





Reading the Wrihting


Reading isn't as popular as it once was. Some people blame it on television and movies , saying that these modern forms of communication encourage sitting passively and soaking up the images. It's true that reading requires greater effort - both physically and mentally - than watching movies or television. Those interested in Drama cannot be passive. Reading and analyzing script is a necessary function for any Thespian.





- Reading plays is more demanding than reading a novel. Why? Because the author of a story or novel often communicates the mood and meaning of a particular scene by describing the setting in great detail.

- In a play, almost all of the information is conveyed through the dialog. Of course, there are stage directions, sometimes - at the beginning of the act or scene - including descriptions of the setting. When we read a play we do not see gestures, facial expressions or descriptions of how a character feels. That is where the actor comes in. He must read the script with astute perceptions to take dialog and bring it to life.



What are Stage Directions, and where do they come from?

- u **Stage Directions** are the description of actions in a play script which are enclosed in parenthesis, and usually in italics. The scripts are called *Acting Editions*, and are ordered from publishers. These acting editions have very detailed stage directions. In most cases, you might be surprised to know, the playwright did not write the stage directions. During the Broadway run of a show, the publisher often hired the stage manager to provide a detailed set of stage directions from the production. Experienced actors and directors learn to ignore the stage directions in the script, and generate their own which are unique to the particular design and theme of their production.



Some Tips on Reading Plays

- u Understand the way plays are printed -

- u Sample section of a published play:

- u **TOM:** (*standing beside the fireplace as he burns the pages of his book*) **I just can't believe the publisher didn't like it**
Mother.

- u three styles of type are used:

- u **ALL CAPS (and or Bold face)** for character names

- u *Italics* for stage directions

- u **Standard print** for the actual dialog



Some Tips on Reading Play (cont.)

- u **It's important to read the character names, because you need to keep track of who is doing the talking.**
- u **It's important to read the dialog - that's what it is all about!**
- u **You can probably skip reading most of the stage directions, but if you find yourself confused, go back and re-read... this time reading the stage directions as well.**
- u **Don't try to read too fast. Dialog is written to be spoken and heard and it helps if you read silently as if you were hearing the words delivered by actors on a stage.**

If they WRITE plays, why are they called playWRIGHTS?

u Nowadays a playwright is about the only person we hear of who is called a *WRIGHT*, but it used to be a much more common term. There were wainwrights, shipwrights, wheelwrights, and others. A wright is a builder or maker or constructor, a skilled craftsman who carefully prepares each piece and part of his work, then assembles them into a finished product. It is just a coincidence, but Wilbur and Orville WRIGHT built bicycles and airplanes, and don't forget the great American architect, Frank Lloyd WRIGHT.

The Elements and Structure of Drama

u A cake is made of flour, sugar, eggs, shortening, and other ingredients.


What are the main ingredients that, properly mixed, make a play?

u Most 'recipes' for a play would include :

u plot

u theme

u character



u A recap of the plot is what you get when you ask the question, “What happens in the play?”

u The plot is organized around units such as:

- u exposition**
- u inciting incident**
- u rising action**
- u climax**
- u falling action**

PLOT






exposition

u The 5 W's : who, what, why, when, where. This is the information the audience needs to understand the play.


Exposition is always given to the audience by way of dialogue between characters on the stage who impart to them enough background information that the audience feels “let in” on past events. Exposition always comes at the beginning of a play.





inciting incident


u The initial (first) action or conflict in a play. This conflict is usually between the protagonist and antagonist, and sets up a rivalry of sorts that will build in intensity as the play goes on.





rising action


u The rising action is a series of conflicts or incidents which happen between the protagonist and the antagonist . these incidents build in intensity and seriousness as the play continues. the rising action is the biggest portion of a play, in other words, the rising action makes up the body of the play.






climax

the climax is the high point of the play. the events of the rising action build the dramatic tension, the audience interest to a peak - that peak is the climax. at the point of climax the protagonist must face some new or altered emotional or physical situation.






falling action

a.k.a.

denouement

u the denouement is the period of time after the climax where the protagonist comes to terms with the changes brought on by the events of the climax. in a fairy tale the denouement would be “and they all lived happily ever after.”



u If you ask the question, “What’s the play about?” you should expect a different answer: the theme.

Theme

A Theme should always be expressed in one sentence

Let’s consider a story familiar to almost everybody
“Little Red Riding Hood.”

What happens in the story? *a little girl is sent to deliver food to her grandmother. Although the little girl is cautioned not to talk to strangers, she speaks to a wolf, and tells the wolf she is on her way to visit her grandmother. When she arrives at grandma’s the speedy wolf has already eaten granny, and is lying in wait in her bed. The wolf proceeds to have Red for dessert. This is the PLOT.*

What is the story about ? *the story is about a little girl who suffers the consequences for not following directions. This is the THEME.*

CHARACTER

- u **Every play has at least one *Character* - somebody has to perform the action and speak the words! Most often the playwright creates several characters for a play. The characters are carefully constructed to provide contrast and the opportunity for conflict - if the characters were all the same, the play would be extremely boring.**
- u **Most plays have a character who is known as the *Protagonist*. The protagonist is the hero, the person who the audience identifies with and wants to get whatever it is he/she has set out to achieve.**
- u **If there is a *Protagonist*, you will find an *Antagonist* as well. The Antagonist is the person who through intentional action, or through being in the wrong place at the wrong time, finds him/herself standing the the way of what the Protagonist wants.**



Types of Plays

u **Tragedy**

u **Comedy**

u **Drama**

u **Melodrama**

u **Farce**

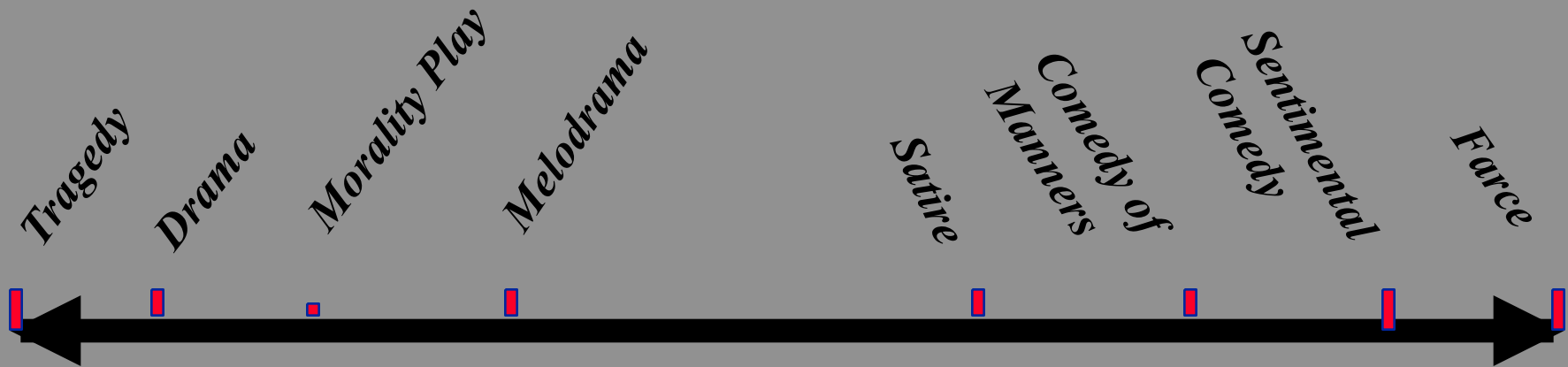
u **Satire**

These are just a few of the types of plays. A published play often includes one of these words on the cover as a clue to the reader about the contents of the book (*a comedy in one act, or a drama in three acts, for example.*)





Some plays are serious, others are funny. Some serious plays contain funny scenes or lines, while some funny plays have serious messages or themes. And there are different kinds of funny. It may be helpful to think of plays as being part of a continuum - a line that stretches , unbroken, from the most serious to the most comedic.



Each play can be classified by looking at it's characteristics, the same way that foods can be classified by looking at ingredients. In the following slides we will examine the major types of plays.



Tragedy

Tragedy is one of the oldest types of Drama. It has been with us since the days of the Great Greek Playwrights Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripedes. In general usage, tragedy means something like *very sad*, but in the study of drama it has a much more specific meaning.

Aristotle defines Tragedy



Greek Philosopher, Aristotle, gave us the oldest definition of Tragedy. His definition includes the following elements:

- u** The play must be serious in nature, intending to provide the audience with an emotional catharsis, or cleansing by arousing deep feelings of horror or pity.
- u** The play must adhere to three unities of Time, Place, and Action. That is, the story of the play must take no longer than one day, it must take place in only one location, and it must not be interrupted or diluted by sub-plots.
- u** The play must feature a tragic hero (the Protagonist): a person of exalted state (meaning a person of some importance in the world) who is essentially a good man but has a tragic flaw in his character such as excessive pride.
- u** Fate or destiny brings the tragic hero to a crisis point where he is forced to choose between two courses of action, neither of which is obviously better than the other.
- u** The hero is destroyed by his choice.



COMEDY

u Comedy is a more general term, applied to any play that has a happy ending - even if the play isn't funny. Plays ranging from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, to Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windemere's Fan* to Anton Chekkov's *Uncle Vanya* to Neil Simon's *The Odd Couple* all are comedies. Even murder mysteries such as Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap* are, technically, comedies.



Drama

u Drama is a general category for plays about serious subjects. Character development and theme are usually more important than plot. Ibsen's *A Doll's House* is a drama, as is *Miss Julie*, by Strinberg.



MeloDrama

Melodrama is the category for plays about serious subjects where plot is more important than characters and theme. Characters tend to be rather flat, and they don't change or develop during the course of the play. Murder mysteries and suspense thrillers fit into this category.



Sentimental Drama

- u **Sentimental Drama is the “soap opera” category. Serious subjects are treated in a serious manner; plot and character are more important than theme. There is usually a heavy emphasis on the emotions of the characters.**



Sentimental Comedy



u Sentimental Comedy is the “sit com,” or situational comedy, category. Subjects are usually lighter, and are treated with humor. Major emphasis is on plot and character. Neil Simon’s *Barefoot in the Park* fits in this category.

Farce




U Farce is often called “low comedy.”
The emphasis is almost entirely on plot, with bawdy jokes and physical humor. Elements of farce include such things as *chases, disguises, talking at cross purposes, and slapstick (pratfalls, slipping on banana peels, etc.)*. Feydeau’s *A Flea in Her Ear* is a farce.



Theatre of the Absurd

Theatre of the **absurd** contains elements of many other types. It is usually defined by its underlying theme of the meaningless nature (or absurdity) of life. Often, the very structure of the play reinforces this idea, as in Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano*





Comedy of Manners is a “high comedy” category. The emphasis is on the cleverness and witty dialog of the characters, who are usually members of the upper class. The great comedies of the English Restoration (1660-1725) and Eighteenth Century (Farquhar’s *The Beaux` Stratagem* and Sheridan’s *The Rivals* for example) and Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* fit in this style

Comedy of manners






Comedy

re

satire is also considered to be high comedy. In satire, the playwright poked fun at social customs and current fashions - sometimes including specific individuals of the times - perhaps in some effort to change the current thought and behavior. Aristophanes satirized many elements of Greek culture in his plays. Moliere satires, such as the *Imaginary Invalid*, *Tartuffe*, and *The Would-be Gentleman* were sometimes so biting that his career was threatened.





Parody

Parody is a specific form of satire in which a very familiar play/song/movie/etc.. is recreated in a humorous way, poking fun at the original version



Musical Comedy



Social Drama



u Social Drama is the serious counterpart of satire. Current social problems are examined in a serious manner. Modern serious plays dealing with homelessness for example, or drug addiction, or child abuse, or teen violence would fit within this