesis has his own recommendations. However, the above combination has significantly the largest consensus support.

Volition, or desire, is perhaps the pre-eminent quality of character. Selden defines it most clearly:

> The great driving factor in all effective theatre is a human desire, a desire to achieve something, or to control something, in order to secure and extend oneself or one's fellows, or to exercise one's senses more enjoyably. Frequently the goal of the desire is a combination of these, but in every case it is the 'wanting' personality who moves the play.[144]

More than this, adds Selden, the volitional character must not merely desire something, he must be willing to "fight for it."[145] Gallaway notes that "volition is the surest mark of the skilled playwright,"[146] and states also that "a character will appeal to an audience if he has powerful and understandable needs and desires."[147] She goes as far to say, and is not alone in doing so, "the strength of the audience's response is just about proportionate to the intensity of the protagonist's desire."[148] Finally, Smiley lists volition as a crucial quality for any

leading character.[149]  To avoid further repetition of a point which by
now should be obvious, the theorists see volition as an indispensable
precondition to truly dramatic, decisive characters. Although not all
the theorists are quoted here in support of this, the verdict is unanimous.
Macgowan and Kerr even support the prospect of volition being able to take
over the play, sometimes in spite of the dramatist's intentions. They
argue that to deny volition may be to impose unnecessary artificiality
on character development. They counsel that if a character starts running
away from the intended scenario, he should be encouraged, not checked.[150]
Such a view gives incredible potential power to the quality of desire. A
short step from this is Selden's consideration of a central character who
lacks volition:

> The one kind of human personality that is valueless as
> a principal figure in drama is the tranquil one, the
> one who lacks all incentive to strive because he is now
> so perfectly satisfied with his lot, or is so generally
> resigned with respect to it that he is disinclined to
> exert himself.[151]

Once again it must be stressed that volition is not simply an advised
quality, it is essential.

Devices by which volition may be highlighted in a character are
detailed by Gallaway. These include, if what he desires seems worthy
of desire to the audience, if he suffers because of his need for the
object, and if he constructs a plan.[152]  Selden adds to these, an equal
desire in the antagonist if the volitional character is the protagonist,
and various other qualities including sympathy for the character.[153]
These devices are put forward here only as suggestions, not as consen-
suses.

As well as aiding in the perception of volition, sympathy is a vital product of the second essential quality, attractiveness. Gallaway thinks that if the audience is to be involved with a character, if it is to have sympathy enough to care to suffer with the character, it must first "be able to care what happens to him. . . . [It] must find him attractive in some way."[154] The many ways in which this attraction may be generated are discussed by the theorists. Smiley suggests making the character's friends attractive and opponents unattractive, having him often repeat his opinions and attitudes, and giving him a moral purpose which is commendable.[155] Macgowan, noting that modern authors have used "ornament" on their characters to render them more attractive, concludes that, though superficial, this may succeed in making the characters more sympathetic and more like a common man.[156] In this sense, "ornament" is perhaps manifested as a quirk, failing, or habit. Gallaway suggests that physical attraction may be tried in order to generate this quality. This is perhaps another way in which Macgowan's idea of ornament may be tried. In any case, Gallaway states that it is inferior to instilling moral or spiritual beauty in a character.[157] She emphasizes the necessity of attractiveness even more by relating it to protagonists who might not superficially seem to be good:

> Even the spiritually base protagonist--that is, one
> who violates common tastes and standards of behavior--
> may be made to seem beautiful by the possession of some
> counteracting characteristics. Macbeth, whom we should
> abhor as a murderer, gains our pity because he is re-
> luctant to commit his first crime, because he has a
> strong sense of decency, and because he experiences
> terrible remorse after murdering Duncan.[158]

It should, by this point, be clear that attractiveness should be implanted in certain characters in every play which requires the

audience's identification with character. It is the quality which can involve the spectator in the drama emotionally, and so is essential to Aristotelian theatre.[159]

The third most emphasized quality is consistency. Rowe puts it at the heart of convincing characterization when he writes, "The first few revealing touches for a character in the play are like points on a graph; they establish a curve, and everything a character says or does must fall on that curve."[160] This is echoed by Macgowan, who includes the demand that characters be "consistent in their behavior and reactions," as one of his three basic principles of drama.[161] Egri joins the consensus when he says that a character's behavior must seem logical, and rendered inevitable by his personality.[162] Gallaway extends the scope of this quality when she identifies as one of the most important things in building credible characters, "care in making the relationships between characters true and consistent."[163]

Such consistency is so widely advocated it would appear almost ridiculous that the playwright should not subjugate all elements of the play to it willingly. However, there are temptations not to do so always lurking in the back of a dramatist's mind when he is writing. These are the pressures of theme and of plot. Practically, these pressures will either emerge when the author is so intent on putting across a message that his characters become inconsistently allegorical mouthpieces, or, in the case of plot, when inconsistencies in plot must be covered up by sacrifices in character. Obviously, both temptations must be rigorously resisted and another solution sought.

There are other qualities of character sometimes mentioned by individual theorists. Smiley, for instance, insists on stature, inter-relation, and clarity,[164] and Egri can be found to agree with the first of these.[165] It may not be within the scope of this study to investigate these recommendations, but this does not make them in any way invalid. Only volition, attractiveness, and consistency can be considered essential under the definition of the consensus. These qualities must be evident in any major character on the "decisive" level of traits. Other lesser characters may possess volition and attractiveness, and all should have consistency, but the necessity for all three is found only in a play's central, dynamic figures.

## Types

There are numerous subdivisions of character types constructed by the theorists, but a clear consensus can only occur when these subdivisions are generalized into three groups. Though only these groups will be discussed, they do include all possible types of characters.

The most important character type is the dynamic protagonist. He is usually the play's central catalyst, and defines the play to the extent that Smiley can conclude that such a focal character may be the key to a play's clarity.[166] The protagonist is expected to contain the six levels of traits and all the vital qualities. It is particularly remarked upon that his attractiveness should generate sympathy. Rowe contends, "It is almost essential that the protagonist be a sympathetic character," although "the characters of a play other than the protagonist may be sympathetic or not."[167] Selden notes similarly, "someone

to root for" is essential,[168] and Gallaway must be accepting this prin-
ciple of sympathetic identification when she defines the protagonist as
"one with whom the audience suffers."[169] She goes even further in saying
that the protagonist can even turn the sympathy of the audience into
empathy.[170] After all this, it is no surprise Smiley concludes a pro-
tagonist should in most cases be more good than evil.[171] One final
aspect of this definition is the possibility of group protagonists.
This idea is supported by, among others, Smiley and Gallaway, with the
condition that each member of the group is lifelike enough to command
individual sympathy.[172]

The second important type is the antagonist, the character who
opposes the protagonist. The need for conflict and contrast between
the characters is frequently cited as an excellent means of giving a
play variety and development. Rowe, for example, believes "conflicting
desires are the stuff of drama,"[173] and Egri reaffirms that "contrast
must be inherent in character."[174] Macgowan regards it as a basic
principle that protagonists and antagonists be "bound to react upon
each other, bound to clash,"[175] and Grebanier similarly demands "a
certain opposition" in his characters.[176] Smiley concludes that, while
a play may exist without an antagonist, his presence, if used to create
obstacles for the protagonist, can lend "clarity and power to a dramatic
structure."[177]

The antagonist is partially shaped by the idea of the balanced con-
flict. Smiley writes of the antagonist, "If his volition is approximately
the same as or greater than that of the protagonist, the resultant crises
and conflicts will be more dynamic and can more easily reach an optimum

level for the specific material."[178] This idea that the opponents should

clash on the level of relative parity is developed more in the next

section of this study, but it may be noted here that the confrontation

between two fairly equal and diametrically opposed volitions creates

a situation where, in Egri's opinion, reasonable compromise is not

possible, and the play cannot be resolved unless "a trait or dominant

quality in one or more characters is fundamentally changed."[179] This

is undoubtedly a potentially dynamic circumstance.

    The third major type is under the (admittedly generous) umbrella of

"subsidiary" characters. This is simply all apart from the protagonist

and antagonist. These characters are generally categorized by their

function. Smiley and Gallaway describe the "foil," a minor character to

contrast with a major, and the "raissonneur," a character who speaks for

the author.[180] Smiley briefly details the self-explanatory "messenger"

and "narrator," but this seems more from a desire to be comprehensive than

to recommend these functionaries.[181] In the same mood, Gallaway lists

several possible roles for minor characters—exposition, creation of atmos-

phere, performance of necessary business, acting as confidants, providing

comic and other relief, and aiding in transitions—but does not urge their

necessary inclusion in the play.[182] If this seems a somewhat desultory

treatment of the subsidiary characters by the theorists, this is perhaps

deliberate. The primary concern of the authors is that the central char-

acter conflict should be served in the minor characters, not that they

should rival it. Structurally, they are devices which focus the plot on

the main struggle. This they do both directly, and indirectly by dealing

with issues outside the main conflict themselves (and so not involving the

protagonist and antagonist in separate schemes). The theorists solve the possible problems of overemphasizing the subsidiary characters by considering them greater or lesser functionaries. Smiley sums up the apparent consensus conveniently when he says, "A play is best served when only essential characters appear,"[183] where "essential" is understood to refer exclusively to the conflict between the protagonist and antagonist.

The generalization of a play's character types may be of some help to the beginning playwright. A clear protagonist in a dynamic struggle with a fairly equal and opposite antagonist, both served by subsidiary characters who focus the conflict, is a neat, compelling, and manifestly workable scheme which can give a play great "clarity and power." However, as is the case with many generalizations, this is by no means a scheme incapable of exceptions. Macgowan is quick to point out that there are many plays which do not suffer when the protagonist and antagonist are the same character, when the protagonist is not made sympathetic through his attractiveness, when he is not dynamic and volitional (as Othello), and when he is not the pivotal character throughout the plot. Macgowan contradicts the implicit understanding that the antagonist must be human, visible, villainous (if the protagonist is, like Macbeth, morally equivocal), or a fair match for the protagonist.[184] These points, though they are not a stated consensus, undeniably have a bearing on the consensus of this section. Macgowan amply illustrates that the relationship of character types is not rigid and precise, and does not apply to every play. If, however, the standard scheme is followed by the playwright, there is still no reason it should fail. The scheme is not flawed within itself, only, to an extent, in its applications.

This concludes the isolated consideration of character. To have any dramatic merit it must now be related to the structure of plot. Only if this is done can the consensuses in these sections have any artistic value whatever.

## Character and Plot

Grebanier writes, "It is safe to say that the better the play, the more an audience is intent upon the characters, rather than on the plot or the theme."[185] This is because, as has already been mentioned, on the highest level, character creates plot. The integration of these two elements is usually discussed within the framework of the objective/obstacle pattern. At its simplest, the pattern focuses the play in terms of the protagonist's drive, from the beginning of the play, toward an objective which he either does or does not attain at the play's conclusion. On his journey he must overcome several obstacles in order to move nearer to his objective. Failure to overcome any particular obstacle will drive the protagonist further from his objective, and so lengthen the play. This pattern does not replace the chronological structure described in plot, but, as will be shown below, it should co-exist.

The attainment of the objective is seen by Gallaway and Smiley as the means of reasserting harmony in the play.[186] Gallaway describes the quintessence of a drama in these terms:

> Somewhere early in the play, there is a scene or group of scenes which reveals a fundamental disharmony either within the protagonist or between the protagonist and his environment. . . . This results in a clear and vigorous statement by the

protagonist of precisely what he thinks he needs to readjust himself. The rest of the play is a series of incidents which alternately promise and withhold the adjustment, thereby making it more desirable and the protagonist more volitional.[187]

It is generally agreed that the protagonist must have the initiative in trying to restore harmony. The only exception is suggested by Gallaway. "If, because of his nature or his situation, the protagonist cannot initiate the action, then he must certainly furnish some resistance to the forces which threaten his life harmony."[188] In binding together the movements of character and plot, the objective/obstacle pattern is clearly an excellent instrument for lending unity to the play.

There are various other areas of accord on the objective. It should be tangible, or at least definite. Thus, Selden wants an objective which is "clear and strong,"[189] and Gallaway one which is "clear and specific."[190] Second, Mabley is not the only author who believes "There can be but one main objective if the play is to have unity."[191] Gallaway does support the idea of a double objective if both are "mutually exclusive, simultaneously held," and of equal importance, such as love and duty.[192] Though a dissenting opinion, this does seem valid in the light of certain plays.[193] It is still, after all, in line with the overall aim of the restoration of harmony. It is probably sufficient to note that the use of more than one objective may create a particularly complex plot. To maintain clarity, a reasonable amount of structural skill may be required. A third area of accord is the feeling that the objective should be fervently desired by the protagonist. Mabley writes, "It's how fiercely he wants something that determines the degree of our interest in him,"[194] and Gallaway confirms the principle when she says that the best dramatic objective is

"something which the protagonist really desires, and without which he suffers."[195] The next area of common observation is that the nature of the objective will determine the audience's reaction to the protagonist.[196] If the objective is praiseworthy in the eyes of the audience, this will reflect well on the protagonist. If it is unusual, he may seem amusing, and if it is unattractive to the audience, his credibility might be in danger. Finally, it is implicit in this pattern that the objective should not be too easy of attainment.[197] Should it be, the drama could only be very short or unnecessarily long.

If the play is to have conflict, the protagonist must be faced with obstacles in his quest for the objective. Mabley indicates their importance: "If the protagonist and his objective may be said to constitute the first two important elements in the construction of a play, the various obstacles, collectively, comprise the third."[198] The obstacles must impede the protagonist, but must appear, to him, to be surmountable. If they are overcome, the play is generally over. If they are not, the play may either continue, or end, depending on other factors.

According to Gallaway, obstacles may increase the appearance of volition in the protagonist (as has been mentioned previously) and engender hope and fear in an audience. The best obstacles are considered to be the antagonist, or an impediment created by the antagonist. Other alternatives are possible; Gallaway suggests environment, the past, incompetence, the objective behaving independently, the mutually exclusive double objective and, in a mystery play, the playwright's ingenuity in concealing the solution. These, though, do not have anything like the support of the antagonist-related obstacles.[199]

The objective/obstacle pattern will work efficiently for the play-
wright when he is seeking to integrate character and plot structure. It
is not, as some of the theorists do indicate, a rule with no exceptions.
It is remarked, for instance, that such plays as Oedipus Rex, The Cherry
Orchard, and Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman are dramatic successes
even though the protagonists are really facing unsurmountable obsta-
cles.[200] This situation might pose two large problems: it makes the
objective effectively redundant, and eliminates the possibility of a
credible conflict. To overcome this potentially disasterous dramatic
impasse, it is necessary to generate a slightly artificial situation
where the protagonists of these plays do not recognize the insurmounta-
bility of the obstacles until "failure stares them in the face and they
must bow to it."[201] From the playwright's point of view, this entails
the setting up of two layers of reality, subjective and objective, and
sustaining them almost to the last. Since this may prove to be an
ambitious task for the beginning playwright, it is only logical to
think he might be better off starting with plays which use the obstacles
in the conventional sense.

The objective/obstacle pattern is so intimately related to plot
structure it may seem to run parallel. The appearance of the first
obstacle often provokes the point of attack, the other obstacles repre-
sent the complications and the crises, the final obstacle to be overcome
before the objective is (or is not) achieved is equivalent to the major
crisis and climax, and the ultimate attainment or non-attainment of the
objective is contained within the resolution. This parallelism is vital
to the final version of the play, but proper integration can best be

achieved by first understanding plot and character separately. The goal is not to make the two elements become one in the completed play, but to add to the common ground of each selected individual characteristics of one or the other. This method will create a combination greater than either of the elements.

A final piece of advice may help to put this chapter into perspective. The theorists do not believe that character portrayal is something which can in toto be abstractly taught. Lifelike characters cannot come solely out of principles, but should also come partly from direct observation. A good playwright will almost always construct his characters largely from his deliberate sociological awareness.[202] This prompts Gallaway to conclude that "boundless curiosity and inexhaustible patience" are ideal qualities for the playwright, since they may most easily lead him to the necessary, sustained observation.[203]

CHAPTER 6

THEME

The arrangement of this chapter is determined by the contradictory
opinions expressed by the theorists. Either they dwell mainly on the
advantages of theme, or they concentrate on the disadvantages. There
is such opposition to theme that it is seen as the curse of many a bad
play, and such support for it that it is regarded as the quintessence
of a good play. The division of opinion will be investigated first
from the viewpoint of those favorable to it, then from that of those
unfavorable. Both these sections will be preceded by an extended
statement of the problem.

A cursory and uninformed understanding of the term "theme" might
lead one to a definition something like "the emotion or quality the
play is about." This, however, is incompatible with the concepts
behind the terms used instead of "theme" by the theorists who oppose
it. The disagreements are not merely over nomenclature, but are con-
ceptual. The terms "thought," "thesis," "meaning," and "premise," are
not only differing labels, but also represent differing ideas. On one
level the difference stems from the understanding of a theme as an
underlying movement, constant throughout the play. In contrast to
this, "thought" is more all-encompassing, "thesis" and "premise" are
active propositions which greatly influence the play from the very

beginning, and "meaning" is basically a distillation of the play when it is over. None of these terms, when applied to Macbeth, for instance, would result, like the uninformed understanding of "theme," in the conclusion "ambition." Similarly, when applied to Othello, none would result in the answer "jealousy." These other terms all demand something more. A missing element needs to be found to redefine this layman's conception of theme so that it may become conventionally meaningful. In the meantime, the term "theme" will be used ambiguously, though with an eye toward its final, useful, definition. This definition should eventually allay most of the objections of those who oppose theme, and still should be seen as an implicit consensus.

## The Pros

There is undoubtedly a little support for the general idea of a theme, even in the uninformed sense. Selden recognizes the value of "A central idea from which the audience starts and can always return."[204] Grebanier underlines this unifying role when he describes theme as the "central or governing idea."[205] It is possible to conclude that, under this definition, the playwright might take a concept such as love, jealousy, or ambition and let it be manifested in different places in his play. Smiley says that the likely places for this theme to emerge are in a simple statement, a character's "amplification or diminution" of a subject, an "arousal or expression of emotion," an "argument," or in the "meaning of the whole."[206] This conception of theme may be applied to most plays, and could be a small aid to the understanding of the elements of plot and character. The major shortcoming of this scheme is that theme

does not consequently seem to attain anything like the importance it should. Certainly this definition must rank it below plot and character. It becomes an element limited in scope and usefulness, both from the point of view of the playwright and the audience. Furthermore, it is vague, lacks proper cohesion, and does not move the drama in any one specific direction. Something is evidently missing. The consensus is that this is a consistent attitude on the part of the playwright.

In practice, the consensus comes close to the concepts of a thesis and a premise. According to Egri, the playwright needs to be able to express his attitude in one sentence which implies conflict. His own examples include "Frugality--leads to (conflict)--waste," and "Honesty--defeats--duplicity," and for _Macbeth_ the sentence reads "Ruthless ambition leads to its own destruction."[207] When Selden develops and qualifies his earlier definition of theme, he moves very close to the idea of Egri. Theme is, he says, "The subject or text of a play. It is the essential idea of the play, an idea which can be set down in a simple statement of very few words. The theme is based on a commonly-accepted truth."[208] His interpretation of the "essential idea" of _Macbeth_ is "Ambition knows no gorge but the grave," a virtual echo of Egri's.[209] Grebanier is on a parallel path when he says that the basis of the theme of _Othello_ may be, "Jealousy is a sickness which can utterly destroy a human being."[210] An informed consensus is becoming apparent which is adequately summed up in a comment by Mabley:

> The theme might be defined as the playwright's point of view toward his material. Since it hardly seems possible to write a play without an attitude toward the people and the situations one has created, every play has a theme of some kind.[211]

Of course, not every sentence is appropriate for a theme. The proper sentence-theme will contain potential for movement and conflict, and so must be chosen carefully, not at random.

Investigating this consensus further, other common grounds are dis-covered. Mabley states of the sentence-theme, "there is one spot in the play where it can invariably be discerned--the climax."[212] Gallaway effectively agrees, writing, "The value of knowing his own point of view becomes clear to the playwright when he attempts to determine the ending of his play," for, "it determines the final meaning."[213] Another accord is the theorists' advocacy of the integrated theme. Rowe comments, "A play must not argue or expound the theme, but must embody it, be in its entirety a concrete illustration of the theme."[214] Grebanier is basically concurring when he says that if a playwright ends up "merely manufacturing situation and character" to prove a theme, then "neither situation or characters will be dramatically convincing."[215] There is more implicit backing for an integrated theme from Macgowan and Grebanier when they praise Ibsen for his subtlety in concealing theme in character, and similarly from Gallaway when she recommends that the theme at the end of a play should be embodied in the fate of the major characters."[216] A third point of consensus is explained by Selden, "A well written script has one principal theme, and one only."[217] This is obviously the best way to ensure thematic clarity in the play.

Thus, from the positive point of view, theme may be regarded as the element which lends the play an underlying attitude, direction, and clarity, and which ultimately may be largely responsible for the strength of the play's impact. Most concisely, the form of theme advocated can be

defined as a short statement giving the playwright's point of view, fully integrated in the play.

## The Cons

The most virulent repudiation of theme comes from Smiley. He believes "theme is perhaps the most confusing, dangerous, and useless word that can be used in reference to playwriting,"[218] at heart because it has been used by so many different people in so many different ways. This complaint must be overcome gradually by examining all the major objections. Only then can Smiley seem less at odds with the supporters of the sentence-theme.[219]

Macgowan, admittedly not one too well disposed toward the element, contends, "A theme . . . is seldom the initial impulse for the writing of a good play."[220] However, agreement with this comes even from Rowe, who is overall far less hostile, when he says, "starting with theme is the hardest way to achieve a play."[221] The objections are not to theme per se, so much as to it having too much "initial" or "starting" influence. This is because, explains Grebanier, "It too easily may lead the writer into contriving heavily moral or propagandistic demonstrations of an idea."[222] Mabley combines and clarifies the above when he opines, "The experienced dramatist seldom begins with a theme, or attempts to fashion a story in order to present a philosophical position. This method can lead to clichés, propaganda, and lifeless characters."[223] The clues to a possible solution are inherent in the phrase, "a philosophical position," and also in the difference between a thesis and a theme.

Kerr defines a thesis as, "a position or proposition which a person advances and offers to maintain by argument."[224] If this is interpreted in a "philosophical" sense, either as the beginning of an abstract proof, or as the beginning of a Hegelian dialectic, it is clearly incompatible with the artistic demands of a play. It is an explicitly dissimilar conception to that of the sentence-theme. The philosophical thesis intends to prove, where the dramatic theme is more concerned to show. The playwright may conceive a theme in advance in order to show, through the plot and characters, how it may be an organizing principle of behavior, not so that the plot and character can be created as mere functionaries of the theme. Those who are concerned that the early establishment of a theme will choke creativity are essentially warning against an untheatrical, philosophical rigidity, not the principle of a governing idea. Kerr makes two statements which illustrate the solution to the problem. First he condemns the philosophical straitjacket:

> What is intrinsically wrong about the thesis play is that it puts the drawing board before the drama. It begins at the wrong end of the creative scale. It begins with a firm fast premise, achieved in the intellectual solitude of the study and proceeds to make all life dance to a quite debatable tune.[225]

Conversely, he says of the "rational mind," and this applies perfectly to the consensus on an organizing theme, it is best used when it "shapes, but does not stamp."[226] In reality, the concept of a theme is not under attack, only its possible excesses. Few would disagree with Kerr's statement, "A good way to destroy a play is to force it to prove something. Forced it will always be,"[227] because he is attacking the non-dramatic, not an artistic element.

The second major area of objection is directed particularly toward
the sentence-theme. There is a large measure of doubt that the encapsu-
lating of a play into one sentence can be of any real value. Macgowan
observes, with an obvious dig at Egri, "Macbeth is not great because
someone can read it and say, 'Ah, you see, ruthless ambition leads to
its own destruction.'"[228] He believes that to condense a play into a
brief sentence is inevitably to deny many aspects of the drama. Mabley
says, in the same mood, "I doubt very much Shakespeare was trying to
prove anything about jealousy in Othello."[229] Mabley's use of the term
"prove" might seem to strip this quote of controversy, but one cannot
ignore Mabley's implication that to focus on the jealousy in Othello is
to fail to consider much of the play. A related problem is raised by
Mabley when he notes that there are nearly as many theories about the
theme of Hamlet as there are theorists. The only consensus he can reach
is the watered down conclusion, "We may surmise that it signified to the
Elizabethan public the ultimate triumph of justice and the continuity of
the state under a legitimate government."[230] This is so vague, and says
so little about the play, it is effectively useless. These criticisms of
the sentence-theme must be dealt with if it is to have any real credibil-
ity.

The solution is perhaps a relatively simple one. It should be enough
to look at the structure of this or any other playwriting study to see
that theme, whether or not in its sentence form, is not intended to pre-
sent the play in microcosm. Such an intention would inevitably lead to
a denial of all the other elements that make drama. Theme is simply a
guide to organization which, if formulated early, may give direction to

plot, character, dialogue, genre, and spectacle. It is not the sum of these, nor even of their essences, for theme is not a containing element. An examination of _Macbeth_ which came to the conclusion that the effect of the play is the comprehension of the maxim, "Ruthless ambition leads to its own destruction," would be as shallow as it would be ludicrous. This is no more than one facet of the play. At the same time, it is nonetheless true that this theme, as a shaping principle, does help to lend "clarity and power" to _Macbeth_. It is an excellent focus for parts of the action. When Grebanier objects to "themes that sound like slogans or Sunday-school mottoes,"[231] it is surely their modishness, implied lack of sufficient thinking out (leading to weak clichés), and perhaps the dangers of theme being clumsily employed to reduce all elements of the play so they can be conveniently expressed in one banal sentence, which he is shying away from. Like others, he recognizes the dangers of the misuse of theme, but does not deny its value when properly channeled.

The objections to theme from Smiley which opened this section will be largely overcome upon the observation of the above consensus. If theme is allotted its proper place it should be quite the opposite of "confusing," and if it is not misused there is no reason it should be "dangerous." Furthermore, it is only "useless" if it is designed by the playwright to encapsulate the whole play. Such an attempt would inevitably lead to the meaningless _reductio ad absurdum_ typified by Mabley's conclusion on the theme of _Hamlet_.

This interpretation of theme is one to which the consensus of the theorists may be reconciled. The sentence-theme as an organizational and directive influence can work in conjunction with plot and story,

and the behavior of characters. When properly employed, it helps to
make physical action and emotional behavior logical, to ensure appro-
priate focus, and to bring out clear motivations in a play.

On one hand, the theme must never swamp the play, but must always
allow it to develop naturally. On the other, it may act as a limiting
force if this is for the good of the other elements. This is an artistic
tightrope which can only be successfully negotiated if great care is
given to the original composition of the theme. Because it may be ex-
pressed so succinctly, the sentence-theme must be formed only after much
careful thought. The brevity will spawn endless connotations, and these
need to be carefully anticipated if the finished play is to be properly
served.

CHAPTER 7

DIALOGUE

Plays which rely primarily on rapidly changing plot or on spectacle
do not have to place a high premium on dialogue. Such plays, however,
are usually excessively melodramatic (in the pejorative sense of the
term), or severely ritualistic. The vast majority of plays do depend
a great deal on dialogue, and an undeniable feature of nearly all re-
spected plays is well-constructed dialogue.

Selden writes, "There are . . . no rules for the writing of dia-
logue."[232] Nonetheless, there are certain principles, according to him
and the other theorists, which good writers of dialogue tend to follow.
From the multitude of recommendations the theorists make, all those
backed by some consensus are detailed here. They are not presented
as rules, but as guidelines.

## Recommendations for Effective Dialogue

### I. Dialogue should be appropriate to character

Rowe is voicing a common sentiment when he says, "The basis of
dialogue lies within the characters."[233] Ideally, as Grebanier notes,
dialogue will be inseparable from character."[234] Others are in accord
with Rowe, differing only in emphasis. Egri recommends that dialogue
follow "clearly and validly from the character that uses it,"[235]

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Macgowan desires "appropriate idiom,"[236] Smiley "appropriateness,"[237] and Mabley notes that, at best, dialogue "arises out of character."[238] The consensus is more than clear.

Specific suggestions are made as to how to achieve this appropriateness. Macgowan wants dialogue to be "reflecting temperament and education."[239] Smiley advocates idiom be appropriate to background and immediate situation. Thus, middle and working class speech varies, as does the language of both depending on whether they are in formal or formal situations.[240] Grebanier similarly recommends uncultivated speech for "uncultivated" people, and cultivated speech for the "cultivated." In the latter case, however, the playwright must avoid giving the characters esoteric and unfamiliar words, unless this is a deliberate quality of one of the characters.[241]

## II. Dialogue should be selected, not copied, from life

Kerr is opposed to realism because he believes that in its mirroring of the inarticulateness of life, it has created an inarticulate theatre.[242] It is almost a truism to say that this is most notably apparent in the element of dialogue. Although the other theorists do not go so far as Kerr in repudiating realism completely, they do recognize the dangers inherent in slavishly transcribing natural patterns of speech from life into the theatre. Though such dialogue may be real, it may not be dramatic. A play's dialogue is subject to the principle, cited by Egri, that "Art is selective, not photographic."[243] The essence rather than the form of everyday speech should determine dramatic speech. Theatrical dialogue should, according to Selden, be "more eloquent,"[244] to Smiley,

be "clearer, more interesting, and more causally probable,"[245] and to Macgowan, be able to "heighten and deepen,"[246] when compared to natural patterns. Mabley even concludes that inarticulate characters need to be more articulate than in real life, although the sense of "truth" should still be maintained.[247] The truth should, of course, be applicable to every character in respect to the selectivity of his speech.

The various methods of selectivity are detailed in some of the sections below.

## III. Dialogue should further conflict

Rowe stresses that the primary role of dialogue is the advancement of the action through conflict, not the definition of character.[248] Mabley says likewise, it is imperative dialogue "advance the action,"[249] and Egri writes, "No dialogue, even the cleverest, can move a play if it does not further the conflict."[250] This consensus is probably unsurprising when one considers the high value placed on rising conflict, and the warnings against static conflict and the dramatic stasis of character delineation.

## IV. Dialogue should be clear and comprehensible

This requirement Mabley places in his ten recommendations for good dialogue.[251] Selden, Macgowan, and Grebanier all write that dialogue has the best chance of being clear and comprehensible if it is "simple."[252] Grebanier explores this and concludes that simplicity does not entail the use of monosyllabic and fragmented sentences which assume the audience is illiterate, for such sentences may paradoxically confuse as often as clarify. Instead, he recommends simplicity of vocabulary

and sentence structure.[253] Smiley says "clear" dialogue is necessary to convey precisely the correct nuance intended for each word and sentence.[254] It can be concluded by implication that complexly structured dialogue is probably not the correct way to convey complicated ideas. Precise interpretation is reliant on easily understood constructions.

## V. Speeches should be constructed for optimum emphasis

Grebanier makes a typical comment when he says, "The strongest positions in a sentence are the beginning and the end."[255] This he expands into a general rule about whole speeches:

> Opening and conclusion are of cardinal importance in dramatic talk--though it is strange how many dramatists seem unaware of the principle--because of the very nature of dialogue. The beginning of one speech is the link with the speech just ended; its conclusion is the link with the speech about to be heard.
> For this reason, the principle must be enlarged to apply to each speech as a whole, as a unit. The opening of any given speech and its close must generally be allotted to the most important things being said.[256]

Mabley adds, "The most emphatic position in a speech is at the end, the second strongest at the beginning."[257] Mabley, Rowe, Selden, and Grebanier all believe that a speech should build toward an end which, in the words of Rowe, "usually should be climactic."[258] This is pertinent when considering the principle of selectivity. As Mabley says of a play's dialogue, "Putting a modifying clause at the end of a speech, or the name of the character being addressed, is invariably weakening," even though this is frequently done outside the theatre.[259] Grebanier clarifies and elaborates on this:

> Though it is common enough in life that we end our remarks with parenthetical phrases like 'as you know,' 'of course,' 'by the way,' 'so I hear,' it is, for

example, wise to make them truly parenthetical by
tucking them in somewhere before the conclusion of
a speech. As an ending for a given speech:
    You're bound to hear from him, I'm sure.
can be improved to;
    You're bound, I'm sure, to hear from him.
or--better:
    You'll hear from him, I'm sure, you're bound
to.260

## VI. The playwright should be aware of the rhythm of dialogue

The emphasis within a speech may give a series of insights into its
subtext. Similarly, rhythm is considered a principal avenue to the play's
inner movement, particularly on the emotional level. As Grebanier writes,
"Nothing can be more effective in a dramatist's work than well-calculated
rhythms mirroring the emotional values that are to be projected."[261] He
even goes so far as to write, "More important than giving a character
the words he would use in life is giving him the rhythms of speech he
would use in life."[262]

Smiley investigates rhythm in the greatest depth. One of his main
criteria for word selection is an anticipation of the movement that will
be apparent when the sounds are combined. He believes, consequently,
that a playwright should be aware of elements such as word stress, tempo,
meter, assonance, consonance, and alliteration. These can not only un-
cover emotional subtext, but also give indications of "a speaker's age,
sex, disposition." To aid rhythm generally, Smiley suggests that in
looser sentences the essentials should precede the modifiers, the modi-
fiers should be selected with care, pauses should be consciously arranged,
and that good rhythm is most likely to come out of good sentence structure
and clearly expressed ideas.[263]

Rhythm is possibly not something which may be learned by rote, but it will probably become easier to incorporate with experience. It seems self-evident that an obvious way to develop a feeling for a play's rhythm is to read it aloud.

## VII. Each speech should contain only one thought

There might appear to be a potential dichotomy in Selden's view that in a good play speeches tend to be short,[264] and Grebanier's that speeches which are too short cannot carry a play.[265] However, both assertions are based on the common belief that one speech should contain one complete thought. Selden is, in part, warning against putting too many thoughts into a single utterance, and Grebanier is suspicious of the possibility of incompleted thoughts.

Grebanier's definition explains this theory; "The salient fact about any given speech is that it must constitute a unity. It is safe to say, therefore, that any given speech must convey only one dramatic idea and/or one ruling emotion."[266] Hence, one-sentence speeches are perfectly possible, as are long soliloquies, just so long as they satisfy this criterion. "Too short" and "too long," can now be seen as criticisms of form, not of length.

## VIII. Use concrete images

Selden notes that, at its best, "dramatic dialogue is richly suggestive . . . full of imagery,"[267] but Mabley qualifies this when he says, "The concrete image, one that can be visualized, is generally more effective than an abstract one."[268] This consensus is most fully expressed by Grebanier:

> The language of the novel, the short story, poetry,
> and the drama--because they are concerned above all
> with the realities of human experience--must be
> largely the language of experience, the record of
> the world as presented to our senses or our imagina-
> tion. This is the language made up of concrete
> expression. . . . In the drama completeness is
> necessary even when ideas are being discussed.
> . . . The importance of concrete expressions to
> the man of letters is they are the stuff out of
> which images are made, and images are the source
> of vividness, power, and immediacy of meaning.
> From abstract phrases no images emerge.[269]

To drive the point home, Mabley and Grebanier give various examples of

both. Abstract images include beauty, truth (Grebanier), grandeur, and

turmoil (Mabley). Concrete images are table, violet, Matthew Arnold

(Grebanier), mountain, and storm (Mabley).[270] These examples indicate

that "abstract" is a term synonymous with moral, social, psychological,

and political concepts, and "concrete" is synonymous with material items.

This might seem to imply that the place for the abstract lies within the

more concept-oriented area of theme, rather than in dialogue.

## IX. Poetic dialogue may be tried

This is the only one of these recommendations which the playwright

can reject out of hand with no ill effects. However, poetic dialogue is

a suggestion which has a great deal of support among the theorists.

Grebanier believes that "Poetry is almost the natural vehicle for

speech in the theatre, for the life of the theatre is in the projection

of a compelling illusion."[271] Kerr is so convinced of this he makes it

the crux of his dramatic credo:

> The fact is that every major serious play--and the
> lion's share of the comedies--that we cling to out
> of the past are verse plays. Three hundred years
> of prose have done well enough by the novel,

beautifully by history and biography; they have left
the theatre grunting like an underprivileged child.[272]

In support of this, Grebanier notes that many of the greatest dramatists--
including Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Shakespeare, Marlowe, Racine,
Ibsen (at times), and Tennessee Williams (at times)--wrote poetic and
near-poetic dialogue.[273] He is further of the opinion that "Imagery
has been the lifeblood of poetry,"[274] and when this is seen in concert
with Kerr's belief that prose chokes imagery,[275] it might be judged that
an important dramatic constituent can best be provided by poetic dialogue.
If so, the lot of the latter would necessarily run high.

The specific qualities of poetic dialogue include, first, concentra-
tion. Kerr opines, "We often think of verse as a rather roundabout way of
saying something. It isn't. It is the fastest way of saying something
provided it is not a plain and literal statement of fact."[276] This
intrinsic ability for compactness provokes Grebanier to say, "Drama,
being a concentrated method of presenting life, . . . has always had a
strong affinity for poetry."[277] A second, related quality, according to
Kerr, is that "Verse is simply more pliable than prose, and for a form
as swift and compact as the theatre extreme pliability is wanted."[278]
Third, again from the viewpoint of Kerr, verse dialogue may allow the
playwright an extended artistic field:

> The chief value for verse is its capacity for working
> in depth. Verse is able to descend to those recesses
> of personality and experience for which we have no
> adequate rational labels, to mine the soul of man
> for whatever is inexplicable about him. Verse goes,
> in a quite literal sense, where there is no prose.[279]

He illustrates the potential validity of this point by simply raising
the specter of a Hamlet done entirely in prose.[280]

Since there would appear to be so many advantages to poetic

dialogue, a question is inevitably raised over the reasons for its

relatively low profile in the modern theatre. Based on the above

support for the concept, some are apparent. Poetic dialogue, although

it can conceivably be prominent in any play, is surely best suited, in

the twentieth century, to poetic drama, and this is a specific genre

not necessarily suitable for the portrayal of all contemporary plots,

characters, and themes. Then, Kerr warns that success is very diffi-

cult to achieve, both in writing good poetic dialogue and in overcoming

the inevitable, initial hostility of the audience.[281] Lastly, it should

be pointed out that Kerr (especially) is misrepresenting prose drama,

for it may certainly contain imagery. Only the most realistic drama

can sometimes be justifiably accused of being devoid of this element.

These objections do not negate the positive consensus, but should

prevent the issue being presented too simplistically. It might, in the

end, be advisable to take Macgowan's practical advice if poetic dialogue

is to be a prominent factor in a proposed drama:

> If, spurred on by the success of Anderson, Eliot, and
> Fry, the apprentice dramatist is tempted to write
> poetic drama, I suggest that he try loosely rhythmed
> prose, using the simple words that went into the King
> James version of the Bible.[282]

## X. Make dialogue interesting

On the face of it this may seem to be a difficult recommendation to

break down into specific advice. Obviously, interesting dialogue is

largely reliant upon the interest in the other elements of drama when

they appear in a speech. If they are not compelling, it is logically

unlikely that dialogue can alone make them so. The ways in which
interest can be generated, if the appropriate source material is
available, are consequently concerned more with form than content.
To combine the advice of Smiley and Grebanier, the playwright should
avoid successions of short sentences or long monologues, concentrate
on syntactical variations, and use words both figuratively and lit-
erally.[283]

## XI. Use only essential words

Frequently it is implied that a play should contain no wasted words;
Smiley writes that only the very "necessary" be included.[284] This econ-
omy of expression, also advocated by Rowe and Grebanier,[285] is exempli-
fied in Smiley's list of parts of dialogue the playwright should avoid.
These include needless repetition, redundant modifiers, superfluous
words, compound prepositions, double negatives, excessive use of "that,"
"which," or "who" to open clauses, sentences with too many abstract nouns
ending in -tion, -ness, -ment, -ance, and -ity, every noun having a modi-
fier and so creating a "singsong effect," and two or more sentences
together with the same arrangement.[286]

It is probably unrealistic to expect a playwright to write with
constant and scrupulous regard for all these restrictions, but an
awareness, at least, of the principle should help to curb excesses.

## XII. Dialogue should not be overemphasized

Dialogue cannot exist independently, but must be fully integrated
with the other major dramatic elements, and is ultimately subservient
to the drama. Egri suggests the proper perspective, saying, "Once your

characters have been set in motion, their path and speech are determined, to a great extent."[287] He also counsels against witty plays if they happen to overemphasize dialogue, and so do not allow characters to grow.[288]

XIII. Listen, read, and practice

The above recommendations are all put into their correct focus by Macgowan when he asserts, "Nobody can teach you how to write good dialogue."[289] All the principles discussed here will be valuable to the playwright in developing the techniques of good dialogue; however, to pool the collective opinions of Selden, Rowe, Macgowan, and Grebanier, unless the playwright trains his ear to listen to the rhythms of other's conversations, carefully reads acknowledged models of good dialogue, and indulges in ceaseless practice, he will not be able to convert the techniques into proper practice.[290]

The final recommendation could serve as an appropriate conclusion to this whole chapter. No amount of abiding by principles will transform a playwright into a good writer of dialogue unless he is willing to listen, read, and practice. Even if these things are done, it must be expected that progress may be slow, for the playwright will be acquiring a skill, not mechanically learning a process. Nonetheless, since clumsily constructed dialogue can cause a play to fail artistically, it would seem vital that he not shy away from this work.

CHAPTER 8

GENRE

The theorists assume that a playwright will have an acquaintance
with the major historical genres before he begins his work. Preferably
this knowledge will have been gleaned from a reading of plays, but the
playwright is at least expected to have read summaries of these genres.
Some of the theorists provide these summaries, while others do not, but
it is not the place of this thesis to fully explain the major dramatic
genres. Even though a knowledge of them is invaluable, they do not
represent original research. When the theorists detail the genres,
they are merely trying to restate common ideas, not to create any
radically new concepts.[291]  Consequently, the idea of a new consensus
on genre is redundant, since the theories on genre the authors present
are consensuses in the first place. The most useful exercise which may
be performed within the parameters of this study is to examine where
there is a consensus among the theorists which is contrary either to
the historical or present interpretation of any genre. The only other
remarks which it is appropriate to note are those, such as in tragedy,
where a body of the theorists highlight one particular aspect of a
genre for specific comment. In re-emphasizing historical ideas, and
so de-emphasizing others, this can be viewed as original thought.

Genres may be broken into those based on treatment and those based
on style, and they will be considered in this order.

## Genres Based on Treatment

The genres from this perspective are tragedy, comedy, and melodrama.
They are grouped together because, unlike genres based on style, they do
not generally rely for their identity upon a specific form of stage
production, but on the way the dramatist chooses to treat the other
basic elements of theatre.

Tragedy

By far the greatest amount of original critical attention is
directed toward the final effect of tragedy, that is, the nature of
the play's physical ending, and the catharsis.

Contradicting a common misconception, Rowe writes, "all tragedy is
not closed with death."[292]  Gallaway seems to agree when she implies
that the ending of a play does not necessarily indicate its genre.[293]
Macgowan goes further when he contradicts the belief that an objective
successfully achieved is the sure sign of a comedy, and one not, that
of tragedy.  As support for this he notes Oedipus succeeds in securing
the good of the state, and Hamlet in killing a murderer.[293]  These
opinions are intended to lift a straitjacket of misconception from
modern tragic thought.

The catharsis is a prominent Aristotelian concept which is dis-
cussed by the theorists largely because they believe it to be often
imperfectly done.  Aristotle's explanation of the effect is usually

summarized as "a purgation of pity and fear." In the optimum situation,
a successful tragedy will purge the spectator of these two emotions so
he may leave the play somehow purified. An overall view may be obtained
when the views of Macgowan, Smiley, and Grebanier are combined.[294] Their
consensus is that catharsis is intimately connected with "fulfillment."
This, rather than frustration, indignation, or depression, is the feel-
ing the tragedian should try to generate at the end of the play. The
other emotions will not purge, partly because they will not evoke the
awe we feel when something mighty is accomplished or greatness becomes
manifest. Awe is presumably a necessary quality, for how can an audience
really feel purged by something which is lesser than they? Smiley goes
on to say the purgation must occur in the actual play before it is felt
by the audience. So, after Hamlet's death he is no longer pitiful or in
a fearful situation, and only as a result of this is the audience purged
of its pity and fear.[295]

The ending of tragedy is, thus, seen to be governed only by the need
for a correct catharsis. The physical demands must be subordinate to the
emotional.

Comedy

Comedy emerges well from the ruminations of the theorists. Macgowan
hints at a high opinion of this genre when he accuses the beginning play-
wright of being attracted more easily to tragedy, thinking it more
theatrically powerful (because of its apparent bloodiness and excitement).
This is not true, he concludes; dramatic power is not the primary domain
of any genre.[296] Smiley's related comment is that comedy is just as valid

a genre as tragedy, and he goes on to write that, "It is not the anti-
thesis of tragedy, but its complement."[297] Grebanier strikes a further
blow for comedy when he stresses that its plot is in every way as
important as tragedy's.[298] A look at successful comedies from Moliere
to Wilde should soon confirm this.

Smiley and Grebanier both shy away from the idea of comedy being
dependent on audience laughter. Their concern is that the dramatist
will make the fatal mistake of generating his comedy only from one-line
jokes, instead of ensuring that it comes out of the basic elements of
the play.[299]

## Melodrama

It is a mistake to think of melodrama purely in terms of the obvious
nineteenth-century variety. Smiley considers it the form "most often
employed by twentieth-century playwrights."[300] Grebanier adds, "In a
technical sense, the term 'melodrama' must not be construed as in any
way derogatory."[301] The modern melodrama, according to Grebanier, aims
to shock or thrill the audience. It "sets out to play upon the nerves
by using the sensational and the unexpected." This definition allows
him to label Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author a
melodrama.[302] Smiley states that this genre usually clearly delineates
between good and evil, and cannot allow its characters to change. He
may be close to agreeing with Grebanier's reasoning when he writes,
"Good melodramas in today's theatre are likely to be called 'dramas,'
or 'serious plays,'"[303] so, perhaps, opening the way for the inclusion
of such as Pirandello's plays in this genre. In any case, the definition

permits Smiley to include Euripides' Electra, and Look Back in Anger by
John Osbourne.[304]  The one item on which Egri, Grebanier, and Smiley all
agree is that the plot of melodrama has great movement, and that this
quality may even be more important than total credibility of plot.[305]

Melodrama is the middle ground of the theatre. It is certainly no
longer of the nineteenth-century type which sacrificed all to populism,
although aspects of the modern version are refined from it. So long as
it does not aspire to tragedy, the theorists do not generally discourage
it. Not everybody is forced to try to write a comedy or tragedy.

Tragedy, comedy, and melodrama seem to be the three main genres
based on treatment. The genre here labelled "melodrama" is elsewhere
labelled, depending on the aspects emphasized, "tragicomedy," "drama,"
"drama of ideas," "theme play," or "problem play." Quite possibly these
terms are not synonymous with melodrama, but there is no consensus to
this effect. The only genre clearly outside the three detailed is
didactic drama. Although this has a little backing from Rowe and
Smiley,[306] the earlier consensus that it is dangerous to try and make
a play "prove" something is set strongly against it.

## Genres Based on Style

There is some discrepancy among the theorists over which genres are
still to be considered valid. However, there is a consensus which rejects
the specific past interpretations of all the dramatic styles. Thus, while
naturalism may not be in disfavor, Zola's naturalism is, and though
symbolism is acceptable to some, Maeterlinckian symbolism is not. In
this way, the theorists can extract the facets of any historical genre

which will be pertinent to the modern theatre, and leave behind those intimately connected with its own age.

The only genres based on style which will be examined are realism and naturalism, expressionism, and symbolism. These by no means cover all of modern drama; to do so would involve mentioning tens of genres the theorists ignore, but they probably do encompass the styles of the bulk of mainstream modern drama. The greatest omission may be that which Smiley calls, "presentational drama."[307] It is the avant-garde work of such luminaries as Brecht, Ionesco, and Beckett. Only Smiley and Mabley pay it adequate attention, and so it is not precisely within the bounds of this study. Nonetheless, it is a genre which the modern playwright cannot afford to ignore, and so is looked at in the conclusion to this section and in the brief glance at non-Aristotelian theatre.

## Realism and Naturalism

For the purist (or perhaps even anyone with a rudimentary acquaintance with dramatic styles), this may seem an unholy alliance. The historical genres of realism and naturalism were once clearly distinguishable from one another. Now the terms are used almost interchangeably by the theorists. For example, Grebanier sees realism as the trite and superficial well-made plays of Scribe, and naturalism as the legacy of Zola's rejection of these.[308] Conversely, Rowe states that The Cherry Orchard represents the ultimate development of the convention of realism.[309] Placing realism and naturalism together as the "lifelike" genre is an artistically dubious stopgap, but not really avoidable.

The main thrust of the theorists' comments on these genres has been indicated already: a rejection of the assumptions on which the genres were originally based. Grebanier takes the lead in criticizing the formlessness of early examples of these genres, Zola for wrongly assuming heredity and environment were scientific concepts, the essentially undramatic principle of recording every minute detail (making drama scientific, but dull, or even impossible), and naturalistic writers for showing the "beastly," never the "noble" in man.[310] Kerr unleashes much vitriol against the genres, complaining the naturalistic rhythm of a play tends to choke the natural rhythm.[311] Grebanier agrees.[312] Kerr thinks pictorial realism such an unimaginative extreme that it forces those who reject it, to reject it so much they must write the plays of an "unintelligible anarchist."[313] Even Rowe weighs in against the clinging legacy of realism and naturalism because they provoke the modern playwright to compose dramas which are sadly "pseudo-Chekhov or psuedo-Ibsen, or pseudo-Odets."[314]

The common rejection of the precise original circumstances of realism and naturalism is manifest. It is important to restate that realistic or naturalistic style is not being dismissed as a valid style for the modern theatre. On the contrary, it is the genre most recommended by the majority of the theorists. They do reject the overpowering early traditions of the genres (when they almost become a play's _raison d'etre_), and accept the contemporary version detailed throughout this thesis.

## Expressionism

Non-realistic/naturalistic theatre receives short shrift from many of the theorists. Expressionism, called by Rowe "the ultimate

in inwardness in drama,"[315] is a prime target. Grebanier calls it "passé," "interesting as an experiment," but one which can be faulted because of its depersonalization (which precludes identification), distracting alternating moods, noise, violence, and sameness.[316] He concludes witheringly:

> There is, of course, no reason why a dramatist should not try his hand at this kind of play. They do not seem very hard to write after one has mastered the conventional three-acter. . . . [but] it is wiser to depart from tradition into such fields as Expressionism . . . only after he is sure of his control of what is traditional in form. Then, if one chooses to break with tradition, one knows just where one is departing and why. Those who refuse to take this advice can never be free of the suspicion within themselves that all they have chosen is an easier way.[317]

Kerr, as usual, is aggressively forthright:

> Expressionism was sometimes regarded as an erratic offshoot of our drama. It was, on the contrary, the logical dead end toward which our drama had been moving. If we pulled back from it rather quickly, it was, I think, in horror at how far we had gone. The intellectual mathematics which underlay our drama had been too candidly expressed, rendered altogether too transparent. If we had to have this sort of thing, we preferred it in diluted form, with a little flesh grafted on to it.[318]

Once more the original configuration of a movement is criticized because of its extremes. These are the facets which have become outdated, since it was to a great extent only because of their novelty they were lent temporary artistic validity in the first place.

Expressionism would seem to have little support, but some might be found in Kerr's phrase, "a little flesh." Expressionism brought new breath to a theatre choked by the excesses of realism and naturalism, but its influence was not wholly temporary. If nothing else it showed

that tangible or superficial reality was not always sufficient for truth in drama (as Rowe says, "some themes lie too deep for realism").[319] To reject expressionistic elements completely reeks of the extremity the theorists so criticize. Perhaps a workable compromise lies, in Rowe's words, in basing a play on a "foundation of observation,"[320] rather than a knowledge of theatrical styles. In this way, expressionistic features can be incorporated into a modern play without it becoming swamped by the abstractions of the style. In other words, expressionism can still be an influence as long as it is surrounded by the appropriate amount of theatrical "flesh."

## Symbolism

Grebanier takes the lead in showing some approval for symbolism. Noting that many realistic dramatists have employed it, he concludes that this "might very well serve as an argument that it is a highly effective counterpoise to the always imminent dreariness of stark realism."[321] Quite obviously he is not referring to the totally symbolistic theatre typified by Maeterlinck's dramas, but, as he says, to symbolism used "in conjunction with other techniques."[322] The plays of the early twentieth-century symbolists now appear to Grebanier "unbelievably accentuated."[323]

This last comment sets the tone of many of the viewpoints on symbolism. There are a number of ways in which a symbolist drama can fail in the modern theatre. One danger is obviousness. Grebanier laments Ibsen's unsubtle symbolism in The Master Builder, which causes the play to "degenerate into the allegorical."[324] Another danger is

suggested by Kerr in his comment, "it is the critic and not the play-wright who has created the symbol. . . . we speak of the symbolism in a work and mean the symbolism that can be deduced from it."[325] This might be seen as a warning against the over-intellectualizing of symbols, not just by the critic, but also by the playwright. It is probably more directly a criticism of _over_-subtlety. Symbolism will be ineffective if it is so buried that it is not perceptible on the first exposure to a play.

A rough synthesis does emerge from the above. As stated by Grebanier, appropriate symbolism for modern drama should have the role and prominence it had in the best of Ibsen, Chekhov and Shakespeare (as in the "persistent images of corruption, disease, and decay"[326] in Hamlet which make us feel "that Hamlet is operating in a Denmark that is indeed sick from the evil murder and incestuous marriage").[327] The symbols should focus the main issue of the play, as, for example, money is employed in A Doll's House as a focus for the dishonesty in the Helmer's marriage.[328] In this way symbolism, like expressionism, may be used to explore dimensions which cannot be touched by realism/naturalism.

Whether based on treatment or style, genres develop. The play-wright must recognize that what was a rigid rule or an accepted convention in the past, may now have to be more loosely interpreted, or may even have outlived its usefulness for the contemporary theatre. If there are any constant recommendations, they are that the playwright become acquainted with past genres, but extract from them only the aspects indicated above, and add to these other aspects from his own

personal vision. Without this last factor the theatre cannot but be
stagnant. This eclectic playwriting process has been well utilized
by the great writers of "presentational drama." By any reasonable
standards these writers would include Brecht, Frisch, Weiss, Sartre,
Beckett, and Ionesco. In Smiley's words, they have written some of
the "most intense and imaginative plays of the twentieth century."[329]
Perhaps the playwriting student would profit from reading the work of
these influential dramatists not just to appreciate the forces which
have shaped playwriting for the past few decades, but also to see how
the innovations of these writers have been added to traces of past
genres. "Presentational drama" is undeniably a new form, but the
conscientious playwright may find in it aspects of past theatre from
the ritualistic Chinese drama to the almost schoolboy-like exuberance
of Alfred Jarry.

CHAPTER 9

SPECTACLE

In the narrow area in which he was able to conceive of spectacle,
Aristotle considered it the least of the elements of theatre. The
modern theorists have a much broader perspective, both technically
and artistically, and have formed opinions on much that Aristotle did
not cover. Where the thrust of much of Aristotle's investigations was
to enable spectacle to be qualitatively compared with the other ele-
ments, the modern theorists look for the most part at the uses and
abuses of the element within itself.

It is convenient to consider first one of the constituents of
spectacle which is common to Aristotelian and modern theory: the
division of offstage and onstage action. Classical Greek decorum
generally stipulated that violent or spectacular incidents take place
offstage. The two major reasons for this were that the sensibilities
of the audience not be injured, and that such incidents were thought
to have more dramatic power when presented in this way. This second
objection to onstage portrayal might perhaps be overcome by using the
resources of twentieth-century theatrical technology, but this is an
incomplete solution since the power of an incident is only partly
related to its physical credibility. The consensus solution to this
dilemma is somewhat removed from the Greek ideal.

Macgowan comes closest to backing the standard Aristotelian approach
when he cautions against the ludicrous melodrama too many violent inci-
dents onstage may provoke.[330] However, he is only attacking the excesses
of onstage violence, not the principle. Gallaway is one of many who
believes the modern playwright should keep all action onstage. Excep-
tionally, she says, some may take place offstage, but only the less
important incidents, and only if absolutely necessary. In such cases,
she goes on, the playwright must ensure that the audience knows exactly
what is going on by the use of stage devices such as starting or con-
cluding the action onstage. Furthermore, the playwright must satisfy
himself that the action will be more effective offstage, and make it
as exciting as possible for the audience even though it cannot see
what is happening.[331] Kerr is equally, if not more forthright:

> Let a roof cave in, or a car hurtle over a speedway
> embankment, or a hero be hacked to death in a play
> called Julius Caesar and we will hardly be able to
> keep our eyes off the spectacle. We feel a little
> disgraced by this appetite. But why shouldn't the
> theatre be disgraced, now and then? It's always
> been called a disgraceful place, and I worry over
> its new respectability. When the theatre was held
> to be at its most loathsome, it did some of its
> very best work.[332]

These attitudes are not intended as specific attacks on Aristotle, but
they do show that his model is outdated in this respect. The emphasis
seems to have shifted from an audience's ears to its eyes. Only events
which can be seen are to be trusted in the theatre of today, at least
that is the implication. Modern dramatists may need to be aware of
this to get the best response from their audience.

One problem inherent in the theory of twentieth-century spectacle
lies paradoxically in its technical progress. There is now both the

temptation and the means to create great technical performances at the expense of artistic concerns. Of course, this temptation has always existed, as have some of the means, but with the advent of controllable electricity (and more recently computers) whole new vistas have opened up. Kerr and Smiley warn against using the versatility of the modern stage to create dramas with innumerable set changes. Since moving pictures already do this so well, they conclude it is pointless to devote so much time and effort to unoriginal techniques.[333] In a related statement, Macgowan says, and is supported by Gallaway in doing so, "Avoid technical displays such as a forest fire or a stormy sea. They cannot 'come off,' and, if they could, the miracle of their accomplishment would distract the audience from the words or the emotions of a character."[334] Like Smiley and Gallaway, Macgowan is concerned that overemphasis on technical virtuosity is quintessentially untheatrical because it inevitably detracts from other important parts of the play.[335]

Another area which garners significant critical attention is the division of dramatic responsibility between the playwright and the designer, particularly surfacing in the dilemma over stage directions. Selden would have the playwright include all the vital and significant stage directions in terms of "visible and audible imagery."[336] Gallaway prefers that the dramatist describe the scene well,[337] Macgowan that he either describe the scene very well or leave it all to the imagination (as long as he provides simple ground plans), and Smiley that he detail the essentials of the setting, though not the non-essentials.[338] These views are all linked by the understanding that the designer will be given

room to be creative, but must have some idea of the writer's overall
conception before the designing can begin. As Selden confirms, "The
artist likes to have considerable freedom for his planning, but he
realizes he cannot go very far with this until he knows also what
the playwright has in mind."[339]

One final aspect of spectacle which ought to be mentioned is that
of economy. The theorists recognize a playwright probably has a better
chance of having his work performed if the staging is simple and inex-
pensive. Macgowan would like to see "one, or at most two" settings per
play, and common sense dictates this rule be disobeyed only if the
reasons are excellent.[340]

From this assessment of the state of modern spectacle, it is
appropriate to conclude, with Smiley, that while a playwright may
not know stagecraft practically, he should in any case know it
theoretically. This is clarified in a statement by Mabley:

> This is not to suggest that the playwright has to
> be a composer, choreographer, set designer, or
> electrician any more than he has to be his own
> director or leading actor; but he must know how
> the various parts of the theatre can be utilized
> to make real in the playhouse what was born in
> his head.[341]

To this principle must be added another gleaned from the opinions cited
in this chapter: spectacle must be used in moderation. Even when Kerr
speaks of cars hurtling over embankments, he is conscious of a moderating
influence. Moderation, as it should be interpreted here, is the quality
which must act as a check on the possibility of gratuitous spectacle,
and its frequent tendency to detract from the other vital parts of the
play.

CHAPTER 10

MISCELLANEOUS

There remain three important aspects of playwriting which do not
fit precisely within the parameters of any previous chapter. Since all
three receive a significant amount of attention from the theorists,
they will be examined here.

The One-Act Play

The one-act play was not considered under genre because it is not
governed by content or style, but obviously length. Macgowan writes
that such a play must begin late in the story, a high premium must be
placed on efficient exposition, and only one or two complications can
occur before the major crisis and climax.[342] Selden goes a little
further in allowing only one proper crisis and climax in the whole
play.[343] Grebanier is sympathetic with the principle of simplicity
which Selden is clearly implying. He contends that the one-act play
should be built around just one incident, a situation Selden's words
also seem to insinuate. Grebanier goes on to note that the play's
characters can only really be known as much as this incident elaborates
them. He also makes the obvious logistical proposal that the number of
characters in a one-act play be kept as low as possible.[344]

One concern remarked on at the end of some of these reviews of the format of the one-act play is its relative lack of marketability in contemporary theatre. The potential writer of this form should be aware that his commercial prospects are far from rosy.

## The Scenario

The second miscellaneous item which commands attention is scenario writing. The construction of the outline of a play before the actual writing begins is heartily recommended. Mabley warns, "The beginner skips this important step at his peril,"[345] and, "To begin writing without knowing where one is going is to head for the wilderness, with normally little prospect of finding one's way out again."[346]

The precise nature of the scenario is determined by the degree to which the theorists investigate it. It must be said, however, that nowhere does one propound an idea which explicitly contradicts another's view, and a simple but important consensus does occur which supports the idea of the scenario containing all the major details of the play's action. Rowe, for example, believes a well-constructed scenario "shall show the structure of complications, and it shall show the organization into form for the stage, the act and the scene divisions, with the entrances and exits."[347] Smiley urges the drawing up of a rough scenario where as many aspects of the final play as possible are included. This he then wants refined into the final scenario which contains the title, description of time, place, and characters, a prose narration of the play, and a working outline of the main action.[348]

Mabley details another way in which the original rough scenario may become the final working outline:

> Many playwrights, in order to keep the entire structure of a play in mind at all times . . . have found they can best maintain this perspective by starting with a brief outline, perhaps a single page indicating the general movement of each act, then expanding the outline again and again, each time encompassing the entire play. This encourages a kind of organic growth of the work, and helps to achieve the balance and unity so essential if the play is to be successfully completed.[349]

He goes on to note that one advantage of a detailed scenario is that a playwright may write the dialogue for any scene he feels is ready for it, since he already knows what each scene should say.[350] Thus, the scenario is seen as an invaluable aid to the organization of a play. It makes for clarity in construction, which leads to clarity in performance. Further, it is only logical to observe that while the construction of a scenario may delay the beginning of the actual writing process, it should speed up this process by eliminating many of the revisions of plot, character, and theme which would have been necessary if the playwright had begun the writing unprepared.

## Rewriting

The final miscellaneous aspect is the shared belief in what Selden calls the "old chestnut," which states that "a play is not written, it is rewritten."[351] Rowe thinks that the seriousness of a young playwright can be determined by his energy to rewrite.[352] He does note great first drafts may occasionally be written, and that one can revise too much, but clearly is skeptical that either happens very frequently.[353] Suffice it to say, a play's original draft is rarely ideal theatrical material,

and the playwright's readiness to accept this, even if he has spent a great deal of time on preparation, will probably be related to how good his play will finally turn out to be.

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NON-ARISTOTELIAN THEATRE

All the theories in this study have been primarily directed toward generating plays based largely upon Aristotelian concepts. Of course, the modern theorists do diverge from Aristotle in many respects, but most of his salient recommendations do have some support from the theorists. There is, though, a branch of modern drama which is manifestly non-Aristotelian (even anti-Aristotelian). Smiley uses highly descriptive terms to distinguish between these two: "linear" form is the result of Aristotelian ideas, and "configurative" form is his term for the alternative.[354] It is not the place of this thesis to consider the theoretical bases of non-Aristotelian theatre, but there are three topics concerned with this genre which should briefly be covered in order to give an indication of the real balance in modern theatre. These three are the specific characteristics, principal theorists, and present influence of configurative form.

Aristotelian or linear theatre is usually rooted in causal illusionism. Smiley describes it as having "single or parallel lines of successive events," "psychological" characterization, "rational reality," and a "concrete structure" representing "the arrangements in actual life."[355] By contrast, he examines the specific characteristics of configurative form and discovers striking differences:

Configurative form in drama is characteristic of those works that have curved patterns of activity, episodic lines of action, and asymmetrical or random arrangements. The characters are more fragmentary, distorted, or simultaneous--as in cubistic paintings, for example-- than are those in linear drama. Their motivations are often missing; they appear to be fantastical; and they are seldom causally related to the action. Conditions are more important than situations; often a configurative play is simply a presentation of only one life condition as seen through a distorting lens of imagination. Such plays concentrate on stasis or circularity. The connections between people and other people, or between events and other events, are often more surreal than real; the relationships depend upon imaginative association rather than on causal progression. A configurative play is likely to be variegated and rhapsodic. Exposition and preparation are generally absent, and rhythm or pattern usually replaces story. Transitions are likely to be abrupt, rather than smooth as in linear drama. The whole of a configurative structure is organized as a vision or a dream in order to penetrate to the reality of existence beneath the level of sensory reality. Such a structure is abstract. The arrangement of parts presents the arrangements of the imagination.[356]

So alien is this conception to Aristotelian theory that an understanding of linear form is of almost no value to the writer of configurative form, save to serve as a reminder of what he has rejected or as a target to shoot at. The interested writer must consult the plays and theorists of non-Aristotelian theatre if he is to become properly acquainted with its *modus operandi* and its capabilities.

Theoretical writings which would be of value in research into this genre would include Brecht's *A Short Organum for the Theatre*, Antonin Artaud's *The Theatre and its Double*, Richard Schechner's *Public Domain*, and *The Theatre of the Absurd* by Martin Esslin.[357] A perusal of any of these works will almost certainly stimulate any playwright with an interest in non-traditional dramatic forms. This is by no means a

complete list, even of the most seminal works, but it should nonetheless give the reader much of the most pertinent background material on configurative form.

The present influence of this form on theatre is great. Its dramatists and theorists are amongst the most critically acclaimed of this era. As is often the case with the _avant-garde_, one of its biggest limitations is the financial one--as Kerr puts it from another point of view, "The innovator . . . rarely eats well"[358]--but lack of huge commercial success is by no means a reliable qualitative yardstick. An objective assessment of theatre since the second world war will surely result in the conclusion that configurative form has been one of the major advances.

The inescapable conclusion to this briefest of examinations must be that, even if non-Aristotelian theatre is still perceived as the alternative rather than the norm (and this might well be confirmed by simple attendance tallies), any potential playwright who wishes to achieve a real consensus of relevant playwriting theory must become acquainted with it. This is, furthermore, definitely the route to follow for any individual who feels his vision is somehow alien to that accepted by the consensus of the theorists in this study.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis is not intended as an anthology of playwriting theory. Each theorist has a different scheme, parts of which form this consensus. However, no single scheme survives even close to intact. An anthology would provide more information but much of it would be contradictory or unique (and so unverifiable). Its advantage would be comprehensiveness, where the advantage of this consensus is the opportunity for the playwright to quickly understand the unequivocally important. This study is not intended to be an overview of every ramification of theatre, but it still should contain sufficient guidance for the potential dramatist to begin his play on a firm foundation. The aspects of drama which have not been evident in this examination--from details of minor genres to a guide to the business side of theatre--are those outside the process of the construction of most plays. Nonetheless, although they are excluded from this study, this is not to suggest that they should not, or need not be investigated by the student wishing to become fully cognizant with theatre.

Perhaps the best way a playwright may use this consensus is by acquainting himself with its concepts before he begins his play. Naturally, this will not ensure he writes a good play--to claim this from the limited investigation undertaken here would be presumptuous indeed--but it may minimize the chances of glaring errors. A further

use for this thesis may arise after the play has been written and is not
judged by the playwright satisfactory in all aspects. Perhaps he might
check back to see that elements of his play are not drastically at
variance with the corresponding elements of this consensus. Again,
this is not at all to claim the consensus is a panacea; the appropriate
solution to the playwright's dilemma may not be obvious here, yet there
is a good possibility a solution will at least be hinted at.

In the final analysis, this consensus, like most of the books on
which it is based, is probably most useful for the beginning or inex-
perienced dramatist. This is not because the recommendations are
inapplicable to the experienced writer, but rather because he may
well already have learned many of them. The beginning playwright's
use of this consensus may not ensure him of dramatic success, but it
could help him to avoid reading which later proves to be of limited
usefulness, and it could dissuade him from launching into the writing
stage unprepared because of the discouraging welter of unverifiable
theories which he may feel is initially facing him. If, in the end,
this is a modest aim for this thesis, it seems to be a realistic one.

NOTES

[1] The generic pronoun "he" is used to denote the playwright of whatever sex. This is the general practice of the theorists.

[2] The term "consensus" is used *passim* to indicate a majority opinion or a significant body of opinion, rather than necessarily total agreement.

[3] Edward Mabley, *Dramatic Construction: An Outline of Basic Principles* (Philadelphia: Chilton Book Company, 1972), p. 6.

[4] Kenneth Thorpe Rowe, *Write That Play* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1939), p. 45.

[5] Rowe, p. 42.

[6] Marian Gallaway, *Constructing a Play* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1950), p. 39.

[7] Samuel Selden, *An Introduction to Playwriting* (New York: F. S. Crofts and Co., Inc., 1946), p. 2.

[8] Selden, p. 2.

[9] Lajos Egri, *The Art of Dramatic Writing* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), p. xxi.

[10] Egri, p. 20.

[11] Selden, p. 1.

[12] Selden, p. 1.

[13] Gallaway, p. 149.

[14]Aristotle, _Poetics_ Trans. James Hutton (New York: Norton, 1982). _European Theories of the Drama_, ed. Barrett H. Clark. (New York: Crown Publishers, 1947).

[15]Rowe, p. 49.

[16]Selden, pp. 7-9.

[17]Selden, p. 9.

[18]Bernard Grebanier, _Playwriting_ (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1961), p. 20.

[19]Selden, pp. 10-12.

[20]Sam Smiley, _Playwriting: The Structure of Action_ (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971), pp. 13-16.

[21]Smiley, pp. 13-16.

[22]Smiley, pp. 22-24.

[23]Rowe, p. 26.

[24]Mabley, p. 7.

[25]Smiley, p. 43.

[26]Smiley, p. 43.

[27]Smiley, p. 43.

[28]Smiley, p. 52.

[29]Rowe, p. 27.

[30]Gallaway, p. 116.

[31]Walter Kerr, _How Not to Write a Play_ (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955), p. 95.

[32]Grebanier, pp. 24-28.

[33]Page numbers from the _Poetics_ will not be given. A recent translation is detailed in these notes and in the bibliography.

[34]Kenneth Macgowan, <u>A Primer of Playwriting</u> (New York: Random House, 1951), p. 93. Also, Gallaway, p. 320.

[35]Macgowan, pp. 93-94.

[36]Gallaway, p. 117.

[37]Rowe, p. 33.

[38]Kerr, p. 136.

[39]Mabley, p. 17.

[40]Mabley, p. 17.

[41]Rowe, p. 27.

[42]Mabley, p. 6.

[43]Kerr, pp. 134-35.

[44]Smiley, pp. 53-54.

[45]Macgowan, pp. 33-36. Smiley, p. 58.

[46]Egri, pp. 128-79.

[47]Selden, p. 41.

[48]Rowe, p. 29.

[49]Smiley, p. 53.

[50]Smiley, p. 54.

[51]Rowe, p. 54.

[52]Selden, pp. 51-52. Egri, p. 125.

[53]Egri, p. 183.

[54]Egri, p. 183.

[55]Rowe, p. 60.

[56]Egri, p. 187.

[57]Egri, p. 234.

[58]Mabley, p. 18.

[59]Mabley, p. 20.

[60]Gallaway, p. 283.

[61]Mabley, p. 19.

[62]Macgowan, pp. 151-54.

[63]Mabley, p. 19.

[64]Macgowan, p. 154.

[65]Egri, p. 236.

[66]Macgowan, p. 154.

[67]Smiley, p. 66.

[68]Selden, p. 53.

[69]Rowe, p. 28.

[70]Smiley, p. 56.

[71]John Howard Lawson, Theory and Technique of Playwriting (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1949), p. 232, as quoted in Gallaway, p. 191.

[72]Gustav Freytag, Technique of the Drama, Trans. Elias J. MacEwan (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1894), pp. 104-40.

[73]Smiley, p. 58.

[74]Gallaway, p. 212.

[75]Egri, p. 219.

[76]Egri, p. 220.

[77]Rowe, pp. 60-61.

[78]Rowe, p. 58.

[79]Gallaway, p. 118.

[80]Macgowan, pp. 119-20.

[81]Macgowan, p. 114.

[82]Gallaway, p. 197.

[83]Smiley, pp. 56-57.

[84]Gallaway, p. 197.

[85]Rowe, p. 57.

[86]Kerr, p. 118-20.

[87]Gallaway, p. 207.

[88]Macgowan, pp. 116-17.

[89]Selden, p. 53.

[90]Gallaway, p. 207.

[91]Mabley, p. 25.

[92]Smiley, p. 67.

[93]Gallaway, p. 238.

[94]Gallaway, pp. 239-43.  Smiley, p. 67.

[95]Gallaway, p. 244.

[96]Gallaway, pp. 245-49.

[97]Rowe, p. 59.

[98]Gallaway, p. 257.

[99]Gallaway, p. 258.

[100]Gallaway, p. 263.

[101]Gallaway, pp. 270-72.  Smiley, p. 66.

[102]Gallaway, pp. 273-74.

[103]Gallaway, p. 275.

[104]Rowe, p. 33.

[105]Selden, p. 52.

[106]Mabley, p. 12.

[107]Rowe, p. 31.

[108]Gallaway, pp. 326-28.

[109]Grebanier, p. 119.

[110]Grebanier, p. 140.

[111]Grebanier, p. 141.

[112]Mabley, p. 14.

[113]Rowe, p. 55.

[114]Selden, p. 53.

[115]Smiley, p. 59.

[116]Smiley, p. 59.

[117]Egri, p. 229.

[118]Gallaway, p. 226.

[119]Gallaway, pp. 120-21.

[120]Gallaway, p. 142.

[121]Gallaway, p. 143.

[122]Egri, pp. 232-33.

[123]Egri, p. 234.

[124]Egri, pp. 232-33.

[125]Gallaway, pp. 143-45.

[126]Mabley, p. 25.

[127]Selden, p. 63.  Macgowan, p. 98.

[128]Kerr, pp. 116-23.  Grebanier, pp. 332-33.

[129]Grebanier, pp. 334-35.

[130]Smiley, p. 57.

[131]Rowe, p. 144.

[132]Macgowan, p. 64.

[133]Macgowan, pp. 64-65.

[134]Grebanier, pp. 186-90.

[135]Egri, p. 90.

[136]Smiley, p. 79.

[137]Smiley, pp. 84-89.

[138]Egri, p. 33.

[139]Smiley, p. 83.

[140]Gallaway, p. 47.

[141]Smiley, p. 88.

[142]Rowe, p. 150.

[143]Rowe, pp. 149-50.  Grebanier, p. 195.  Mabley, p. 21.

[144]Selden, p. 21.

[145]Selden, p. 14.

[146]Gallaway, p. 59.

[147]Gallaway, p. 53.

[148]Gallaway, p. 54.

[149]Smiley, p. 92.

[150]Macgowan, p. 69.  Kerr, p. 81.

[151]Selden, p. 22.

[152]Gallaway, pp. 55-57.

[153]Selden, p. 64.

[154]Gallaway, p. 51.

[155]Smiley, p. 93.

[156]Macgowan, pp. 72-73.

[157]Gallaway, p. 52.

[158]Gallaway, p. 52.

[159]Non-Aristotelian theatre, as will be discussed later, often flatly rejects the concept of identification.

[160]Rowe, pp. 146-47.

[161]Macgowan, p. 63.

[162]Egri, p. 59.

[163]Gallaway, p. 48.

[164]Smiley, pp. 92-94.

[165]Egri, p. 77.

[166]Smiley, p. 96.

[167]Rowe, p. 145.

[168]Selden, p. 72.

[169]Gallaway, p. 51.

[170]Gallaway, p. 46.

[171]Smiley, p. 96. He is referring to tragedy. The protagonist's role in other genres is noted elsewhere.

[172]Smiley, p. 97. Gallaway, p. 61.

[173]Rowe, p. 28.

[174]Egri, p. 118.

[175]Macgowan, p. 63.

[176]Grebanier, p. 191.

[177]Smiley, p. 97.

[178]Smiley, p. 97.

[179]Egri, pp. 121-24.

[180]Smiley, pp. 97-98. Gallaway, p. 156.

[181]Smiley, pp. 98-99.

[182]Gallaway, pp. 153-59.

[183]Smiley, p. 101.

[184]Macgowan, pp. 81-89.

[185]Grebanier, p. 162.

[186]Gallaway, pp. 56-57.  Smiley, pp. 53-60.

[187]Gallaway, pp. 56-57.

[188]Gallaway, p. 59.

[189]Selden, p. 64.

[190]Gallaway, p. 73.

[191]Mabley, p. 10.

[192]Gallaway, p. 77.

[193]C. F. Sophocles's _Antigone_.

[194]Mabley, p. 10.

[195]Gallaway, p. 78.

[196]Gallaway, p. 81.  Mabley, p. 10.

[197]Gallaway, p. 78.

[198]Mabley, p. 11.

[199]Gallaway, pp. 86-88.

[200]Gallaway, p. 91.  Mabley, p. 12.

[201]Mabley, p. 12.

[202]A look at the working methods of such as O'Neill, Williams, and
Ibsen should soon confirm this.

[203]Gallaway, p. 31.

[204]Selden, p. 59.

[205]Grebanier, p. 20.

[206]Smiley, pp. 115-19.

[207]Egri, pp. 2-8.

[208]Selden, p. 58.

[209]Selden, p. 59.

[210] Grebanier, p. 21.

[211] Mabley, p. 14.

[212] Mabley, p. 14.

[213] Gallaway, p. 101.

[214] Rowe, p. 50.

[215] Grebanier, p. 21.

[216] Macgowan, p. 61.  Grebanier, p. 23.  Gallaway, p. 104.

[217] Selden, p. 59.

[218] Smiley, p. 112.

[219] "Sentence-theme" is the term being used to describe the consensus of the cons.

[220] Macgowan, p. 56.

[221] Rowe, p. 50.

[222] Grebanier, p. 23.

[223] Mabley, p. 15.

[224] Kerr, p. 60.

[225] Kerr, p. 66.

[226] Kerr, p. 67.

[227] Kerr, p. 51.

[228] Macgowan, p. 57.

[229] Mabley, p. 16.

[230] Mabley, p. 59.

[231] Grebanier, p. 23.

[232] Selden, p. 76.

[233] Rowe, p. 154.

[234] Grebanier, p. 231.

[235]Egri, p. 238.

[236]Macgowan, p. 159.

[237]Smiley, p. 132.

[238]Mabley, p. 29.

[239]Macgowan, p. 159.

[240]Smiley, p. 143.

[241]Grebanier, p. 231.

[242]Kerr, p. 202.

[243]Egri, p. 240.

[244]Selden, p. 76.

[245]Smiley, p. 131.

[246]Macgowan, p. 161.

[247]Mabley, p. 29.

[248]Rowe, p. 157.

[249]Mabley, p. 29.

[250]Egri, p. 137.

[251]Mabley, p. 29.

[252]Selden, p. 76.  Macgowan, p. 161.  Grebanier, p. 230.

[253]Grebanier, pp. 229-30.

[254]Smiley, p. 131.

[255]Grebanier, p. 252.

[256]Grebanier, p. 253.

[257]Mabley, p. 29.

[258]Mabley, p. 29.  Rowe, p. 58.  Selden, p. 77.  Grebanier, p. 254.

[259]Mabley, p. 29.

[260]Grebanier, p. 254.

[261] Grebanier, p. 233.

[262] Grebanier, p. 232.

[263] Smiley, pp. 167-76.

[264] Selden, p. 76.

[265] Grebanier, p. 255.

[266] Grebanier, p. 256.

[267] Selden, p. 77.

[268] Mabley, p. 29.

[269] Grebanier, pp. 241-242.

[270] Grebanier, p. 241.  Mabley, p. 29.

[271] Grebanier, p. 245.

[272] Kerr, p. 212.

[273] Grebanier, p. 243.

[274] Grebanier, p. 242.

[275] Kerr, p. 214.

[276] Kerr, p. 214.

[277] Grebanier, p. 243.

[278] Kerr, p. 212.

[279] Kerr, pp. 223-24.

[280] Kerr, p. 224.

[281] Kerr, pp. 225-26.

[282] Macgowan, p. 162.

[283] Smiley, pp. 132-139.  Grebanier, pp. 229-32.

[284] Smiley, p. 139.

[285] Rowe, p. 160.  Grebanier, p. 229.

[286] Smiley, pp. 142-43.

[287]Egri, p. 244.

[288]Egri, p. 240.

[289]Macgowan, p. 7.

[290]Macgowan, pp. 11-15.  Selden, p. 77.  Rowe, p. 160.  Grebanier, p. 232.

[291]Kerr may be possibly excepted, for his is in many respects a new vision.

[292]Rowe, p. 408.

[293]Gallaway, p. 105.

[294]Macgowan, p. 86.  Smiley, p. 51.  Grebanier, p. 269.

[295]Smiley, p. 51.

[296]Macgowan, p. 51.

[297]Smiley, p. 46.

[298]Grebanier, p. 286.

[299]Smiley, p. 46.  Grebanier, p. 280.

[300]Smiley, p. 47.

[301]Grebanier, p. 290.

[302]Grebanier, pp. 290-291.

[303]Smiley, p. 48.

[304]Smiley, p. 47.

[305]Egri, p. 255.  Grebanier, p. 291.  Smiley, p. 48.

[306]Rowe, p. 396.  Smiley, pp. 121-27.

[307]Smiley, p. 216.

[308]Grebanier, pp. 303-04.

[309]Rowe, p. 352.

[310]Grebanier, pp. 305-06.

[311] Kerr, p. 155.

[312] Grebanier, p. 307.

[313] Kerr, pp. 161-63.

[314] Rowe, p. 351.

[315] Rowe, p. 357.

[316] Grebanier, pp. 329-30.

[317] Grebanier, p. 330.

[318] Kerr, p. 60.

[319] Rowe, p. 349.

[320] Rowe, p. 42.

[321] Grebanier, p. 327.

[322] Grebanier, p. 327.

[323] Grebanier, p. 327.

[324] Grebanier, p. 326.

[325] Kerr, pp. 178-79.

[326] Grebanier, p. 314.

[327] Grebanier, p. 319.

[328] Grebanier, p. 325.

[329] Smiley, pp. 216-17.

[330] Macgowan, pp. 107-08.

[331] Gallaway, pp. 177-179.

[332] Kerr, p. 241.

[333] Kerr, p. 207.  Smiley, p. 194.

[334] Macgowan, p. 108.  Gallaway, pp. 176-77.

[335] This is one definite point of contact with Aristotle.

[336] Selden, p. 68.

[337] Gallaway, p. 174.

[338] Macgowan, p. 141.  Smiley, pp. 218-19.

[339] Selden, p. 78.

[340] Macgowan, p. 103.

[341] Mabley, p. 5.

[342] Macgowan, p. 170.

[343] Selden, p. 17.

[344] Grebanier, pp. 172-73.

[345] Mabley, p. 34.

[346] Mabley, p. 33.

[347] Rowe, p. 337.

[348] Smiley, pp. 25-27.

[349] Mabley, p. 34.

[350] Mabley, p. 34.

[351] Selden, p. 34.

[352] Rowe, pp. 342-45.

[353] Rowe, p. 345.

[354] Smiley, p. 54.

[355] Smiley, p. 74.

[356] Smiley, pp. 74-75.

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[358] Kerr, p. 236.

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A CONSENSUS OF PLAYWRITING THEORY

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

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Any potential playwright who is of the opinion that he ought to consult some works on the theory of playwriting before beginning his play is faced with a daunting prospect. If he is to avoid the danger of building his knowledge on unreliable foundations, he is forced into reading a significant number of theoretical texts. This will obviously be a very time-consuming process, and effort will undoubtedly be wasted on works which are contradictory, outdated, and overly esoteric. Such a prospect may well be so daunting that the playwright will decide to simply ignore playwriting theories and launch straight into his play. This is clearly a highly risky alternative. It is likely the playwright will make glaring errors of composition which might well have been avoided if he had had a basic knowledge of playwriting theory. This work is intended to provide a solution to this problem.

In this thesis nine leading playwriting theories from the twentieth century have been compared to one another. The views of the theorists are examined in regard to the main elements of theatre including plot, character, theme, dialogue, genre, and spectacle, and also to various other aspects of the playwriting process. In each of the chapters a consensus emerges. The intention is that the playwright should understand each of the areas of the consensus separately before he tries to combine them in his play. At either end of this main part of the thesis are considerations of pre-modern theory and non-Aristotelian theatre so that the consensuses can be put into their proper perspective.

The main asset of this thesis is that it should make it possible for the potential playwright to read just one text before he begins to write, and be assured of its artistic reliability. This will not ensure that he writes a good play, but it may help him to cut down on obvious errors.