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ONE-ACT PLAYS

Selected, introduced and furnished with glossary, biographical and critical notes

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ONE-ACT PLAYS

INTRODUCTION

The one-act play is not, as some people believe, an easy work since the playwright is restricted by time and diction and he is expected to do his best to make his characters and situations easily understood and appreciated by his audience. Thus his dialogues must be subtle and his language must be concise, terse and condensed. Unnecessary details, ambiguous incidents, bombastic speeches, lengthy digressions, superfluous statements and complicated plots do not usually exist in this kind of drama. Yet it does not follow that the playwright has to use hasty dialogues and swift comments.

However, the one-act play is a form of drama which has proven itself eminently suited to the modern temperament and the modern way of looking at reality. This does not mean that there were no short plays in the past. Subsidiary to the full-length play there have been afterpieces, curtain raisers and quart d'heures. Medieval morality plays, such as Everyman and the Japanese Noh plays must technically be considered as one-act plays. Also throughout the Victorian age the one-act play or rather the curtain raiser, as it used to be called as such, was a kind of dramatic entertainment preceding the play proper and intended to amuse the audience while the stalls and boxes were slowly being filled up. It was given no considerable importance as it was mainly used to pass or kill the time.

Again amateur productions and dramatic performances in schools and universities always inclined in favour of short plays—either abbreviated full-length plays or plays and sketches written for the occasion. All these short types of drama, with the exception of the Noh play,

were either strictly subsidiary to full-length plays or the natural outcome of limitations in skill and technical know-how. Very few of these plays can be ranked as acknowledged masterpieces side by side with the best of the modern one-act plays.

At the beginning of the modern era, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the one-act play successfully paved its own way among full-length plays and evolved as an independent dramatic form with its characteristic structure revealing its inherent possibilities. This emergence of the one-act play coincided with the growth of experimental and non-commercial theatres in many European countries and the United States of America. The Theatre Libre founded in Paris in 1887 by Andre Antoine was the first of these theatres. It opened with the production of such new one-act plays as Leon Henrique's Jacques Damour, Arthur Byl's Le Sous-Prefet, Jules Vidal's La Cocarde and Mademoiselle Pomme by Durantis and Paul Alexis. Another theatre, the Freie Buhne (Free Stage), was founded by "a group of Germans . . . with Otto Brahm as the first director"[1] in Berlin in 1889. This theatre produced plays of such playwrights as Ibsen, Tolstoy, Strindberg, Zola, Hauptmann, Arno Holz and others.

One more theatre is the Independent Theatre which was founded in London in 1891 by Thomas Grein, a critic of drama. It produced some of Ibsen's and G. B. Shaw's plays. Moreover, the Theatre de l'Oeuvre, formerly the

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[1] Morris Sweetkind, ed., Ten Great One-Act Plays (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1968), p. ix.

INTRODUCTION

Theatre d'Art, was taken over by Lugne–Poe, a French actor and theatre director, in Paris in 1892. It performed some plays written by Ibsen, Strindberg, Hauptmann, Maeterlinck and others.

The Abbey Theatre was acquired by W. B. Yeats in Dublin, Ireland in 1904. It was inaugurated on December 27, 1904 with production of On Baile's Strand by W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory's Spreading the News. Among the other plays produced later in this theatre were J. M. Synge's The Playboy of the Western World, and plays by G. B. Shaw and Sean O'Casey. It is to be noted also that W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory and J. M. Synge greatly devoted themselves to the interests of the Abbey Theatre and considerably contributed to its fame.

The U. S. A., on the other hand, had its own contribution to the experimental theatres and players. George Cram Cook organized and directed in Provincetown, Massachusetts in 1915 the Provincetown Players, an experimental group of actors and theatre directors. The people who helped the Provincetown Players to develop are, besides George Cram Cook, Susan Glaspell and Eugene O'Neill whose plays are included in our anthology. Also in 1915 the Neighborhood Playhouse was built and founded by Alice and Irene Lewisohn in New York. It produced several short plays by Chekhov, Yeats and G. B. Shaw and later such plays as Fortunato by the Quintero brothers, Galsworthy's The Mob and O'Neill's The First Man. Finally the Washington Square Players, an acting group founded by Edward Goodman and others, opened in New York in 1915. This group inaugurated their production with one–act plays and they later performed full–length plays written by Ibsen, G. B. Shaw and Chekhov.

INTRODUCTION

Several theories have been proposed to account for the emergence and popularity of the one-act play in most European countries and the United States of America. The parallel development of the short story supports the view that modern society—influenced by industrialization, two world wars, a decline of traditional values and a deep distrust in the values propagated by the mass media—favours short forms in literature. the short story instead of the novel, and the one-act play in place of the full-length drama. A dislike of the traditional stage conventions and of the role of the theatre in bourgeois life was the predictable result of the more general rebellion against social and political conventions. The more perfect the "well-made play" was written and performed, the more derogatory the term became.

It should be noted that the one-act play has become a popular medium of expression which has effects even on such pleasant entertainments as the TV programmes. Hence many authors who write plays for the TV adopt the ideas of their plays from the one-act play.

If the one-act play is limited by certain restrictions, it has also its own freedom and flexibility. A most confusing variety of one-act plays is available and continues to be added to. All the types of the full-length drama—ranging from melodrama to mime and farce—have been successfully attempted. It has lent itself to all the passing dramatic trends and fashions such as romantic, realistic, naturalistic, symbolic, expressionistic, epic, futurist, absurd and many others. Practices that seemed dead or too exotic for imitation such as the chorus, the use of masks and the conventions of the Noh play have been revived while modern technology continues to contribute new possibilities as, for example, a tape recorder instead of a

character. The one-acter is written in verse, in prose in dialect, in no language at all, or in that strangely disturbing pseudo-language which shows the failure of modern Man to communicate at all. It may stress a character, an action, a background or an emotion. It has done all this and still continues to develop, experiment and find yet another way to shock Man into awareness.

Having specifically talked of the one-act play, we had better allude to the special distinction between the full-length and one-act plays since we are dealing with dramatic literature in general and plays in particular. Thus if the short story and the novel are distinctive literary works, the same is true with the one-act and full-length plays. The difference between a one-acter and a multi-acter is not only a matter of size and length. A one-act play is designed and made to be called as such. Hence it cannot be called a brief full-length play, nor can it be extended to a multi-act play. It is the structure and technique of the one-acter that distinguishes it from the longer one. A one-act play is usually concerned with one single incident and one single dramatic situation with a definite aim.

Another distinction between the one-act play and the full-length one is that the former generally deals with more probable situations and credible people and its themes are truer to life and commoner than those of the latter. Everyday events, contemporary life and culture are a common subject matter for the one-acters, as they seldom deal with remote themes unless they are modernized or sometimes adapted to suit special purposes as is the case with Christopher Fry's A Phoenix too Frequent. One-act plays depict their characters, as far as possible,

as if they are in their natural and human conduct with almost nothing exaggerated or superhuman about them. In their one–act plays modern dramatists give us the essence of dramatic communication. There is no time, nor desire, for the elaborate world of illusion to develop.

In a one–act play the climax and denouement, which is the final unravelling of the plot, should not be complicated. The denouement in the one–acter usually follows the climax closer than that of the full–length play. In a multi–act play there is normally a considerable lapse of time and action between the climax and the denouement.

Full–length plays do not concentrate on exposition as much as do one–act plays since they enjoy a long space of time. Consequently exposition to the one–act play is essential, as the audience must be acquainted with all the off–stage situations especially those events that took place before the play started. Exposition here mostly depends on the kind of the informative comments and instructive dialogues the author employs. The audience is to be made aware of what is going on off–stage and on–stage by enlarging on and elaborating certain ideas.

One–act plays are, on the other hand, usually performed without a break and in a short time, while the full–length plays are performed in a considerably longer time with one or more intermissions. As for the so–called classical unities of time, plot and place they are better followed, if observed, in the one–acters. Thus commonplace characters, situations and actions are endowed with a new significance, a significance, however, which does not attempt to reach beyond the severely limited time, action and place of the play. Ironically the most rebellious dramatic form inevitably follows one of the oldest dramatic

INTRODUCTION

conventions which were so continuously preached but have rarely been followed.

One more distinction between one-acters and multi-acters is that while the full-length plays are performed in commercial theatres by professional actors, the one-act plays are generally enacted by amateur and non-professional players in amateur, university, school or experimental theatres. The audience in the case of the one-acters mostly consists of friends, colleagues and acquaintances of the amateur players. Nevertheless, popular one-act plays have also been performed in repertory theatres by professionals.

August Strindberg
(1849–1912)

August Strindberg, the Swedish playwright and novelist, was born in Stockholm of a shipping merchant and his former maid-servant. He had an unfortunate childhood as his father went bankrupt when he was only four, and his mother died when he was thirteen. Furthermore he failed in his university study and could not realize his wish to be a successful player. He became a journalist, a tutor and a librarian; and when he published his first volume of short stories, Marriage (1884), he was prosecuted for blasphemous actions. He married three times, but none of his marriages was a success. He tried to make gold out of cheap metal but he failed. As a result of the unhappy life he lived, he was threatened with insanity.

However, Strindberg's contribution to the world drama has been greatly felt. In such plays as The Father (1887) and Miss Julie (1888) he presented naturalistic views. In The Road to Damascus (1898–1901) and A Dream Play (1901) he introduced the ideas of the expressionistic drama.

In The Stronger (1889) Strindberg showed his genius in writing a quart d'heure which had been employed by the Theatre Libre in Paris and in other continental theatres. It is a play about the struggle between the sexes.

The Stronger

by

August Strindberg

Characters

MRS. X, actress, married

MISS Y, actress, unmarried

August Strindberg

SETTING

A corner of a women's cafe; two small iron tables, a red worsted shag sofa, and some chairs.

MRS. X enters wearing a winter coat and hat and carrying an elegant Japanese basket on her arm.

MISS Y is sitting at a table with a half-empty beer bottle on it; she is reading an illustrated paper, which she exchanges for others from time to time later on.

MRS. X: Hello, Amelia darling! You look as lonely on Christmas eve as a poor bachelor.

MISS Y (looks up from her paper, nods and goes on reading)

MRS. X: You know, I feel really sorry for you—alone in a cafe, and on Christmas eve at that. I feel just as sorry as when I saw a wedding party in a Paris restaurant and the bride was sitting reading a humor magazine while the bridegroom was playing billiards with the witnesses. Huh, I thought, with a start like that how would it go and how would it end! He played billiards on his wedding night!—And she read a humor magazine, you're thinking! Well, it's not quite the same!

WAITRESS (enters; puts a cup of chocolate in front of MRS. X, and exits)

MRS. X: You know what, Amelia! I think you would have been better off if you had kept him! Remember I was the first one who told you to forgive him! Remember? You could be married and have a home. Do you remember the Christmas when you were out in the country with your fiance's parents? How you raved about the joys of a home and really longed to get away from the theater! — Yes, Amelia darling, a home of one's own is certainly the best—second to the theater—and the children, of course.—But you don't understand that!

MISS Y (gets a contemptuous look on her face)

MRS. X (drinks a few sips out of her cup; then opens her basket and shows MISS Y the Christmas gifts): I'll show you what I've bought for my darlings. (Takes out a doll) Look at that! It's for Lisa. See, she can roll her eyes and turn her neck! See!—And here's Maja's cork pistol. (Loads and shoots at MISS Y)

MISS Y (makes a gesture of horror)

MRS. X: Did I frighten you? Did you think I wanted to shoot you? Eh:—My word, I think you did! I'd be less amazed if you wanted to shoot me since I've stood in your way—I know you can never forget that I did — though I was absolutely innocent. You still think my scheming got you out of the Great Theater, but I didn't scheme! I didn't though you think I did!—Well, there's no point in my saying so. for you still think I was the one! (Takes out a pair of embroidered slippers) And my husband's to have these. With tulips on them—I've embroidered them myself—I despise tulips, of course, but he has to have tulips on everything!

MISS Y (looks up from her paper—with irony and curiosity)

MRS. X (puts a hand in each slipper) : Do you see what small feet Bob has? See? And you should see how elegantly he walks! You've never seen him in slippers! (Miss Y laughs aloud.) Look, and you'll see! (She pretends to walk with the slippers on the table).

MISS Y (laughs so it can be heard)

MRS. X And then when he's angry he stamps his foot like this, you see: "Eh! The damned maids who never can learn to make coffee! Now those idiots haven't clipped the lamp wick properly! " And then there's a draft on the floor, and his feet get cold: "Ugh, how cold it is! Those damned idiots who can't keep the fire

going!" (She rubs the sole of one slipper against the top of the other).

MISS Y (laughs uproariously)

MRS. X: And then he comes home and looks for his slippers which Marie has put under the dresser. . . Oh, it's a shame to make fun of one's husband like this. He is really kind, and he's a fine little man–you should have had a man like that, Amelia! –What are you laughing at? Eh? Eh? –And then I know he's faithful to me, you see–yes, I do know! He told me so himself . . . What are you grinning about? . . . that when I was on that tour in Norway that nasty Frederique tried to seduce him–can you imagine? (Pause) But I'd have torn out her eyes if she had come around when I was at home! (Pause) It's a good thing Bob told me himself so I did't have to hear it from others! (Pause) But Frederique wasn't the only one, you may believe! I don't know why, but women are absolutely crazy about my husband. They must think he has something to say about contracts at the theater, because he's in the office! –Maybe you have been after him, too!–I didn't quite believe you–but now I know that he didn't care about you and you seemed to have a grudge against him, I always thought! (Pause; they look at each other with embarrassment).

MRS. X: Come over tonight, Amelia, and show us you're not angry with us, not with me at least! I don't know why, but I think it's so unpleasant to be on bad terms with you especially. Maybe it's because I did stand in your way that time–(gradual decrease in tempo)–or–I don't know at all– why really! (Pause)

MISS Y (stares at MRS. X with curiosity)

MRS. X (thoughtful): It was so strange about us–when I

saw you the first time I was afraid of you, so afraid I didn't dare to let you out of my sight. Wherever I was, I was always near you—I didn't dare to be your enemy, so I became your friend. But there was always something wrong when you came to visit us, for I saw my husband couldn't stand you—and then I felt uncomfortable as when clothes don't quite fit—and I did everything to make him friendly toward you, but I didn't succeed —before you got engaged! Then the two of you really got so friendly that it looked as if you dared to show your real feelings when you felt secure—and then —how was it after that?— I didn't get jealous—strange! —And I remember at the christening when you were godmother I made him kiss you—he did, but you got upset—that's to say: I didn't notice it then—didn't think about it afterward either—haven't really thought about it before—now! (Gets up violently) Why don't you say something? You haven't said a word all this time, but just let me keep on talking! You've sat there staring, twisting out of me all these thoughts, which have lain like raw silk in their cocoon—thoughts—suspicions maybe—let me see—Why did you break your engagement? Why did you never come to our house after that? Why don't you want to come to us this evening?

MISS Y (has an expression as if she wanted to speak)

MRS. X: Quiet! You don't need to say anything—now I understand everything! That was why!That was why! Yes! Everything falls into place now! that's it!—Ugh, I don't want to sit at the same table! (Moves her things to the other table)

That's why I had to embroider tulips, which I hate, on his slippers—because you like tulips: that's why—

(throws the slippers to the floor)– we had to live on Lake Mälare in the summer because you couldn't stand the sea; that's why my son was to be christened Eskil, because that was your father's name; that's why I had to wear your colors, read your authors; eat your favorite dishes, drink your drinks–your chocolate for example; that's why–oh, my God–it's terrible when I think about it, it is terrible!–Everything came to me from you even your passions! Your soul stole into mine like a worm into an apple, ate and ate, dug and dug, until all that was left was the shell . . . and a little dark dust! I wanted to escape from you, but I couldn't; like a snake with your dark eyes you fascinated me–I felt how my wings rose only to drag me down. I lay in the water with bound feet, and the more I tried to swim with my hands, the deeper I worked myself down until I sank to the bottom, where you lay like a giant crab ready to seize me in your claws–that's where I am now!

I hate you! Oh, how I hate you! But you–you just sit there keeping still, calm, indifferent; indifferent about whether it's up or down, Christmas or New Year's, if others are happy or unhappy, without the ability to hate or love; as still as a stork by a rat hole–you couldn't catch your victim yourself, you couldn't pursue her yourself, but you could lie in wait for her! Here you sit in your corner –do you know they call it the rat trap–because of your reading the papers to see if anyone's having a bad time, if anyone has been ruined, if anyone has been fired from the theater. Here you sit waiting for your victims, figuring out your chances like a pilot his shipwrecks, receiving your payoffs!

Poor Amelia! Do you know. I'm sorry for you all the same? I know you're unhappy, unhappy like someone who has been hurt, and nasty because you're hurt!–I can't be

angry with you though I'd like to be–you're the weakling –Oh, that with Bob, I don't care about that!–That doesn't really hurt me!–And if you have taught me to drink chocolate, or someone else has, what difference does it make! (Drinks a spoonful out of her cup. With extreme common sense) Besides, chocolate is good for me! And if you have taught me how to dress–well, thanks very much –that has made my husband closer to me than ever – you lost when I won – yes, to judge by certain signs, I think you've already lost him! – I suppose you expected me to go my own way – as you did, and which you regret now–but you see I'm not going to leave him!–We mustn't be petty, you see! And why should I take what no one else wants!

Maybe when all is said I'm really the stronger right now–you never got anything from me, you simply gave, and now I'm like a thief–so that when you awakened, I had what you had lost!

Otherwise how could everything be so worthless, so sterile in your hands? You couldn't keep any man's love with your tulips and your passions–as I could; you couldn't learn the art of living from your authors, as I did; you didn't have a little Eskil, though your father's name was Eskil! And why do you always keep still? Well, I thought that was strength but it's probably only that you haven't anything to say! Because you couldn't think! (Gets up and picks up the slippers) Now I am going home–and taking my tulips with me–your tulips! You couldn't learn from others, you couldn't bend–so you broke like a dry reed–but I didn't! Thank you, Amelia, thank you for everything you taught me! Thank you for teaching my husband how to make love!–Now I'm going home to make love to him! (Exits).

Riders to the Sea

BY J. M. SYNGE

John Millington Synge
(1871–1909)

John Millington Synge was born at Rathfarnham near Dublin, Ireland. He was educated at Trinity College, Dublin. He spent some time in Paris where he was encouraged in 1899 by William Butler Yeats, a famous Irish poet and dramatist, to write about the Irish peasant life. Hence most of Synge's plays revolve about this subject. The most famous plays written by Synge are The Shadow of the Glen (1903), Riders to the Sea (1904), The Well of the Saints (1905) and The Playboy of the Western World (1907). He joined the Irish League and first became the literary adviser and then the director of the Abbey Theatre. He died in Dublin in 1909 suffering from a long illness.

Synge attended the first production of his play, Riders to the Sea, for the opening of the Abbey Theatre in 1904. The play is a tragedy of a woman who loses her son in the sea which has already devoured her husband and her four other sons. It is a struggle between life and death and between patience and passions. The play is a good representative of Irish drama and is full of emotion, realism and mysticism.

CHARACTERS

MAURYA, *an old woman*
BARTLEY, *her son*
CATHLEEN, *her daughter*
NORA, *a younger daughter*
MEN AND WOMEN

RIDERS TO THE SEA

SCENE—*An Island off the West of Ireland.*

Cottage kitchen, with nets, oil-skins, spinning wheel, some new boards standing by the wall, etc. CATHLEEN, *a girl of about twenty, finishes kneading cake, and puts it down in the pot-oven by the fire; then wipes her hands, and begins to spin at the wheel.* NORA, *a young girl, puts her head in at the door.*

NORA (*in a low voice*). Where is she?

CATHLEEN. She's lying down, God help her, and may be sleeping, if she's able.
(NORA *comes in softly, and takes a bundle from under her shawl.*)

CATHLEEN (*spinning the wheel rapidly*). What is it you have?

NORA. The young priest is after bringing them. It's a shirt and a plain stocking were got off a drowned man in Donegal.
(CATHLEEN *stops her wheel with a sudden movement, and leans out to listen.*)

NORA. We're to find out if it's Michael's they are, some time herself will be down looking by the sea.

CATHLEEN. How would they be Michael's, Nora? How would he go the length of that way to the far north?

NORA. The young priest says he's known the like of it. "If it's Michael's they are," says he, "you can tell herself he's got a clean burial by the grace of God, and if they're not his, let no one say a word about them, for she'll be getting her death," says he, "with crying and lamenting."

(*The door which* NORA *half closed is blown open by a gust of wind.*)

CATHLEEN (*looking out anxiously*). Did you ask him would he stop Bartley going this day with the horses to the Galway fair?

NORA. "I won't stop him," says he, "but let you not be afraid. Herself does be saying prayers half through the night, and the Almighty God won't leave her destitute," says he, "with no son living."

CATHLEEN. Is the sea bad by the white rocks, Nora?

NORA. Middling bad, God help us. There's a great roaring in the west, and it's worse it'll be getting when the tide's turned to the wind. (*She goes over to the table with the bundle*) Shall I open it now?

CATHLEEN. Maybe she'd wake up on us, and come in before we'd done. (*Coming to the table*) It's a long time we'll be, and the two of us crying.

NORA (*goes to the inner door and listens*). She's moving about on the bed. She'll be coming in a minute.

CATHLEEN. Give me the ladder, and I'll put them up in the turf-loft,

the way she won't know of them at all, and maybe when the tide turns she'll be going down to see would he be floating from the east. (*They put the ladder against the gable of the chimney;* CATHLEEN *goes up a few steps and hides the bundle in the turf-loft.* MAURYA *comes from the inner room.*)

MAURYA (*looking up at* CATHLEEN *and speaking querulously*). Isn't it turf enough you have for this day and evening?

CATHLEEN. There's a cake baking at the fire for a short space (*throwing down the turf*) and BARTLEY will want it when the tide turns if he goes to Connemara. (NORA *picks up the turf and puts it round the pot-oven.*)

MAURYA (*sitting down on a stool at the fire*). He won't go this day with the wind rising from the south and west. He won't go this day, for the young priest will stop him surely.

NORA. He'll not stop him, Mother, and I heard Eamon Simon and Stephen Pheety and Colum Shawn saying he would go.

MAURYA. Where is he itself?

NORA. He went down to see would there be another boat sailing in the week, and I'm thinking it won't be long till he's here now, for the tide's turning at the green head, and the hooker's tacking from the east.

CATHLEEN. I hear some one passing the big stones.

NORA (*looking out*). He's coming now, and he in a hurry.

BARTLEY (*comes in and looks round the room. Speaking sadly and quietly*). Where is the bit of new rope, Cathleen, was bought in Connemara?

CATHLEEN (*coming down*). Give it to him, Nora; it's on a nail by the white boards. I hung it up this morning, for the pig with the black feet was eating it.

NORA (*giving him a rope*). Is that it, Bartley?

MAURYA. You'd do right to leave that rope, Bartley, hanging by the boards. (BARTLEY *takes the rope*) It will be wanting in this place, I'm telling you, if Michael is washed up tomorrow morning, or the next morning, or any morning in the week, for it's a deep grave we'll make him by the grace of God.

BARTLEY (*beginning to work with the rope*). I've no halter the way I can ride down on the mare, and I must go now quickly. This is the one boat going for two weeks or beyond it, and the fair will be a good fair for horses I heard them saying below.

MAURYA. It's a hard thing they'll be saying below if the body is washed up and there's no man in it to make the coffin, and I after giving a big price for the finest white boards you'd find in Connemara. (*She looks round at the boards.*)

BARTLEY. How would it be washed up, and we after looking each day for nine days, and a strong wind blowing a while back from the west and south?

MAURYA. If it wasn't found itself,

that wind is raising the sea, and there was a star up against the moon, and it rising in the night. If it was a hundred horses, or a thousand horses you had itself, what is the price of a thousand horses against a son where there is one son only?

BARTLEY (*working at the halter, to* CATHLEEN). Let you go down each day, and see the sheep aren't jumping in on the rye, and if the jobber comes you can sell the pig with the black feet if there is a good price going.

MAURYA. How would the like of her get a good price for a pig?

BARTLEY (*to* CATHLEEN). If the west wind holds with the last bit of the moon let you and Nora get up weed enough for another cock for the kelp. It's hard set we'll be from this day with no one in it but one man to work.

MAURYA. It's hard set we'll be surely the day you're drownd'd with the rest. What way will I live and the girls with me, and I an old woman looking for the grave? (*Bartley lays down the halter, takes off his old coat, and puts on a newer one of the same flannel.*)

BARTLEY (*to* NORA). Is she coming to the pier?

NORA (*looking out*). She's passing the green head and letting fall her sails.

BARTLEY (*getting his purse and tobacco*). I'll have half an hour to go down, and you'll see me coming again in two days, or in three days, or maybe in four days if the wind is bad.

MAURYA (*turning round to the fire, and putting her shawl over her head*). Isn't it a hard and cruel man won't hear a word from an old woman, and she holding him from the sea?

CATHLEEN. It's the life of a young man to be going on the sea, and who would listen to an old woman with one thing and she saying it over?

BARTLEY (*taking the halter*). I must go now quickly. I'll ride down on the red mare, and the gray pony'll run behind me. . . . The blessing of God on you. (*He goes out.*)

MAURYA (*crying out as he is in the door*). He's gone now, God spare us, and we'll not see him again. He's gone now, and when the black night is falling I'll have no son left me in the world.

CATHLEEN. Why wouldn't you give him your blessing and he looking round in the door? Isn't it sorrow enough is on every one in this house without your sending him out with an unlucky word behind him, and a hard word in his ear? (MAURYA *takes up the tongs and begins raking the fire aimlessly without looking round.*)

NORA (*turning towards her*). You're taking away the turf from the cake.

CATHLEEN (*crying out*). The Son of God forgive us, Nora, we're after forgetting his bit of bread. (*She comes over to the fire.*)

NORA. And it's destroyed he'll be going till dark night, and he after eating nothing since the sun went up.

CATHLEEN (*turning the cake out of the oven*). It's destroyed he'll be, surely. There's no sense left on any person in a house where an old woman will be talking for ever.
(MAURYA *sways herself on her stool.*)

CATHLEEN (*cutting off some of the bread and rolling it in a cloth; to Maurya*). Let you go down now to the spring well and give him this and he passing. You'll see him then and the dark world will be broken, and you can say "God speed you," the way he'll be easy in his mind.

MAURYA (*taking the bread*). Will I be in it as soon as himself?

CATHLEEN. If you go now quickly.

MAURYA (*standing up unsteadily*). It's hard set I am to walk.

CATHLEEN (*looking at her anxiously*). Give her the stick, NORA, or maybe she'll slip on the big stones.

NORA. What stick?

CATHLEEN. The stick Michael brought from Connemara.

MAURYA (*taking a stick* NORA *gives her*). In the big world the old people do be leaving things after them for their sons and children, but in this place it is the young men do be leaving things behind for them that do be old. (*She goes out slowly.* NORA *goes over to the ladder.*)

CATHLEEN. Wait, NORA, maybe she'd turn back quickly. She's that sorry, God help her, you wouldn't know the thing she'd do.

NORA. Is she gone round by the bush?

CATHLEEN (*looking out*). She's gone now. Throw it down quickly, for the Lord knows when she'll be out of it again.

NORA (*getting the bundle from the loft*). The young priest said he'd be passing tomorrow, and we might go down and speak to him below if it's Michael's they are surely.

CATHLEEN (*taking the bundle*). Did he say what way they were found?

NORA (*coming down*). "There were two men," says he, "and they rowing round with poteen before the cocks crowed, and the oar of one of them caught the body, and they passing the black cliffs of the north."

CATHLEEN (*trying to open the bundle*). Give me a knife, NORA, the string's perished with the salt water, and there's a black knot on it you wouldn't loosen in a week.

NORA (*giving her a knife*). I've heard tell it was a long way to Donegal.

CATHLEEN (*cutting the string*). It is surely. There was a man in here a while ago—the man sold us that knife—and he said if you set off walking from the rocks beyond, it would be seven days you'd be in Donegal.

NORA. And what time would a man take, and he floating?
(CATHLEEN *opens the bundle and takes out a bit of a stocking. They look at them eagerly.*)

CATHLEEN (*in a low voice*). The Lord spare us, Nora! isn't it a queer

hard thing to say if it's his they are surely?

NORA. I'll get his shirt off the hook the way we can put the one flannel on the other. (*She looks through some clothes hanging in the corner*) It's not with them, Cathleen, and where will it be?

CATHLEEN. I'm thinking Bartley put it on him in the morning, for his own shirt was heavy with the salt in it. (*Pointing to the corner*) There's a bit of a sleeve was of the same stuff. Give me that and it will do.
(NORA *brings it to her and they compare the flannel.*)

CATHLEEN. It's the same stuff, Nora; but if it is itself aren't there great rolls of it in the shops of Galway, and isn't it many another man may have a shirt of it as well as Michael himself?

NORA (*who has taken up the stocking and counted the stitches, crying out*). It's Michael, Cathleen, it's Michael; God spare his soul, and what will herself say when she hears this story, and Bartley on the sea?

CATHLEEN (*taking the stocking*). It's a plain stocking.

NORA. It's the second one of the third pair I knitted, and I put up three score stitches, and I dropped four of them.

CATHLEEN (*counts the stitches*). It's that number is in it. (*Crying out*) Ah, Nora, isn't it a bitter thing to think of him floating that way to the far north, and no one to keen him but the black hags that do be flying on the sea?

NORA (*swinging herself round, and throwing out her arms on the clothes*). And isn't it a pitiful thing when there is nothing left of a man who was a great rower and fisher, but a bit of an old shirt and a plain stocking?

CATHLEEN (*after an instant*). Tell me is herself coming, Nora? I hear a little sound on the path.

NORA (*looking out*). She is, Cathleen. She's coming up to the door.

CATHLEEN. Put these things away before she'll come in. Maybe it's easier she'll be after giving her blessing to Bartley, and we won't let on we've heard anything the time he's on the sea.

NORA (*helping* CATHLEEN *to close the bundle*). We'll put them here in the corner. (*They put them into a hole in the chimney corner.* CATHLEEN *goes back to the spinning-wheel.*)

NORA. Will she see it was crying I was?

CATHLEEN. Keep your back to the door the way the light'll not be on you.
(NORA *sits down at the chimney corner, with her back to the door.* MAURYA *comes in very slowly, without looking at the girls, and goes over to her stool at the other side of the fire. The cloth with the bread is still in her hand. The girls look at each other, and* NORA *points to the bundle of bread.*)

CATHLEEN (*after spinning for a moment*). You didn't give him his bit of bread?
(MAURYA *begins to keen softly, without turning round.*)

CATHLEEN. Did you see him riding down?
(MAURYA *goes on keening.*)

CATHLEEN (*a little impatiently*).

God forgive you; isn't it a better thing to raise your voice and tell what you seen, than to be making lamentation for a thing that's done? Did you see Bartley, I'm saying to you.

MAURYA (*with a weak voice*). My heart's broken from this day.

CATHLEEN (*as before*). Did you see Bartley?

MAURYA. I seen the fearfulest thing.

CATHLEEN (*leaves her wheel and looks out*). God forgive you; he's riding the mare now over the green head, and the gray pony behind him.

MAURYA (*starts, so that her shawl falls back from her head and shows her white tossed hair. With a frightened voice*). The gray pony behind him.

CATHLEEN (*coming to the fire*). What is it ails you, at all?

MAURYA (*speaking very slowly*). I've seen the fearfulest thing any person has seen, since the day Bride Dara seen the dead man with the child in his arms.

CATHLEEN *and* NORA. Uah. (*They crouch down in front of the old woman at the fire.*)

NORA. Tell us what it is you seen.

MAURYA. I went down to the spring well, and I stood there saying a prayer to myself. Then Bartley came along, and he riding on the red mare with the gray pony behind him. (*She puts up her hands, as if to hide something from her eyes*) The Son of God spare us, Nora!

CATHLEEN. What is it you seen?

MAURYA. I seen Michael himself.

CATHLEEN (*speaking softly*). You did not, Mother; it wasn't Michael you seen, for his body is after being found in the far north, and he's got a clean burial by the grace of God.

MAURYA (*a little defiantly*). I'm after seeing him this day, and he riding and galloping. Bartley came first on the red mare; and I tried to say "God speed you," but something choked the words in my throat. He went by quickly; and "the blessing of God on you," says he, and I could say nothing. I looked up then, and I crying, at the gray pony, and there was Michael upon it—with fine clothes on him, and new shoes on his feet.

CATHLEEN (*begins to keen*). It's destroyed we are from this day. It's destroyed, surely.

NORA. Didn't the young priest say the Almighty God wouldn't leave her destitute with no son living?

MAURYA (*in a low voice, but clearly*). It's little the like of him knows of the sea. . . . Bartley will be lost now, and let you call in Eamon and make me a good coffin out of the white boards, for I won't live after them. I've had a husband, and a husband's father, and six sons in this house—six fine men, though it was a hard birth I had with every one of them and they coming to the world—and some of them were found and some of them were not found, but they're gone now the lot of them. . . . There were Stephen, and Shawn, were lost in the great wind, and found after in the Bay of Gregory of the Golden Mouth, and carried up the two of them on the one plank, and in by that door. (*She pauses for a moment, the girls start as if they heard something through the door that is half open behind them.*)

NORA (*in a whisper*). Did you hear that, Cathleen? Did you hear a noise in the north-east?

CATHLEEN (*in a whisper*). There's some one after crying out by the seashore.

MAURYA (*continues without hearing anything*). There was Sheamus and his father, and his own father again, were lost in a dark night, and not a stick or sign was seen of them when the sun went up. There was Patch after was drowned out of a curagh that turned over. I was sitting here with Bartley, and he a baby, lying on my two knees, and I seen two women, and three women, and four women coming in, and they crossing themselves, and not saying a word. I looked out then, and there were men coming after them, and they holding a thing in the half of a red sail, and water dripping out of it—it was a dry day, Nora—and leaving a track to the door. (*She pauses again with her hand stretched out towards the door. It opens softly and old women begin to come in, crossing themselves on the threshold, and kneeling down in front of the stage with red petticoats over their heads.*)

MAURYA (*half in a dream, to* CATHLEEN). Is it Patch, or Michael, or what is it at all?

CATHLEEN. Michael is after being found in the far north, and when he is found there how could he be here in this place?

MAURYA. There does be a power of young men floating round in the sea, and what way would they know if it was Michael they had, or another man like him, for when a man is nine days in the sea, and the wind blowing, it's hard set his own mother would be to say what man was it.

CATHLEEN. It's Michael, God spare him, for they're after sending us a bit of his clothes from the far north. (*She reaches out and hands* MAURYA *the clothes that belonged to* MICHAEL. MAURYA *stands up slowly, and takes them in her hands.* NORA *looks out.*)

NORA. They're carrying a thing among them and there's water dripping out of it and leaving a track by the big stones.

CATHLEEN (*in a whisper to the women who have come in*). Is it Bartley it is?

ONE OF THE WOMEN. It is surely, God rest his soul.

(*Two younger women come in and pull out the table. Then men carry in the body of* BARTLEY, *laid on a plank, with a bit of a sail over it, and lay it on the table.*)

CATHLEEN (*to the women, as they are doing so*). What way was he drowned?

ONE OF THE WOMEN. The gray pony knocked him into the sea, and he was washed out where there is a great surf on the white rocks.

(MAURYA *has gone over and knelt down at the head of the table. The women are keening softly and swaying themselves with a slow movement.* CATHLEEN *and* NORA *kneel at the other end of the table. The men kneel near the door.*)

MAURYA (*raising her head and speaking as if she did not see the people around her*). They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me. . . . I'll have no call now to be up crying and praying when the wind

breaks from the south, and you can hear the surf is in the east, and the surf is in the west, making a great stir with the two noises, and they hitting one on the other. I'll have no call now to be going down and getting Holy Water in the dark nights after Samhain, and I won't care what way the sea is when the other women will be keening. (*To* NORA) Give me the Holy Water, Nora, there's a small sup still on the dresser.

(NORA *gives it to her.*)

MAURYA (*drops* MICHAEL'S *clothes across* BARTLEY'S *feet, and sprinkles the Holy Water over him*). It isn't that I haven't prayed for you, Bartley, to the Almighty God. It isn't that I haven't said prayers in the dark night till you wouldn't know what I'd be saying; but it's a great rest I'll have now, and it's time surely. It's a great rest I'll have now, and great sleeping in the long nights after Samhain, if it's only a bit of wet flour we do have to eat, and maybe a fish that would be stinking. (*She kneels down again, crossing herself, and saying prayers under her breath.*)

CATHLEEN (*to an old man*). Maybe yourself and Eamon would make a coffin when the sun rises. We have fine white boards herself bought, God help her, thinking Michael would be found, and I have a new cake you can eat while you'll be working.

THE OLD MAN (*looking at the boards*). Are there nails with them?

CATHLEEN. There are not, Colum; we didn't think of the nails.

ANOTHER MAN. It's a great wonder she wouldn't think of the nails, and all the coffins she's seen made already.

CATHLEEN. It's getting old she is, and broken.

(MAURYA *stands up again very slowly and spreads out the pieces of* MICHAEL'S *clothes beside the body, sprinkling them with the last of the Holy Water.*)

NORA (*in a whisper to* CATHLEEN). She's quiet now and easy; but the day Michael was drowned you could hear her crying out from this to the spring well. It's fonder she was of Michael, and would any one have thought that?

CATHLEEN (*slowly and clearly*). An old woman will be soon tired with anything she will do, and isn't it nine days herself is after crying and keening, and making great sorrow in the house?

MAURYA (*puts the empty cup mouth downwards on the table, and lays her hands together on* BARTLEY'S *feet*). They're all together this time, and the end is come. May the Almighty God have mercy on Bartley's soul, and on Michael's soul, and on the souls of Sheamus and Patch, and Stephen and Shawn (*bending her head*); and may He have mercy on my soul, Nora, and on the soul of every one is left living in the world. (*She pauses, and the keen rises a little more loudly from the women, then sinks away.*)

MAURYA (*continuing*). Michael has a clean burial in the far north, by the grace of the Almighty God. Bartley will have a fine coffin out of the white boards, and a deep grave surely. What more can we want than that? No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied. (*She kneels down again and the curtain falls slowly.*)

SAMUEL BECKETT

ACT WITHOUT WORDS

A Mime for one Player

To Music by JOHN BECKETT

Samuel Beckett
(1906—)

Samuel Beckett is an Irish author and dramatist. He was born in Dublin, Ireland, but he went to Paris in 1937 to study and teach and has lived there ever since. He was awarded the Nobel prize in literature in 1969. Many of his works were first written in French. They range from poetry to novels and plays. He scored a universal reputation when his first play, Waiting for Godot (1952), was performed both in London and the U. S. A. Thus he has been considered a distinguished playwright of the Theatre of the Absurd. Among his other plays are Endgame (1957), Krapp's Last Tape (1958) and Not I (1973).

Act without Words I (1958) is a mime for one player accompanied by music. It is typical of the worlds of the Theatre of the Absurd and the Theatre of Silence.

ACT WITHOUT WORDS I

Desert. Dazzling light.

The man is flung backwards on stage from right wing. He falls, gets up immediately, dusts himself, turns aside, reflects.

Whistle from right wing.

He reflects, goes out right.

Immediately flung back on stage he falls, gets up immediately, dusts himself, turns aside, reflects.

Whistle from left wing.

He reflects, goes out left.

Immediately flung back on stage he falls, gets up immediately, dusts himself, turns aside, reflects.

Whistle from left wing.

He reflects, goes towards left wing, hesitates, thinks better of it, halts, turns aside, reflects.

A little tree descends from flies, lands. It has a single bough some three yards from ground and at its summit a meagre tuft of palms casting at its foot a circle of shadow.

He continues to reflect.

Whistle from above.

He turns, sees tree, reflects, goes to it, sits down in its shadow, looks at his hands.

A pair of tailor's scissors descends from flies, comes to rest before tree, a yard from ground.

He continues to look at his hands.

Whistle from above.

He looks up, sees scissors, takes them and starts to trim his nails.

The palms close like a parasol, the shadow disappears.

He drops scissors, reflects.

A tiny carafe, to which is attached a huge label inscribed WATER, descends from flies, comes to rest some three yards from ground.

He continues to reflect.

Whistle from above.

He looks up, sees carafe, reflects, gets up, goes and stands under it, tries in vain to reach it, renounces, turns aside, reflects.

A big cube descends from flies, lands.

He continues to reflect.

Whistle from above.

He turns, sees cube, looks at it, at carafe, reflects, goes to cube, takes it up, carries it over and sets it down under carafe, tests its stability, gets up on it, tries in vain to reach carafe, renounces, gets down, carries cube back to its place, turns aside, reflects.

A second smaller cube descends from flies, lands.

He continues to reflect.

Whistle from above.

He turns, sees second cube, looks at it, at carafe, goes to second cube, takes it up, carries it over and sets it down under carafe, tests its stability, gets up on it, tries in vain to reach carafe, renounces, gets down, takes up second cube to carry it back to its place, hesitates, thinks better of it, sets it down, goes to big cube, takes it up, carries it over and puts it on small one, tests their stability, gets up on them, the cubes collapse, he falls, gets up immediately, brushes himself, reflects.

He takes up small cube, puts it on big one, tests their stability, gets up on them and is about to reach carafe when it is pulled up a little way and comes to rest beyond his reach.

He gets down, reflects, carries cubes back to their place, one by one, turns aside, reflects.

A third still smaller cube descends from flies, lands.

He continues to reflect.

Whistle from above.

He turns, sees third cube, looks at it, reflects, turns aside, reflects.

The third cube is pulled up and disappears in flies.

Beside carafe a rope descends from flies, with knots to facilitate ascent.

He continues to reflect.

Whistle from above.

He turns, sees rope, reflects, goes to it, climbs up it and is about to reach carafe when rope is let out and deposits him back on ground.

He reflects, looks round for scissors, sees them, goes and picks them up, returns to rope and starts to cut it with scissors.

ACT WITHOUT WORDS I

The rope is pulled up, lifts him off ground, he hangs on, succeeds in cutting rope, falls back on ground, drops scissors, falls, gets up again immediately, brushes himself, reflects.

The rope is pulled up quickly and disappears in flies.

With length of rope in his possession he makes a lasso with which he tries to lasso the carafe.

The carafe is pulled up quickly and disappears in flies.

He turns aside, reflects.

He goes with lasso in his hand to tree, looks at bough, turns and looks at cubes, looks again at bough, drops lasso, goes to cubes, takes up small one, carries it over and sets it down under bough, goes back for big one, takes it up and carries it over under bough, makes to put it on small one, hesitates, thinks better of it, sets it down, takes up small one and puts it on big one, tests their stability, turns aside and stoops to pick up lasso.

The bough folds down against trunk.

He straightens up with lasso in his hand, turns and sees what has happened.

He drops lasso, turns aside, reflects.

He carries back cubes to their place, one by one, goes back for lasso, carries it over to the cubes and lays it in a neat coil on small one.

He turns aside, reflects.

Whistle from right wing.

He reflects, goes out right.

Immediately flung back on stage he falls, gets up immediately, brushes himself, turns aside, reflects.

Whistle from left wing.

He does not move.

He looks at his hands, looks round for scissors, sees them, goes and picks them up, starts to trim his nails, stops, reflects, runs his finger along blade of scissors, goes and lays them on small cube, turns aside, opens his collar, frees his neck and fingers it.

The small cube is pulled up and disappears in flies, carrying away rope and scissors.

He turns to take scissors, sees what has happened.

He turns aside, reflects.

He goes and sits down on big cube.

The big cube is pulled from under him. He falls. The big cube is pulled up and disappears in flies.

He remains lying on his side, his face towards auditorium, staring before him.

The carafe descends from flies and comes to rest a few feet from his body.

He does not move.

Whistle from above.

He does not move.

The carafe descends further, dangles and plays about his face.

He does not move.

The carafe is pulled up and disappears in flies.

The bough returns to horizontal, the palms open, the shadow returns.

Whistle from above.

He does not move.

The tree is pulled up and disappears in flies.

He looks at his hands.

CURTAIN

A GLOSSARY OF DRAMATIC TERMS

words marked with an asterisk (*) are included here

.ct A major division of a play. Each act must have one or more scenes. A play may consist of one, two, three, four, or five acts. In the past English plays usually were divided into five acts while playwrights of the twentieth century prefer the three-act form.

action The series of events that constitute the *plot. Action takes place through physical movement on stage by means of *dialogue, or even in the absence of dialogue or movement. An essential function of action is the unfolding of *character and plot.

SEE: conflict; pause.

actor, actress The men, women or children who play the roles of the *characters in plays. They represent the *action and speak the *dialogue. Costumes, *pantomime, masks, make-up, dance, music, singing, puppets, lighting, tapes and slides can help the actors in their performance on the stage. The actors work under the guidance of a director.

agon (Greek: 'contest') In *Greek drama it was a *dialogue between two characters—usually the *antagonist and *protagonist—in the form of a verbal contest. Each of the two characters is supported by half the *chorus. This ancient technique has been revived by modern dramatists.

alienation effect (from German 'Verfremdungseffekt'; often abbreviated to 'A—effect') An important element in Brecht's theory of drama which has become very influential in modern drama. It is based upon the view that both the audience and the *actors should preserve a state of critical detachment from the play and its presentation by controlling their identification with the *characters and the *action. To achieve this goal the audience is repeatedly 'alienated' during the performance of a play, i.e., it is reminded that it is only watching a representation of life, not life itself.

allegorical drama A play based upon allegory, i.e., an action with a double meaning, a surface meaning and an under-the-surface or symbolic meaning. All *morality plays are based upon allegory.

antagonist The *character in a play who opposes the hero or *protagonist.

in some plays as for example, *melodrama, the antagonist is at the same time the *villain.

anti-hero A major character in a play who is neither the antagonist or *villain nor a hero of the traditional kind; he is not supposed to be handsome, successful, brave, strong, gallant or superior. The anti-hero appears frequently in modern drama.

anti-masque A *farcical episode before or during the main *masque. One form of it constitutes a *burlesque of the masque itself. The anti-masque was developed in the beginning of the seventeenth century.

anti-play A dramatic work which actively distorts the traditional conventions of drama: there is no observable *plot; the *characters are not developed; the *dialogue is often trivial and incoherent; there is no traditional hero. These and other techniques of the anti-play are frequently used by modern playwrights, especially those of the *Theatre of theAbsurd.

SEE: anti-hero

archetype (Greek: 'original pattern') The abstract idea of a class of things which represents the most typical and essential characteristics shared by the class; for example, the 'idea' of tree as opposed to any particular tree. Drama frequently makes use of archetypes in character depiction, *themes and situations. Examples of archetypal characters are the rebel, the all-conquering hero, the *villain, the snob, the damsel in distress and most of the *stock-characters. Archetypal themes are, for example, the pursuit of vengeance, the overcoming of a difficult task, the love-triangle etc. Love, death, fraternal rivalry or the generation conflict are examples of archetypal situations.

artificial comedy SEE: comedy of manners

aside A few words or sentences spoken by a *character in a play to the audience. They are supposed to be inaudible to the other characters on the stage. Since the advent of *naturalistic drama the aside has hardly ever been used any more except in *pantomime and *farce.

SEE: stage direction

atmosphere The mood or feeling evoked by a play or part of a play, for example, gay, tense, dream-like, sinister etc.

GLOSSARY

Black comedy A form of drama which has become very noticeable in the twentieth century specially in the *Theatre of the Absurd. Black comedy displays disillusionment and despair. The *characters live without convictions and hope at the mercy of incomprehensible powers. The human condition as such is considered an absurd predicament. Black comedy therefore advises—since nothing can be done we may as well laugh.

blank verse The most common meter in English *verse drama as it is close to the rhythm of everyday English speech. It is unrhymed iambic pentameter, i.e., each line consists of ten or eleven syllables five of which are stressed. For example:

> How áll occásions dó infórm agáinst me.
> And spúr my dúll revénge! What ís a mán,
> If hís chief goód and márket óf his tíme
> Be bút to sléep and féed? A beást, no móre.
>
> (Shakespeare, Hamlet, IV, IV, 32-35)

(v— / v— / v— / v— / v— (v))

bourgeois drama Modern *naturalistic drama concerned with middle-class social problems. During the first 40 years of the twentieth century this kind of play was very popular.

burlesque (from Italian 'burla' = 'ridicule', 'joke') A comic and exaggerated imitation of another play with the aim of ridicule.It uses the techniques of *low comedy such as *clowning, baffoonery and *slapstick.

buskin It is the thick-soled half boot worn by *actors in *Greek tragedy. The term has come to describe the spirit or style of *tragedy.

SEE: sock

catastrophe The tragic end of a play frequently including the death or suicide of the *protagonist.

SEE: Freytag's Pyramid; tragedy

catharsis (Greek: 'purification', 'purgation') Since Ancient *Greek drama it is the desired effect upon the audience. According to Aristotle "tragedy through pity and fear effects a purgation of such emotions."

character A person in a work of literature. In drama the characters are impersonated by the *actors and actresses. The characters of a play are

sometimes invented by the playwright, at other times they are modelled upon historical persons or on characters from other works of literature.
SEE: flat and round characters; stock characters; protagonist; antagonist villain; stereotype; chorus; confidant; anti-hero

chorus A group of performers who represent one common role. The chorus may take part in the *action, serve as commentator, or provide a lyrical element. The chorus constituted an essential part of Ancient *Greek drama. It has frequently been imitated and adapted throughout the history of English drama including the twentieth century.
SEE: agon

chronicle play SEE: history play

climax That part of a play at which the *conflicting elements are brought together in a decisive confrontation and tension reaches a maximum. It ends the *rising action and introduces the *falling action.
SEE: Freytag's pyramid; turning point; denouement

closet drama A play designed to be read rather than performed on the stage.

clown or fool or jester A character who is meant to be funny by jokes, antics tricks, etc.

comedy (from Greek 'komos' = 'revel', 'merrymaking') According to the Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, comedy—as distinguished from *tragedy—deals in an amusing way with ordinary *characters in everyday situations. It always has a happy comclusion to its *plot. In the more than 2400 years of its history, many different kinds of comedy have been developed, such as comedy of manners, comedy of humours, comedy of ideas, comedy of intrigue, comedy of morals, commedia dell' arte, burlesque, black comedy, drawing-room comedy, domestic comedy, farce, high comedy, low comedy, musical comedy, romantic comedy, satirical comedy, sentimental comedy, tragi-comedy and the Theatre of the Absurd.

comedy of ideas A play which presents ideas and theories in a witty manner. George Bernard Shaw's plays are outstanding examples of this kind of

GLOSSARY

comedy.

comedy of manners or artificial comedy A play which ridicules the social behaviour of the middle and upper classes.

SEE: Restoration comedy

comic relief Comic elements are introduced in a serious play to relieve the tension and heighten the tragic element by contrast. These comic elements can take the form of episodes, *interludes, short remarks or observations, some form of *action, or the inclusion of a comic *character, such as the fool in Shakespeare's plays.

commedia dell' arte A kind of play which was developed in 16th century Italy. The troupes who performed the plays travelled widely through Europe thereby promoting the influence of the form. The plots were usually based on love intrigue and the *characters were *stock types. Both the *plot and *dialogue were usually improvised after basic rehearsal.

confidant A character whose function is to listen to the intimate feelings and intentions of the *protagonist.

conflict An essential element for all action. It can take three forms: 1— the tension or actual opposition of two or more characters (usually between the *protagonist and the *antagonist); 2— the tensions and oppositions within one character (usually the protagonist) who is torn by conflicting desires and commitments; 3— the conflict between a character and outside forces, such as society or a moral code.

convention A customary practice and usage in drama which is accepted by the audience and advantageous to the dramatist. The stage itself, as a physical object and area, establishes a convention: the audience accepts the boundaries of the stage to experience a representation of *scenery and *action, of lighting and words. Other examples of dramatic conventions are the use of *verse, dance, song, the *chorus, the *unities, the *aside, the *soliloquy etc. Dramatic *illusion is made possible only by the implicit agreement between dramatist and audience to accept the dramatic conventions.

crisis That point in a play which precedes the *climax. There may be several crises in a play, each heightening the tension and bringing about

GLOSSARY

a resolution.

curtain The large drape or screen at the front of the stage which is drawn up or aside to reveal the stage. As a stage direction in the *script the word 'curtain' signifies how and at what points of the play the curtain is to be raised or lowered. By dramatic *convention the passing of time or the change of place is indicated by dropping the curtain. In modern drama the same function is sometimes achieved by lighting effects.

curtain raiser A short play, often of one *act, which precedes the main programme. In the late 19th and early 20th century curtain raisers were often used to entertain audiences while late-comers arrived.

cycle A group of plays which are united by one *theme; e. g. Medieval religious drama in its treatment of Biblical themes.

decor SEE: scenery

decorum The principle that *action, *character, thought and language all need to be appropriate to each other. Thus, the language of a character must be in harmony with his social, professional and geographic background and with his emotional condition.

SEE: poetic drama

dénouement (French: 'unknotting') The unravelling of a *plot's complications at the and of a play. In *comedy it is the solution of the mystery; in tragedy it is synonymous to *catastrophe.

SEE: Freytag's pyramid

deus ex machina (Latin: "god from a machine") Any unconvincing *character or event which is introduced into the *plot of a play to resolve a difficult situation. The term is derived from the practice—in Ancient *Greek drama—of lowering a god by some mechanical device on to the stage to get the hero out of difficulties or to untangle the plot.

dialogue The talk of the *characters in a play.

SEE: monologue; soliloquy

documentary theatre A form of drama, related to *epic theatre, which is *propagandist and didactic. It frequently makes use of recent history and documentary evidence as provided by newspapers, archives, official histories, diaries and journals.

domestic comedy A from of drama about middle-class life and *characters with emphasis upon family situations and problems.

domestic tragedy A counterpart to *domestic comedy. It deals with personal and domestic aspects of middle-class life.

drama Any work written to be performed on a stage by *actors. In a more limited usage the term is only applied to serious plays. Since its origins in the religious rites of Classical Antiquity and the Christian Middle Ages, European drama has developed a large variety of forms, styles, and conventions—most recently the film. However, many of the Ancient *Greek theories on drama are still valid as, for example, the division of drama into *comedy and *tragedy.

dramatic irony The situation when a *character says something which has more meaning to the audience than it has for the character himself or to other characters listening to him on the stage. Thus, dramatic irony can only occur when the audience knows something about the *action or a character which has not been revealed to some of the characters. In Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, for example, a young girl disguises herself as her twin brother and is treated as a man—or boy— by all the characters, while the *audience knows her to be a girl.

dramatic structure The formal structure of a play consists of its *acts and *scenes and their interdependent balance. The non-formal structure comprises the events and *actions which take place. The non-formal structure of most plays can be described with the help of *Freytag's pyramid. Some modern playwrights have experimented with different kinds of structures.

SEE: theatre of the absurd; epic theatre; theatre of silence; anti-play

dramatis personae All the characters of a play. Usually they are listed at the beginning of the *script.

dramatization The art of making a play out of a story in another genre. Possible sources are novels, short stories, the Bible, history books, chronicles etc.

dumb show A *mimed performance whose purpose is to prepare the audience for the main *action of the play to follow. In Hamlet, for example, some players wordlessly enact the murder of a king (III,II).

GLOSSARY

epic theatre A form of drama and a method of presentation which was developed in Germany in 1920 and has become highly influential. Brecht is its most important representative. He said: "The essential point of epic theatre is that it appeals less to the spectator's feelings than to his reason." Epic theatre presents a series of episodes in a simple and direct way. It is not restricted by the *unity of time. It aims at propagating political ideas and ideals. Important features are the extensive use of the *Chorus, a narrator, slide projections, films, placards and music.

SEE: alienation effect; expressionism; total theatre

epilogue A short speech to be delivered at the end of a play.

SEE: prologue

exposition Information about the *plot and about what has happened before the beginning of the play.

SEE: protatic character

expressionism A movement in art and literature at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the theatre it was a reaction against *realism and aimed to show inner psychological realities. The term was probably used first by Vauxcelles after a series of paintings by Julien-Auguste Hervé under the title "Expressionismes" in 1901.

falling action That part of a play which follows the *climax.

SEE: Freytag's pyramid; dramatic structure

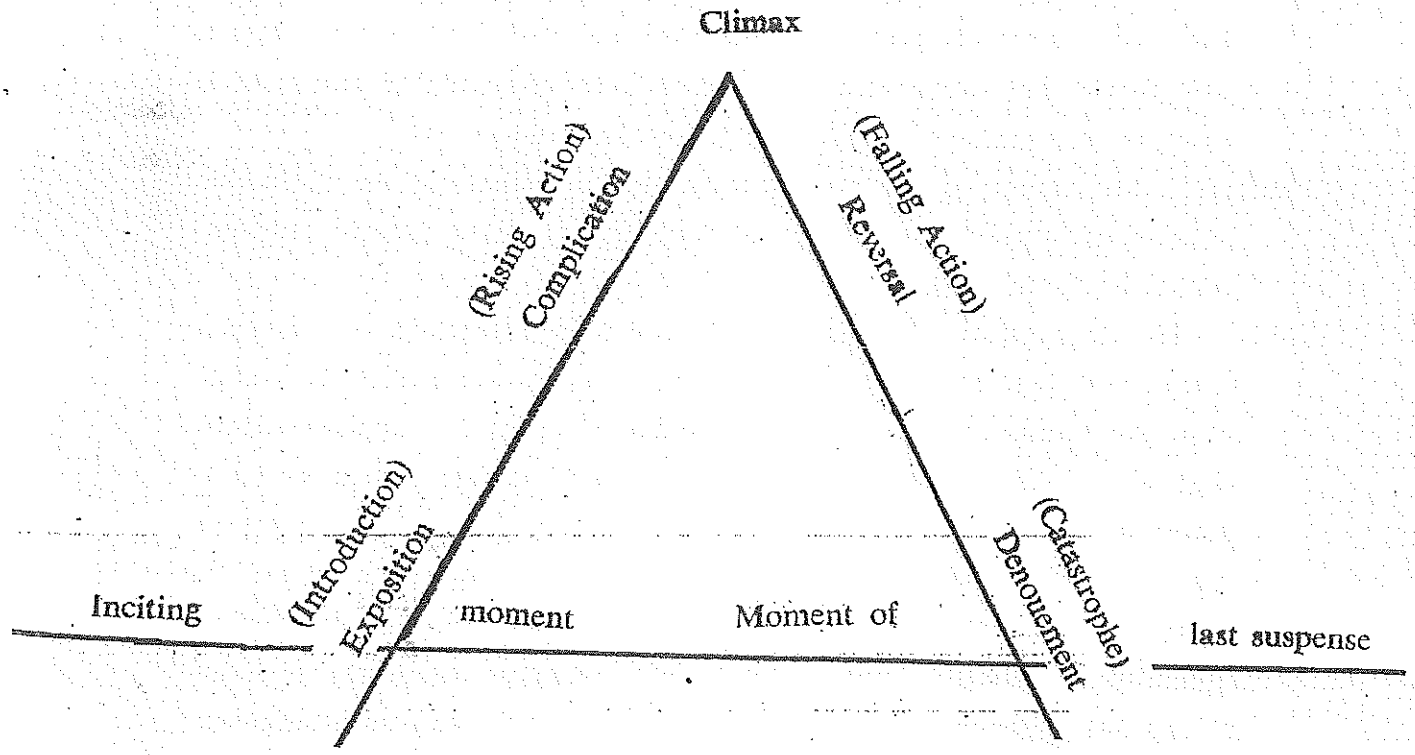
farce A play designed solely to excite laughter. Its basic elements are: exaggerated physical *action, exaggeration of *charaeter and situation, absurd situations and improbable events, surprises in the form of unexpected appearances and disclosures, e. g. Chekhov's "The Bear."

flashback Any scene or episode in a play, film, or novel introduced to show events that happened at an earlier time, by way of explanation or comment.

flat and round characters A flat character is shown from one side only. He has no depth to be discovered and therefore does not develop or change in the course of the play. A round character is discovered, step-by-step from different sides and therefore develops and seems to alter, adding new aspects as the play procceeds. *Stock characters and *archetypal characters are 'flat' unless further developed by the dramatist.

GLOSSARY

Freytag's pyramid The structure of a typical five-act play as it was first analysed by Freytag in 1863.The main divisions are: 1—introduction 2— inciting moment 3— *rising action 4— *climax 5— *falling action 6— *catastrophe (or *denouement). The climax is the apex of the pyramid. With some modifications, this pattern can be used to describe the structure of most plays.



Greek drama Ancient Greek drama has been—and continues to be—the single most important influence upon English and European drama both in theory and in practice. The most important Ancient Greek writers of tragedy are Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides; of comedy, Aristophanes; and on the theory of drama, Aristotle. The mythology and history of Ancient Greece continues to supply English and continental playwrights with *plots and *characters.

history play or chronicle play A play based upon recorded history rather than on myth or legend.

illusion The semblance of reality created on the stage which is accepted by the audience as a valid experience. Playwrights use different techniques depending on the aspect of reality they wish to emphasize, for example, psychological reality, social or historical reality, the reality of a poetic, moral or political vision etc.

initial action The event or events in a *plot which bring about a *conflict and tension.

SEE: Freytag's pyramid; action

interlude (Latin: 'between play') A short entertainment put on between the *acts of a play. They are often *allegorical and didactic or *farcial. They were especially popular in the 15th and 16th century and there is little doubt that most were intended as entertainments at banquets at court, in the houses of nobility, at University colleges etc.

intrigue The aspect of some plots involving mystification, the deliberate creation of misunderstandings, and intricate scheming usually originating in the *antagonist.

irony The discrepancy between words and their meaning, or between actions and their results, or between appearances and reality. In verbal irony the speaker means something different—even the opposite—from what he says, (for example: calling as obviously stupid remark 'clever'). Situational irony occurs when an event is the opposite of what might be expected. Socratic irony is named after Socrates' use of it in Plato's Dialogues. It occurs when someone pretends ignorance in discussion, especially by asking a series of apparently harmless questions, in order to trap his opponent into contradictory statements and understanding of the truth.

SEE: dramatic irony

kitchen-sink drama Plays which show working-class life in a *realistic fashion. The term is frequently used derogatorily; it became popular in England in the 1950ies.

libretto (Italian: 'little book') The text of an *opera, an *operetta or any long vocal composition involving *dialogue and narrative.

liturgical drama (from Greek 'leitourgia' = 'Public service of the gods', 'ministry of priests') Plays performed as part of the liturgy of the Church in the Middle Ages. These, eventually, developed into the *Mystery, *Morality, and *Miracle plays.

low comedy The kind of *comedy that gets its effect mainly from *action and situation rather than from *dialogue and characterization. It is a coarse kind of comedy containing buffoonery, *slapstick, violent action

and crude jokes. Some of the early Chaplin films are masterpicces of low comedy.

masque (French: 'mask') A kind of dramatic entertainment popular in the 16th and 17th century. The *plot was usually based upon mythology and allegory; the *dialogue was written in *verse. The staging techniques were elaborate including sumptuous costumes, masks, music, dance and lavish scenery: e. g. Ben Jonson's Love Freed from Ignorance and Folly (1611).

SEE: anti-masque; allegorical drama

melodrama (Greek: 'song drama') A play characterized by sensationalism, violent appeal to the emotions, violence, stereotyped characters including excessively virtuous heroes and black *villains, and a happy end. Shaw's Passion, Poison and Petrification is an example for an intellectual melodrama.

messenger A character who reports some *action which has taken place off the stage in Greek tragedies and plays that are modelled thereon; e.g. Milton's Samson Agonistes.

miles gloriosus A *stock character since the Roman playwright Plautus (254—184 B. C.). He is a braggart soldier who is basically a coward yet boasts of valorous deeds. He appears most frequently in *comedy where he is ridiculed.

mime A form of drama in which the *actors tell a story by gestures only, i.e., acting without words.

SEE: pantomime

miracle play A later development from the *Mystery play. It dramatized saints' lives, divine miracles, and legends.

monodrama A drama in which there is only one *character.

monologue A long speech by one *character only.

SEE: soliloquy; monodrama; dialogue

monopolylogue A play in which one *actor plays many roles, sometimes with the aid of masks.

GLOSSARY

morality play An *allegory in dramatic form which was developed in the late Middle Ages. It dramatizes the battle between the forces of good and evil in the human soul. Thus, it is always didactic. Common *characters in morality plays are Everyman, God, Death, Knowledge, Beauty, the World, the Devil etc.

musical comedy A kind of play developed in the United States of America. It combines songs, music, dance and spoken *dialogue, e.g. My Fair Lady adapted from Shaw's Pygmalion.

mystery play A kind of play which developed out of the *liturgical plays. Mystery plays are based upon the Bible dealing with the stories of Man's creation and fall, the life and death of Jesus etc. At first, they were presented by the clergy on the greater festivals of the Church. Eventually, the original Latin was replaced by the vernacular, the church by the marketplace, the clergy by performers from the craft guilds.

SEE: miracle play; morality play

naturalistic drama Drama which seeks to represent life with the utmost fidelity in language, scenery etc. It is extreme *realism. This kind of play became popular late in the 19th century. Gradually, it was replaced by more symbolic forms.

SEE: slice of life

new comedy Greek comedy in the 3rd and 4th century B. C. as opposed to the *Old Comedy. Both *plots and *characters were very often stereotyped.

No or Noh play A form of Japanese plays evolved in the 14th century. They are highly stylized lyric dramas intended for aristocratic audiences. They depend upon the use of masks, elaborate costume, stylized dances and chanting.

off-Broadway Drama produced in New York City away from the commercial theatres on Broadway. It is often experimental drama.

Old comedy Greek drama in the 5th century B. C. which developed from fertility rites. Important elements were the *chorus, *satire, bawdy and, at times, obscene passages. Only the plays of Aristophanes survive from this period.

GLOSSARY

one-act play A play consisting of only one act, usually short—with a playing time of five to forty minutes. It concentrates upon one single episode or situation. In *theme, mood and subject the range is considerable.

opera A drama, usually tragedy, in which the *dialogue is sung.
SEE: libretto

opera bouffe *Opera in which comical, even *farcical elements predominate.

operetta A light drama consisting of musical interludes and spoken dialogue.
SEE: musical comedy; libretto; opera

pantomime Similar to *mime but usually limited to a spectacular mime suitable for children. The *plots are based upon fairy tales and popular songs are included.

parody The imitation of the characteristic style and techniques of a writer in such a way as to make his works ridiculous. Parody is a branch of *satire.

passion play A religious drama presenting the Crucifixion of Christ.

pathos (Greek: 'suffering', 'feeling') That quality in a work of literature which evokes feelings of sympathy, pity or sorrow.

pause or point of rest A silence during the performance of a play. Some modern dramatists have used the pause extensively, since they characterize people as much by what they do not say as by what they say.
SEE: theatre of silence

peripety or peripeteia (Greek: sudden "change") The sudden change of *fortune from prosperity and happiness to ruin.
SEE: turning point

play A dramatic work designed to be presented on stage and performed by *actors. The *script of a play is written by the playwright or dramatist. All the different kinds of plays may roughly be divided into *tragedy or *comedy.

plot A series of *actions arranged in such a way as to induce curiosity and *suspense in the audience. The structure of a plot can usually be analysed with the help of *Freytag's pyramid. An essential element of

GLOSSARY

any plot is *conflict. Some modern playwrights have attempted to write plays without plot.

SEE: unities; anti-play

poetic drama or verse drama Drama in which the *dialogue is partly or completely in verse. *Blank verse is the most successful meter for dramatic purposes in the English language but many other meters have been used for lyrical passages. In addition to meter, dramatists have always made use of the devices of poetry such as imagery, figures of speech etc.

point of attack The moment in a play when the main action begins.

point of rest SEE: pause

problem play or thesis play A drama which deals with a specific social problem and offers a solution. Important playwrights who have contributed to the form are Ibsen, Galsworthy and Shaw.

prologue A kind of introduction to a play, often in verse, which is part of the performance as opposed to the preface which is not. In Greek tragedy the part before the entrance of the chorus introducing the theme of the play.

SEE: epilogue.

propaganda play A play which is devoted to the spreading of a particular idea or belief which may be religious, social or political. Generally, it is more one-sided and of more limited relevancy than the *problem play.

protagonist The main character of a play. Frequently, he is the hero.

SEE: antagonist

protatic character A character introduced at the beginning of a play, usually for the purpose of *exposition.

quart d'heure (French: 'quarter of an hour') A short *one-act play used as a *curtain-raiser, common in French theatre.

realistic drama Part of the literary movement, called 'realism,' in the 19th century. Proponents of the movement thought a writer should concern himself with the here and now, with everyday events, with his own predominant environment and with the political and social movements of his time. In drama realism was a less extreme form of *naturalism. Playwrights who favoured realism rejected the concept of the *well-made play. Ibsen, Shaw and Strindberg were of great influence.

GLOSSARY

resolution = falling action

Restoration comedy The kind of drama which prevailed between the restoration of the English monarchy in 1660 and the advent of *sentimental comedy early in the 18th century. It was chiefly concerned with presenting a society of elegance.

SEE: comedy of manners

rising action That part of a play which precedes the *climax.

SEE: Freytag's pyramid

romantic comedy A form of drama in which love is the main *theme—a love which leads to a happy ending.

round character SEE: flat and round characters

satirical comedy A form of *comedy whose purpose is to expose and ridicule the follies, vices and shortcomings of society, and of individuals who represent that society. It is related to *burlesque, *farce and *comedy of manners.

scenario an outline of a play, opera, or film.

scene SEE: act

scenery Painted screens, hangings etc. used on the stage to represent places and surroundings.

script The script of a play contains its title, the name of the playwright, the *dramatis personae, the *stage directions and the *dialogue (including *monologues and *soliloquies).

sentimental comedy A kind of play developed in reaction against *Restoration Comedy. It was most popular amongst the middle class. According to Goldsmith, in this kind of drama "The virtues of private life are exhibited, rather than the vices exposed, and the distresses rather than frailty of mankind," e.g. Richard Steele's The Lying Lover (1703).

setting The time, place, environment, and surrounding circumstances of a play

situational irony SEE: irony

sketch A short, light and informal dramatic piece which is performed as part of some theatrical entertainment.

slapstick Low, crude comedy in which the humor depends upon physical action like, for example, the throwing of custard pies.

SEE: farce; low comedy; burlesque

sock The low shoes or "socks" worn by actors in classical comedy. The term has come to describe the spirit or style of *comedy.

SEE: buskin

Socratic irony SEE: irony

soliloquy A speech in which a *character—alone on the stage—expresses his thoughts and feelings. He is "thinking aloud" for the benefit of the audience.

SEE: dialogue; monologue

stage directions Notes within or added to the *script of a play to indicate the moment of a *character's appearance ("enter") and disappearance ("exit"), looks and manner; how he should deliver his speeches (for example: "*aside") and move upon the stage; and information about the *scenery, lighting, *curtain, music etc.

stage time The time required to perform a play on the stage.

SEE: unities

stock character A recurrent type, like the characters in *commedia dell' arte, the *miles gloriosus, the *clown and the *villain in *melodrama.

SEE: archetype; flat and round characterc

stock response The predictable reaction of an audience to certain *characters and situations without the involvement of critical judgement, as for example, the cheering for a beautiful or famous actress.

stock situation A well-tried, recurrent pattern, for example, mistaken identity, *dramatic irony, the love triangle etc.

sub-plot A secondary *action or *plot in a play. It may be a variation of the main plot or it may be contrasting with it. In the latter case it is sometimes called counter-plot.

surrealism A movement which originated in France in the 1920ies. The surrealists attempted to express in art and literature the workings of the unconscious mind. Their works frequently have a dream-like, non logical quality. The impact of surrealist thinking on modern drama has been considerable.

SEE: theatre of the absurd

GLOSSARY

suspense A state of uncertainty, anticipation and curiosity on the part of the audience as to the outcome of a play. In a successful performance the suspense of the audience rises with the *rising action, reaches its maximum with the *climax and falls with the *falling action.

SEE: Freytag's pyramid

tableau (French: 'little table', 'picture') A grouping of performers who are posing silently and without moving.

tetralogy A group of four connected plays.

theatre of cruelty Plays based upon the theories of the French dramatist Antonin Artaud who formulated his principles in the 1940ies. In his view the theatre must disturb its audience profoundly. This is achieved with the aid of *mime, *scenery, lighting effects etc. rather than the *dialogue.

theatre of silence A theory of drama devised by Jean-Jacques Bernard in the 1920ies. In his view, *dialogue was not sufficient; equally important was what characters could not and did not say. Thus, the possibilities of the prolonged *pause are deliberately exploited by dramatists like Chekhov, Bernard, Pinter and others.

theatre of the absurd A term applied to the pervasive attitude of a group of dramatists who were active in the 1950ies (Adamov, Beckett, Genet, Ionesco, Pinter and others). Their attitude is based upon the belief that the condition of man in this world and in this universe is absurd, ridiculous and irrational. In the plays, life is seen as absurd, without purpose, out of harmony with its surroundings, sad to the point of anguish and at the same time funny. The *characters live in solitude in a hostile world and isolated from other human beings. The plays do not conform to any of the dramatic *conventions.

SEE: anti-hero; anti-play; black comedy; theatre of silence

theme The central idea of a play

thesis play SEE: problem play

three unities: SEE: unities

total theatre An approach to theatre which began in Germany in the 1920ies and developed into *epic theatre. The text of the play is subordinated to effects which could be achieved by lighting, music, dance,

acrobatics, special purpose costumes, the introduction of film and animated cartoons on the stage, and the involving of spectators and the audience in the action.

tragedy (from Greek: 'goat song') A play of a serious and sorrowful character, dealing with a central *character and leading to an unhappy conclusion. Traditionally, the characters were of elevated rank and expressed themselves in a serious and dignified style. In traditional tragedy, the downfall of the hero was brought about by fate or a tragic flaw in his character; in modern tragedy psychological or social reasons are usually made responsible for the *catastrophe.

tragedy of revenge A play in which someone—usually a hero or a villain—rights a wrong. Perhaps the earliest instance is the Oresteia of Aeschylus.

tragic flaw A defect in a tragic hero or heroine which leads to their downfall.

tragi-comedy A play in which elements of the *tragedy and of the *comedy are combined.

trilogy A group of three connected plays

unities A classical precept which required that a play should adhere to the "Three Unities": the unity of time, of place and of *action. The time of the action should be limited to twenty-four hours; the scene should be unchanged or—at least—confined to one town; the action should form one unified whole to the exclusion of *sub-plots. Inspite of its fame, the rule of the "Three Unities" has seldom been adhered to.

university wits A group of writers, all Oxford or Cambridge men, who lived in London towards the end of the 16th century. The most famous members were: Marlowe, Nashe, Greene, Lyly, Lodge and Peele.

vaudeville A term used in France and England to describe light, theatrical entertainment with musical interludes. In the past it had different meanings in different places and times.

villain A stock character who developed in the 16th century out of the role of the devil in medieval *Mystery Plays. Even as a human character he seems like an incarnate devil, a completely evil person.

well-made play A neatly and economically constructed play which works with mechanical efficiency. The term implies negative criticism.