Drama

3

GREG JOHNSON & THOMAS R. ARP

Perrine's LITERATURE

STRUCTURE, SOUND & SENSE

Thirteenth EDITION

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DRAMA

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PREFACE

In preparing this thirteenth edition of *Perrine's Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense*, I have striven to be faithful to the principles established by Laurence Perrine more than sixty years ago while also acknowledging the evolving nature of literature. Not only have I been guided by my own experience but also by the rich legacy of Thomas R. Arp, who joined Perrine in 1979, and by the helpful suggestions of many teachers who have contributed the results of their classroom experience. Many of them are identified in the "Professional Acknowledgments" pages. Their insights have been invaluable in helping me replace more than 25 percent of the literature printed in the previous edition.

Here I must expand briefly on the contribution of Thomas R. Arp, who passed away in 2015 but whose work on *Literature* for more than thirty-five years has left an indelible imprint. Professor Arp's depth of knowledge and experience with the book as a whole, combined with his perspicacity in choosing stories to illustrate the principles of each chapter, has been a source of inspiration to me during the many years I worked with him, and here I wish to salute his achievement. Although any faults in this new edition are mine alone, I continued to benefit from his wisdom and insight in his last years, since he graciously consented to serve in a consulting role as we revised the book. Thus his name, I'm happy to say, continues to grace the cover of the book, a fitting reminder of his past contributions.

In keeping with Perrine's and Arp's shared principles, the book works to balance the classic with the contemporary, to represent a wide diversity of writers, and to emphasize the importance of understanding the elements of literature as the avenue to enjoy and appreciate it. Although there are many flourishing approaches to literature and its effects, all three of us have always believed that the initial step must be understanding the major elements of fiction, poetry, and drama.

This book is written for the student who is beginning a serious study of literature. It seeks to give that student a sufficient grasp of the nature and variety of fiction, poetry, and drama; some reasonable means for reading with appreciative understanding; and a few primary ideas on how to evaluate literature. The separate chapters gradually introduce the student to the elements of literature, putting the emphasis always on *how* and *why*: *How* can the reader use these elements to get at the meaning of the work, to

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interpret it correctly, and to respond to it adequately. *Why* does the writer use these elements? What values have they for the writer and the reader?

In matters of theory, some issues are undoubtedly simplified, but I hope none seriously, and some more sophisticated theoretical approaches have had to be excluded. The purpose has always been to give the beginning student something to understand and use. The first assumption of *Literature* is that literature needs to be read carefully and considered thoughtfully, and that, when so read, it gives readers continuing rewards in experience and understanding. I also assume that some works repay more richly than others the trouble and effort expended in reading them, and my objective is to help the student identify, understand, enjoy, and prefer such works. To this end, the book examines the major elements of literature and suggests some criteria for judgment.

The organization and structure of the book reinforce the step-by-step approach to understanding literature. Each chapter contains two parts: (1) a discussion of the topic indicated by the chapter title, with illustrative works, and (2) a relevant selection of additional works with study questions for further illustration of the topic. Also, in each chapter I include a list of review topics for the materials, and a list of Suggestions for Writing about those materials as they are illustrated elsewhere in the book.

The book opens with a section on "Writing about Literature," which embraces the important assumption that the fullest understanding and appreciation of a literary work arises from the reader's ability to express in language its meaning and emotional effects. The process of finding the right words to make these clear, and the additional clarity that results from the correct and effective presentation of these materials, is a significant part of making a work part of one's experience.

Although the book emphasizes the study of literature, not writers, I have continued the practice of representing some authors with a sufficient number of works to support the study of them as individual artists. In the fiction section, I include three stories each by a great nineteenth-century writer (Nathaniel Hawthorne), by a important modernist writer (Flannery O'Connor), and by a major contemporary author (Joyce Carol Oates). In this edition, there are also five poets amply represented as "Featured Poets": John Donne from the Renaissance, John Keats and Emily Dickinson from the nineteenth century, and Robert Frost and Sylvia Plath from the modern era. The table of contents gathers the titles of their poems in a boxed format for easy reference.

This edition also presents "A Contemporary Collection," five poets represented by six or more poems each, placed throughout the text: Billy Collins, Louise Glück, Seamus Heaney, Sharon Olds, and Natasha Trethewey. These too are identified in a boxed format in the table of contents.

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Finally, to provide an introduction to the further works of individual poets, the book contains at least three poems each by more than two dozen writers, both classic and modern. These poems can easily be referenced in the index of the book.

In the drama section, I have maintained the practice of including a number of one-act plays, both within the section's chapters and the additional "Plays for Further Reading," so as to provide a wider range of dramatic styles and approaches, and to include contemporary playwrights of diverse backgrounds.

An *Instructor's Manual* has again been prepared to accompany this book. It is available to all teachers who adopt the book for their classes. The manual contains an analytical article on every selection, suggesting approaches to interpretation and providing information that places the works in their contexts. These articles are the work of the author who prepared this edition as well as the man who created the first edition, Laurence Perrine, and the man who worked on the series for several decades, Thomas R. Arp. In the interests of space, the main text does not provide extended biographical information about the writers, but instructors and students who feel the need for such material are urged to consult Wadsworth's valuable Literature resource Center at http://trials.galegroup.com/thomson.

Through the thirteen editions of this book, which originated in the middle of the twentieth century, *Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense* has evolved in many ways, responding to shifts in interest, concern, and taste expressed by its users. However, certain abiding principles remain as relevant in the current century as they were in the last. Among these are the conviction that the close reading of a text is basic to understanding and appreciating it; that to understand the means by which a work achieves its ends is an essential part of experiencing it fully; and that reading imaginative literature is important to the development of the whole person.

G. J.

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FOREWORD TO STUDENTS

You've been reading stories ever since you learned to read; your first exposure to verse came with "Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker's man"; you've been watching dramatized life since your family planted you in front of the TV. You've developed your own tastes and your own attitudes toward what these varieties of "literature" can give you. In a sense, there's no need to take an introductory course in reading literature, because you've moved beyond the "introductory" phase. Let's say, then, that it's time to become familiar and friendly with the literary arts.

But let's take stock of where you stand. What have you been getting out of the things that you enjoy reading and watching? For most people, the first answer is "vicarious experience," the impression that you are temporarily able to live in some other world than your own private one—a world that may be as familiar as your own neighborhood or as alien to your experience as space travel in some future time or the adventures of explorers of the past. What you want is for the author to take you to where you have never been, so that you can imagine yourself as a person in a world other than your own.

You probably also want to be able to "relate" to the characters in the things you read or watch, discovering in them some features of yourself or some qualities that you would like to have. Or you like to share vicariously the excitements, joys, and sorrows of people who are not very much like you, but whose lives seem rich and interesting. Or you get a lift from watching some characters making major mistakes with their lives, and turning themselves around just in time—or maybe you are thrilled to see such people brought to justice and punished for misdeeds.

Whatever the sources of your pleasure and enjoyment from reading, you may now be ready to find both broader and deeper reasons for continuing that pastime. No matter how much experience you bring to the study of these works, you're in for a few surprises. Some of them will be the surprises that come from broadening your vicarious experience, from "traveling" with us to India and Russia, to Paris and Pittsburgh and Dublin, and to sixteenth-century London and seventeenth-century Massachusetts. Some will be the surprises that come from penetrating to the secret recesses of the human mind and soul in joys and agonies, from observing people whom you have never met or imagined and with whom you have nothing in common but your humanness.

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And, we hope, there will be the surprises and pleasures that come from feeling yourself growing in control or even mastery of your responses and reactions as you learn *how* literature does what it does. This, of course, is what the formal study of literature can bring you. We all know how we *feel* when we first read through a work. We probably start by thinking "I like this" or "it doesn't say much to me" or "what in the world is that supposed to mean?" If you could, you'd act on your first reaction and read the work again, or try to see what it's trying to say, or drop it and go on to do something more pleasurable.

But you're in a special situation. You're taking a course (either by your own choice or because you're required to), and one of the rules of the game is that you're supposed to move from your initial reaction to some sort of "serious" response that will satisfy your teacher. If you like something and want to reread it, your teacher will pester you with wanting to know *why* you liked it, and might even insist that you offer reasons why other people should like it too. If you are only a little bit curious about it, or think that it is a waste of time, your teacher will lead (or nudge, or bash) you into finding things in it that might change your first opinion. In any case, the terms of your special situation, as a student in a course with a grade on the horizon, make it necessary for you to have more than an initial reaction. You'll need to develop an understanding of the work, and you'll need to show in discussion or writing both what you understand and how the work itself led to that understanding.

That's where this book will help. In addition to a systematic guide for discovering how and what a literary work means, we've provided you with Suggestions for Writing at the ends of the chapters and standards for your written work in the first section of the book.

Why is writing so important? It's the most straightforward way of sorting out your feelings and ideas, putting them into shape, nailing down your own experience. All writing about literature has a double motive—it sharpens your grasp of the work, and it helps you lead other people to share your experience. Writing about literature is writing persuasively, and persuading others to see what you see helps you to see it more clearly.

So at the most basic level, we want to help you with reading and writing. But you have every right to ask, "Why literature?" That's a good question, because in our world there are so many ways of gaining experience and insight into our lives and the lives of others that focusing on one resource based on the spoken and written word may seem narrow and old-fashioned. We're willing to grant that, and we'll go even further: in a sense, it is also elitist, and turning to literature as a source of experience will set you apart from the majority of people. Thus, literature provides not only vicarious experience and opportunities to relate to others' lives, but it also permits you to join a special group of scholars, instructors, critics, and other students who share in the wealth of enjoyment and intellectual challenge that it has to offer.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Nature of Drama

Drama, like prose fiction, makes use of plot and characters, develops themes, arouses emotional responses, and may be either literary or commercial in its representation of reality.* Like poetry, it may draw upon all the resources of language, including verse. Much drama *is* poetry. But drama has one characteristic peculiar to itself. It is written primarily to be *performed,* not read. It normally presents its action (a) *through* actors, (b) *on* a stage, and (c) *before* an audience. Each of these conditions has important consequences for the nature of drama. Each presents an author with a potentially enormous source of power, and each imposes limitations on the directions a work may take.

Because a play presents its action *through* actors, its impact is direct, immediate, and heightened by the actors' skills. Instead of responding to words on a printed page, spectators see what is done and hear what is said. The experience of the play is registered directly upon their senses. It may therefore be both fuller and more compact. Where the work of prose fiction may tell us what a man looks like in one paragraph, how he moves or speaks in a second, what he says in a third, and how his auditors respond in a fourth, the acted play presents this material all at once. Simultaneous impressions are not temporally separated. Moreover, this experience is interpreted by actors who may be highly skilled in rendering nuances of meaning and strong emotion. Through facial expression, gesture, speech rhythm, and intonation, they may be able to make a speaker's words more expressive than can the reader's unaided imagination. Thus, the performance of a play by skilled actors expertly directed gives the **playwright**† a tremendous source of power.

*Plot, character, theme, symbol, irony, and other elements of literature have been discussed in the Fiction section and the Poetry section.

†The word *wright*—as in *playwright, shipwright, wheelwright, cartwright,* and the common surname *Wright*—comes from an Anglo-Saxon word meaning a workman or craftsman. It is related to the verb *wrought* (a past-tense form of *work*) and has nothing whatever to do with the verb *write.*

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But playwrights pay a price for this increased power. Of the four major points of view open to the fiction writer, dramatists are practically limited to one—the *objective*, or *dramatic*. They cannot directly comment on the action or the characters. They cannot enter the minds of their characters and tell us what is going on there. Although there are ways around these limitations, each way has its own limitations. Authorial commentary may be placed in the mouth of a character, but only at the risk of distorting characterization and of leaving the character's reliability uncertain. (Does the character speak for the author or only for herself or himself?) Entry can be made into a character's mind through the conventions of the **soliloquy** and the **aside**. In soliloquies, characters are presented as speaking to themselves—that is, they think out loud. In asides, characters turn from the persons with whom they are conversing to speak directly to (or for the benefit of) the audience, thus letting the audience know what they are really thinking or feeling as opposed to what they pretend to be thinking or feeling. Characters speaking in soliloquy or in asides are always presumed to be telling the truth, to the extent that they know the truth. Both devices can be used very effectively in the theater, but they interrupt the action and are therefore used sparingly. Also, they are inappropriate if the playwright is working in a strictly realistic mode.

Because a play presents its action *on* a stage, it can forcefully command the spectator's attention. The stage is lighted; the theater is dark; extraneous noises are shut out; spectators are almost literally pinned to their seats; there is nowhere they can go; there is nothing else to look at; there is nothing to distract. The playwright has extraordinary means by which to command the undivided attention of the audience. Unlike the fiction writer or the poet, the playwright is not dependent on the power of words alone.

But the necessity to confine the action to a stage, rather than to the imagination's vast arena, limits the kind of materials playwrights can easily and effectively present. For the most part, they must present human beings in spoken interaction with each other. They cannot easily use materials in which the main interest is in unspoken thoughts and reflections. They cannot present complex actions that involve nonhuman creatures such as attacking lions or charging bulls. They find it more difficult to shift scenes rapidly than writers of prose fiction do. The latter may whisk their readers from heaven to earth and back again in the twinkling of an eye, but playwrights must usually stick to one setting for an extended period of time and may feel constrained to do so for the whole play. Moreover, the events they depict must be of a magnitude appropriate to the stage. They cannot present the movements of armies and warfare on the vast scale that Tolstoy uses in *War and Peace.* They cannot easily present adventures at sea or action on a ski slope. Conversely, they cannot depict a fly crawling

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around the rim of a saucer or falling into a cup of milk. At best they can present a general on a hilltop reporting the movements of a battle, or two persons bending over a cup of milk reacting to a fly that the members of the audience cannot see.

The ease, and therefore the rapidity, with which a playwright can change from one scene to another depends, first, on the elaborateness of the stage setting and, second, on the means by which one scene is separated from another. In ancient plays and in many modern ones, stage settings have been extremely simple, depending only on a few easily moved properties or even entirely on the actors' words and the spectators' imaginations. In such cases, change of scenes is made fairly easily, especially if the actors themselves are allowed to carry on and off any properties that may be needed. Various means have been used to separate scenes from each other. In Greek plays, dancing and chanting by a chorus served as a scene divider. More recently, the closing and opening or dropping and raising of a curtain has been the means used. In contemporary theater, with its command of electrical technology, increased reliance has been placed on darkening and illuminating the stage or on darkening one part of it while lighting up another. But even where there is no stage scenery and where the shift of scene is made only by a change in lighting, the playwright can seldom change the setting as rapidly as the writer of prose fiction. On the stage, too-frequent shifts of scene make a play seem jerky. A reader's imagination, on the other hand, can change from one setting to another without even shifting gears.

Because a play presents its action *before* an audience, the experience it creates is communal, and its impact is intensified. Reading a short story or a novel is a private transaction between the reader and a book, but the performance of a play is public. The spectator's response is affected by the presence of other spectators. A comedy becomes funnier when one hears others laughing, a tragedy more moving when others are present to carry the current of feeling. A dramatic experience, in fact, becomes more intense almost exactly to the extent that it is shared and the individual spectator becomes aware that others are having the same experience. This intensification is partly dependent on the size of the audience, but more on their sense of community with each other. A play will be more successful performed before a small audience in a packed auditorium than before a large audience in a half-filled hall.

But, again, the advantage given playwrights by the fact of theatrical performance is paid for by limitations on the material they can present. A play must be able to hold the attention of a group audience. A higher premium than in prose fiction is placed on a well-defined plot, swift exposition, strong conflict, dramatic confrontations. Unless the play is very brief, it is usually divided into parts separated by one or two intermissions, and

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each part works up to its own climax or point of suspense. It is written so that its central meanings may be grasped in a single performance. Spectators at a play cannot back up and rerun a passage whose import they have missed; they cannot, in one night, sit through the whole performance a second time. In addition, playwrights usually avoid extensive use of materials that are purely narrative or lyrical. Long narrative passages are usually interrupted, descriptive passages kept short or eliminated altogether. Primarily, human beings are presented in spoken interaction with each other. Clearly, many of the world's literary masterpieces—stories and poems that enthrall the reader of a book—would not hold the attention of a group audience in a theater.

Drama, then, imposes sharp limitations on its writer but holds out the opportunity for extraordinary force. The successful playwright combines the power of words, the power of fiction, and the power of dramatic technique to make possible the achievement of that force.

REVIEWING CHAPTER ONE

1. Identify the three unique qualities that drama possesses (in contrast to literature written to be read).
2. Explore the advantages and disadvantages of having actors as the medium for the presentation of the dramatic experience.
3. Review the gains and losses imposed by having a drama acted on a stage rather than being presented on the page.
4. Explain how sharing the experience of drama with other audience members is an advantage over viewing it alone, and how the presence of an audience also can impose limitations on what the dramatist can include.

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UNDERSTANDING AND EVALUATING DRAMA

Because drama may combine the literary resources of both prose fiction and poetry, many of the "Understanding and Evaluating" exercises provided for those two genres (pages 94 and 714) may be applicable to drama—except for those directed toward the study of point of view in fiction, since drama always employs the objective or dramatic point of view. Even if a drama is not written in verse, the general questions about diction and figurative language supplied for the elements of poetry may be applicable to drama.

In addition, the variety of dramatic forms and the special nature of drama as a theatrical as well as a literary experience require a set of supplementary questions. Many of these questions will become more meaningful as you read further in the drama section of this book. (Some terms printed in boldface are not defined in this section but are included in the Glossary and Index of Literary Terms, page 1633.)

1. Does the play employ **realistic** or **nonrealistic** conventions? On the spectrum from literalistic imitation of reality to stylized or surrealistic representation, where is the play situated? Are there breaks from the conventions established as a norm in the play? If so, what is the dramatic effect of these departures? Are they meaningful?
2. Is the play a **tragedy** or a **comedy**, a **melodrama** or a **farce?** If a comedy, is it primarily **romantic** or **satiric?** Does it mingle aspects of these types of drama? How important to experiencing the drama is the audience's awareness of the classification of the play?
3. Identify the **protagonist(s)** and **antagonist(s)**. Are there any **foil characters?** What dramatic functions are served by the various minor characters? Do they shed light on the actions or motives of the major characters? Do they advance the **plot** by eliciting actions by others? Do they embody ideas or feelings that illuminate the major characters or the movement of the plot?
4. How is dramatic **suspense** created? Contrast the amount of information possessed by the audience as the play proceeds with the knowledge that various individual characters have: what is the effect of such a contrast?
5. What **themes** does the play present? To what extent do the thematic materials of the play have an effect on the dramatic experience?

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Does the power of the ideas increase or decrease the pleasure of the theatrical experience? Does the play seem either too **didactic** or insufficient in its presentation of important human concerns?

6. How do the various physical effects—theatrical components such as sets, lights, costuming, makeup, gestures, stage movements, musical effects of song or dance, and so forth—reinforce the meanings and contribute to the emotional effects? By what means does the playwright indicate the nature of these physical effects—explicitly, through stage directions and set descriptions, or implicitly, through dialogue between characters?
7. What amount of time is covered in the action? How much of the action is presented as a report rather than dramatized on stage? Is there a meaning behind the selection of events to be dramatized and those to be reported? Does the play feel loose or tight in its construction? Is that feeling appropriate to the themes and dramatic effects of the play?
8. To what extent does the play employ narration as a means of **dramatic exposition?** What other expository methods does it use? Does the exposition have a function beyond communicating information about prior events? What effects on the audience do the expository methods have?

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JOHN MILLINGTON SYNGE

Riders to the Sea
a play in one-act

Characters

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

(An island off the West of Ireland. Cottage kitchen, with nets, oilskins, 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 maybe 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."

RIDERS TO THE SEA First performed in 1904. John Millington Synge (1871–1909) was an important figure in the Irish Literary Renaissance. A versatile writer, he is best known for his play *The Playboy of the Western World* and for the short play presented here. He wrote primarily of peasant life in the countryside of Ireland. Among the settings mentioned in "Riders to the Sea" are the Aran Islands, where Synge lived and worked for several years, and Connemara, a western district of the country. Closely associated with other Irish Literary Renaissance writers such as William Butler Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory, Synge lived on a private income that enabled him to write until his untimely death at age thirty-seven.

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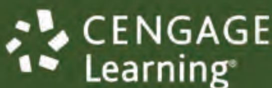

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