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DRAMATIC CRITICISM: THEORY AND PRACTICE

BY
KENNETH M. LOCKE
TO THE HONORS COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE COMMITTEE
28 APRIL, 1981

FOREWARD

This paper is the result of four hours of senior level study, and as such completes the requirements of the honors program for graduating with honor. A brief explanation of it is certainly in order.⁶

I envisioned this paper as series of essays, much along the same format as one of the "Twain Series," or "Twentieth Century Critical Reviews." As befits the title of this paper, they deal with both the theory and practice of Dramatic Criticism.

In several places I have opted to use the vocabulary of the original author in order to avoid Pen Warren's "heresy of paraphrase." If this inconveniences anyone, then I am truly sorry, but I felt it best not to run the risk of misrepresentation. The best source for those who are confused is the original article. Also, those who have not read Harvey by Mary Chase are advised to do so.

Certain debts of gratitude must be mentioned here. Bill Ballard wins my heart-felt thanks for his constant encouragement, advice and insight. Betty McCommas deserves a bow for being the one who pushed me in this direction and for her meticulous critiques. Also my typist, Connie Opper is the recipient of many thanks for making sure this work was presentable.

ARISTOTLES' POETICS

Aristotle is unquestionably one of the great, early masters of dramatic philosophy. A student of Plato, he was very well educated and artful, a man worthy of the subject of which he wrote. A measure of his value is easily discerned when we realize that he is still required reading for the student of criticism.

Aristotle was concerned with efforts to imitate life because he felt that such imitation lead to the joy of learning. Life is imitated by combinations of rhythm, language and harmony. Various combinations of these three produce the four modes of imitation: epic, tragedy, comedy and dithyrambic poetry. The distinctions between the four are formed by their varying mediums, objects and manners of imitations.

Tragedy and comedy, our principle concerns, are both recorded as poetry, therefore, we should understand that Aristotle considers poetry to originate from two separate but related causes. The first is the instinct for imitation, the second is the instinct for harmony and rhythm. Aristotle seems to have somehow missed himself at this point. We should notice that according to his concept of imitation, it would be impossible to have it without harmony and rhythm since imitation is a combination of rhythm,

language and harmony. Harmony and rhythm therefore should be listed as subparts of imitation, not as equals in the poetic process. It is not a major point, but it is worth noting as an example of the immortal Aristotles' humaneness.

The majority of the Poetics is concerned with the study of tragedy rather than comedy, though he does state briefly their major difference. He contends that while tragedy portrays men as better than they are, comedy portrays men as worse than they are. An enterprising historical psychologist with an interest in sociology might find it interesting to research why the ancients seemed to have preferred a tragic view of man.

In Aristotles' terminology, tragedy is that which is presented in the form of an action that imitates an action of life that is serious, complete and of magnitude. Tragedy is also, of course, the combination of the six Aristotelian dramatic parts (plot, character, thought, diction, song and spectacle, listed in the order of importance that Aristotle determined them to have).

Plot, the most important part, is readily divided into three subparts; "beginning, that which follows only necessity, but after which something naturally comes or is to be, middle, that which follows something as something follows it, end, that which follows some other thing but is followed by nothing."

The length of the plot must be long enough to allow a change of fortune from bad to good or vice-versa and must

be short enough to be perspicuous. The generally accepted length is one day, but if it is even longer and still perspicuous then it will be even more beautiful by reason of size.

Aristotle insists on the unity of the plot. It must imitate one action that is both complete and whole, so that if one part is removed then the entire work will fall. That which makes no difference is not organically significant to the whole.

At the same time, though, Aristotle insists that this lean plot he has been describing can also be either simple or complex and is best if the events that occur come on us by surprise and yet follow as cause and effect from the plot. All this is well and good if one accepts the challenge. Many, though, have tried and failed. Even Shakespeare had to resort to *Dieu ex machina* in Cymbeline, where ^{OV}Jaxé suddenly appears out of nowhere to set things right.

Aristotle lists five methods of recognition: by signs, e.g. birthmarks, considered to be the least artistic; those invented at will by the poet; memory-when the sight of an object awakens a feeling in the person concerned; by processes of reasoning; and by those means that arise from the incidents themselves.

The most important person in the tragic play is called the tragic character. This person is not eminently good and just, yet his misfortune is brought on by some error or frailty, not by a vice or depravity. This will lead to the tragic incident.

The tragic incident is the destructive or painful act in the play, and is considered best when it occurs between friends or loved ones. A good tragic incident will produce a feeling of pity and fear in the audience.

The only other thing that I will include from Aristotle in this study is a brief overview of his concept of character. This may be effectively summarized by listing the four things to aim at in a good one; goodness, propriety (as befits the person), true to life, and consistency (inconsistent characters should be consistently so).

Aristotle had obviously put a lot of effort into his Poetics, and had done quite a study of the plays of his time. I do not, therefore, wish to debate the importance of what he says, or even the relative accuracy of it. I would, however, like to question his knowledge of psychology. What right does he have to say that tragedy presents people as being better than they are, or that the fall of a low person to an even lower position will not have a tragic effect on an audience?

Better still, let me question the ability of those who submit themselves to their self-imposed tyranny of a dead man. We critics owe it to ourselves and our readers to be familiar with Aristotle; but when many ideas found in the Poetics can be challenged, then we must necessarily learn from others as well.

LONGINUS TREATY ON THE SUBLIME

Longinus is considered to be the greatest philosopher of his age, the third Century A.D. Like Aristotle, he studied Plato and wrote extensively. Unfortunately, none of his studies have come down to us except his 'Treaty On The Sublime.'

Having read only selected highlights from Longinus, I will not be as detailed as I was with Aristotle. My effort will be to merely point out major stresses in his long and rather dull masterpiece.

"Sublimity," not to be confused with the "subliminal," is that distinction and excellence in expression whose intention and effect is to "transport the audience." It may or may not be innate to the artist, but all efforts at sublimity must be artfully controlled. Without efforts at control, the full effect of "transport" will not be achieved.

Failure to apply art, that is to say control, to the sublime can lead to two principle vices. The first is tumidity, a gross excess of language, which is rather easy to fall into from fear or error. The other is puerility, which is best described as going from one extreme to another. (Here he seems to have fallen into the same trap that Aristotle did, that of confusing himself with his own systemology. Tumidity could have been included in puerility,

since tumidity is an excess.) Longinus goes on to point out that our defects in attempting the sublime usually come from the same source as our good points. This ought to be rather comforting to everyone, except that he does not say what the source is.

Longinus lists five sources of elevated language. I do not know if he defended his choices or not, but they seem to have been accepted by most of the critics that I have read. They bear an especially strong resemblance to the tenants of the Formalist school.

The first is the power of forming great conceptions, followed by vehement and inspired passion. The power of forming conceptions and the possession of passion are innate qualities of the individual artist. The other three, which must be learned, are: thought-expression, diction i.e. choice of words, metaphor and elaboration, and composition.

Since diction includes metaphor, it is important to make it clear that content is a contributing factor to sublime language. Beautiful language is not enough to be called sublime, its content must contribute. The only problem with this is that some language can transport the audience and say absolutely nothing in the process. Many of the New or Formalist poets are very good at this. Although I would call them sublime, I am not certain that Longinus would have. In any case, it is important to note that he did not have a corner on the definition market.

Longinus considered the most important source of the sublime to be the power of forming great conceptions, (he also refers to this as the "elevated mind"). This innate talent must be nurtured by the soul by being kept free from low and ignoble thoughts. Longinus must either have honestly believed this, or he is guilty of an extremely pious elitism. I am not going to read Mein Kampf just to prove him wrong, but it might actually work.

Like Pope, Longinus recommends imitating and emulating great writers. He must have done so, for I was moved by Longinus' beauty several times.

POPE AN ESSAY ON CRITICISM

As a Catholic, Pope was forbidden to hold high government offices in his native England during his lifetime. He sought his livelihood entirely from his writing, and is famous for being the first person to do so.

The Essay on Criticism is a rather long poem of some twenty pages. Much of it is redundant, but as if to make up for it, there are several rather famous quotes liberally sprinkled throughout.

Nature, we are told, should be our guideline in all things. Even the rules of the ancients are no more than a methodized form of nature. Some ancients, however, were fond of breaking their own rules. In so doing, they managed to achieve a higher form of art which the modern is not always able to accomplish. This is something that all writers and critics should be aware of.

One of the main concerns of the critic is that he should know his author well, e.g. age, religion, country etc. This will help to avoid the problem of removing things from context. For example, we will avoid misinterpreting Johnathan Swift if we are aware of his standing in society and the societies' problems, rather than trying to judge him from our own standards and problems. If a critic should make this mistake, then it is obvious that he has

gone beyond his capabilities; which would have never have happened in the first place if he had followed nature, since ones limits are fixed by nature. Like those that he admired so much before him, Pope does not defend his beliefs concerning nature. At least he is in good company.

Pope introduces a very interesting idea in the second half of his essay, when he emphasizes the importance of Unity, though not in the same way that Aristotle emphasizes it. He holds that we are impressed with the whole of the work, and that the parts of it are of secondary importance. A critic should not, then, condemn a work for faulty parts.

Despite his feelings on the subject of unity, Pope does go so far as to point out several major individual faults that writers and their critics are prone to. They are certainly worth briefly mentioning. A work may have too much style in an effort to make up for a lack of content, but style should reflect content without being the content. The short, choppy, almost masculine style of Ernest Hemingway is a reflection of his characters and their actions. It is an excellent example of someone who has taken this warning to heart. Too much ornament will cloud the central issue. Somehow, ornament and style sound strangely similar, yet he lists and, obviously considers them, as separate faults.

The critic, like the author must take care not to make other mistakes as well. He must not praise just one small facet of a work, but must look at the entire piece to

judge it fairly. The critic should also strive to be "nice." I know of no better word for it. He must always show truth and candor while striving to teach, but must not offend with bluntness. On top of this, it is necessary to read a work in the same spirit in which the author wrote it.

MORGAN THE NATURE OF DRAMATIC ILLUSION,
from LANGER REFLECTIONS ON ART

Of late in the modern age, dramatic criticism has taken two principle forms. The analytical form, which seeks to lay down rules and establish universal standards of judgement, and the impressionistic form, which sets up no God but the individual soul and tries to write of the soul's reaction to literature. These forms have proved to be insufficient, and there is now a need to study modern critical developments to establish a new aesthetic discipline. This discipline must be elastic, reasoned and acceptable to modern critics.

There has also been a new development in the theatre that must be dealt with in this new aesthetic discipline. It is the revolt away from the importance of the dramatist on the grounds that a play is the composite art of several disciplines. From this unity of the drama and from the aesthetic discipline mentioned above come the dramatic illusion. It is the recognition of the need for this illusion that has been missing from the criticism of the moderns.

Dramatic illusion is the union of the audience and the total play (the total play being the composite projection of the various disciplines of which the play is composed). The dramatic illusion is characterized by shock,

which is followed by an inward stillness. From that stillness an influence emerges that transmutes the audience. When the audience has felt this and become part of the play in their own minds, then unity has been achieved.

As Aristotle said, art is rooted in imitation. It does not, however, imitate life, for all we know of life is our conception of it. Rather, then, it imitates our conception of life. The imitation that the artist portrays performs two functions. It negates the spectators' preconception of the subject and leaves him momentarily open to the artists' views. This is no small feat when the two are widely separated. In all this impregnation, Illusion is the impregnating power.

When we go to see a play, we do not leave at intermission because of the plot, but because the form has not yet been resolved. The plot is not important in and of itself, it is merely a structural accident. It is the form that keeps us in suspense, and is itself the art of the drama.

Dramatic Illusion is important to criticism because it may be used to judge all forms. Unlike other methods, the critical use of the Dramatic Illusion may be applied to all dramatic works.

Morgans' essay was first presented at a meeting of the Royal Society in the early 1900's. The moderns that he dealt with were Ibsen and his contemporaries. Even so, his critical method is successful with the more modern dramatic

forms as well. For example, the absurdists are just as intent on showing their view of life as Ibsen was, and they use essentially the same methods (mentioned above).

This critical method, use of the Dramatic Illusion, will only work with those forms that are intent on causing the audience to at least momentarily accept the artists' view of a subject. I do not know of any forms where this is not the primary objective. If one should occur, then the necessity for the Dramatic Illusion will no longer exist.

LANGER FEELING AND FORM, Ch. 17,
THE DRAMATIC ILLUSION

The primary illusion that all poetry tries to create is that of a virtual, or seemingly real, history. Drama, being a poetic art, presents this illusion in the form of immediate visual responses of human beings. The basic unit, or abstraction, of the drama is the act (that which is from the past and is directed towards the future).

The act, as Langer uses it here is any or all reactions that take place on the stage, whether they are invisible or visible. Thus any illusion of physical or mental activity is an act. The composite structure of all the acts is a virtual history in the mode of dramatic action.

In drama, the future is the all important factor because it gives importance to motives and situations in which dramatic action develops. Persons in a drama are merely makers of the future, and the act and drama manage to move toward the future by dealing with commitments and consequences. "A sheer immediacy, an imperishable direct experience without the ominous forward movement of consequential would not be so."

The intensity or conflict between future and present that gives the play its dramatic quality is developed by the controlling factor destiny. Therefore destiny (a product of past and present actions) is of paramount importance.

Form is at least as important for Langer as for Morgan. She feels that for there to be the impression that form is being fulfilled, there must be a feeling that something is or must come afterwards. "This constant illusion of an eminent, this vivid appearance of a growing situation before anything startling has occurred, is a 'form in suspense.' It is a human destiny that unfolds before us, its unity is apparent from the opening words or even silent action. . . ."

It is very important that the playwright make us aware of the future as already being an entity that is embryonic in the present. He must create the sense of destiny as early as possible because it is the illusion of destiny that assures that there is a "form in suspense." We say "illusion" because in reality there is no such thing as "destiny." It is merely an extension of what we perceive of as reality that is essential to our mental wholeness. The illusion of reality is arrived at through our perception of reality as a continuum of past, present and future.

The situation of a play is the complex of present and impending acts. It is said to be organic because it develops and grows as the play proceeds.

Drama is of necessity more tolerant than the other performing arts because it allows, and indeed demands, extensive interpretation by various artists during the production. It is therefore the duty of the dramatist to show what he obviously means so that the production will

not be confused by the conflicting interpretations of those involved. This seems excessively difficult when we realize that the dramatist does not just write lines. In reality, he is writing a long series of culminating acts that must convey their individual backgrounds to the audience. Stage directions and other descriptions are not part of the dramatic form and are, therefore, only literary treatments of the work. In any case, most producers ignore them.

Appreciation of any art form requires a certain detachment or distance which the artist must cultivate. This distance is relative, (i.e. it admits degrees of extremism that vary according to the object and the individual's capacity for maintaining a greater or lesser degree of distance).

Distance is acquired by creating a personal relationship to the object after it has been filtered of the practical and concrete of its appeal. For this reason, art deals in illusions that create symbolic forms for purposes of contemplation. To seek delusion is to deny drama its art because this attempts to create a total nearness. Naturalism, therefore, should be avoided.

LANGER THE COMIC RHYTHM, from
CORIGAN COMEDY, ITS MEANING AND FORM

According to Miss Langer, one of the prime functions of drama is to produce an organic form by creating a semblance of history. This is accomplished by composing its elements into a rhythmic, single structure. It follows then that tragedy and comedy are not the essence of drama but are merely two means of dramatic construction.

All biological beings live in a rhythm (that is to say a cycle of functions) which they maintain the best that they can and modify when ever an unsurmountable object appears, or when they have the opportunity to improve. Man also lives by these natural rhythms, i.e. sexual, appetite, growth, life and death. This instinctual life is modified in almost every way possible by our thoughts.

The relationship between our modified instinctual life and our emotional relation to the symbolic structures that represent our reality is the pattern of our feeling. This feeling is the essence of comedy.

The very fabric of which comedy is made is destiny in the guise of fortune. The action of comedy is destiny forcing the upset and recovery of the protagonist's equilibrium. It is his contest with the world and his triumph by wit, luck or personal power. Or it may be his humorous, ironical or philosophical acceptance of mischance. In

either case, it will always lead to the mental recovery of the protagonist, if not the actual physical recovery.

Comedy grew out of the ancient fertility rites, expressing the elementary strains and resolutions of animate nature. It became an image of human vitality holding its own in the world amid the surprises of life.

The comic rhythm is that of the continuity of life, therefore the characters rarely change or grow. (Good examples of this lack of change may be found in Indian and other Oriental plays). Heroic, romantic, political, and historical drama are usually in the comic form because they have this same open-ended view of life, as opposed to the closed ending of tragedy. An important sideline to this is that humor is a by-product of comedy, not a structural element within it. Political plays are rarely funny, but are usually comic.

We have seen here that comic rhythm is used as a structural necessity in creating organic, dramatic forms. Like tragedy, the comic rhythm ~~that~~ has had its own history and development. It always ends with some form of recovery for the protagonist, who rarely goes through any sort of an important, permanent change.

DRAMATIC CRITICISM

The dramatic critic's principle reason for being is to point out values and flaws that may not be immediately perceivable in a work, with the hope that his efforts will be used by others for insight and improvement into their own works. The critic generally directs his work towards any, or all, of four distinct groups; towards the actor, playwright, director or the audience.

It is especially important for the actor and the playwright that they be well versed in the criticism of the work or type of work that they are engaged in. This is because most critics lean heavily to character psychoanalysis for their method, and these analysis are meant to provide insight for those who are responsible for portraying the work to its best effect. Thus the more one is versed in criticism, the more competent one is at presenting a work.

Everyone, though most especially the playwright, can receive critical aid not only from the psycho-analytical school but from the critic of the craftsmanship as well. The critic of the craft is just that, he decides which relations work best, when a plot needs a new twist and whether or not a scene is too long.

Probably the one to benefit the most from the critic's work is the conscientious audience. The insight gained from

reading a critique greatly aids in a more perceptive and less troubled viewing. The spectator is aware, in advance, which parts are the more significant ones and which may be enjoyed with an intellectually clear conscience. He knows who and what to watch for and goes home with an improved sense of the art of the theatre as well as an improved knowledge of the significance of what he has seen in terms of importance to his own life.

Of course, the job of any critic is not especially easy, as Oscar Wilde managed to point out so elegantly, but the dramatic critic seems to have inherited more than his fair share of problems. He must not only deal with the problems that all critics have in common, but he must deal with those that he has inherited from seemingly unrelated disciplines as well as some that are unique to the drama.

All critics must justify their existence in some way to somebody, even if just to themselves. They have to come up with denials or excuses for being overly critical or not critical enough. They are expected to be experts not only in their field but also in their subject's creators' life and work as well.

To speak more specifically, the dramatic critic must not only be versed in general areas, but in music, art, set-de-sign and lighting as well. It takes very little knowledge of music to read a novel about the life of John Donne, but the dramatic critic who sees the play adaptation must know if the intermission music helps sustain the mood,

if it is appropriate to the period, and if the orchestra is in key.

To go even deeper into the matter, we must decide if the set looks like a house that Hedda Gabler would have lived in? Did men have wide or narrow lapels in 1944? When a person starts to get gray hair, does he do it at the temples or all over? Does the fog on stage look like one that Mack the Knife would come out of?

On top of all this are the purely dramatic questions. Is the acting style used appropriate to the play? Is the director's hand too evident? Did the actor/director/playwright really understand the lines the characters have to say? Does the work come across effectively to the audience or were they left wondering about what was really going on?

It is certainly not easy to deal with these and a host of other problems in the normal space of a two hour play and many critics do not try. Several have made their fortunes from reading scripts and lecturing, but these poor souls have their own problems to deal with.

It was certainly within Poe's rights to say "We loved with a love that was more than a love," but Shakespeare never put that in his stage directions. He said, "Enter, exit, fanfare" and left it at that. A.C. Bradley did not let this throw him, however, and pursued Shakespeare's tragedies with a vengeance that won him world-wide respect. In many ways, Bradley is the epitome of the informed critic. His knowledge of Shakespeare's works is what every

critic should know before he puts pen to paper.

Specifically, Bradley is well versed in psychology and analytical methods, as well as the psychology of the people for whom the plays were written. He is familiar with the type of audiences the plays were written for and what they would have expected to see. He is also knowledgeable in the accousticle limits of the playhouses in the which the plays were performed. As well as all this, he made a study of related plays and the various relationships, symbols, religions and views of life that ran through-out them all. His only problem was that he died before he could be introduced to modern techniques and dramatic philosophy.

The purpose of this long harangue has not been to solicit tears for the dramatic critic, but merely to provide an introduction to the role of the dramatic critic and give some idea as to how he goes about it.

HARVEY AND THE COMIC CHARACTER

In almost any discussion, it is to the advantage of every one to begin with a set of clearly defined words and terms in order to avoid any misunderstandings. When we choose to deal with a comedy, it is therefore to our advantage to decide just what a comic character is. Is he just the one who makes us laugh, or does being a comic character require something more? To understand fully what a comic character is, it is necessary to have some concept of the comic rhythm itself.

The comic rhythm has been discussed extensively by various critics, but probably best of all by Susan Langer. She is greatly respected as a philosopher of the arts and is probably best known for her books Feeling and Form and Problems of Art.

In her essay entitled 'The Comic Rhythm,' from Feeling and Form, Miss Langer points out to us that drama produces its organic form by creating a semblance of history that molds its elements into a single rhythmic structure. The normal rhythmic structures are tragedy and comedy. These rhythms are not the essence of drama, but are rather the means of dramatic construction.

It is conjectured by Miss Langer that the comic rhythm and comedy grew out of the ancient fertility rights,

which became an expression of the elementary strains and resolutions of our animate nature. They are examples of the unchanging man, of human vitality holding its own in the world. This ability to hold one's own is the very essence of comedy.

The fabric of comic action, and by association the definition of the comic character, is the cyclical upset and recovery of the protagonists' equilibrium. It is his contest with the world and subsequent triumph by wit, luck, or personal power that is comic. By whatever means, though, he will always have a mental recovery of his former state.

From this, we can see that the true test of comedy is not how funny it is, but rather that the test comes in the final climax; when the protagonist must recover his former stability to be considered truly comic. If he does not, he is considered to be tragic.

What does that mean that Elwood is? Certainly he is bludgeoned by fate (Veta), and certainly he recovers and comes out of his trials intact. It must also be taken into account that he does not make any real effort to fight his fate. That is the important point. When Veta presses him, he gives up. He is not an example of ". . . the unchanging man, human vitality holding its own in the world." This is not to say that he would not under any circumstances, because we simply do not know. The structure of the play does not allow him any other chance.

What we have here then, is a character who goes through a tragic rhythm that has a final comic twist. In a

way though, this is just as well because it provides us with a real sense of suspense that we might not otherwise have had. We know this play is intended to be comic by the amount of farce, but we are forced to wait until the very end to be sure that Elwood really is a comic character, and that there will be a comic resolution.

Oddly enough, the only truly comic characters are Nurse Kelly~~x~~ and Dr. Sanderson. They fight against their fate (love) every step of the way until they are finally able to accept it (the mental recovery).

In the archaic sense of the word, Veta is a tragic character because she undergoes a character change. She learns to accept Elwood as he is, and finally to want him that way. The change, though, is to her benefit. She should technically be called a tragi-comic character.

The only tragic character is Dr. Chumley, and I feel rather sorry for him. Because of Elwood, he has allowed his unhappiness to show through, and though he is initially afraid of Harvey, he finally wants him. When Elwood walks off with Harvey at the end, his hopes are shattered. He is truly tragic because he has no mental recovery at all. He is left a broken man who does not want to accept his fate.

It is surely interesting to anyone that in this relatively simple comedy, we have three distinctly different lead characters; Elwood the comic, Veta the tragi-comic and Dr. Chumley as the tragic figure. They provide some interesting contrasts that add a little to the moral of the play.

It could also be argued that this is not a flaw on the grounds that a comedy need not end happily for all concerned, just for the protagonist. The most famous example of this is in the melodrama, where the evil antagonist is always left a chastised and broken man. At least in these cases, there is a feeling of good's usurping evil to take the sting out of it.

There is no sense of 'good' triumphing in Harvey because nobody in it is really 'good' (Except possibly Harvey. I do not consider him to be real, and therefore out of the discussion). Elwood has no control over the outcome, which effectively prevents him from being the conquering power. Veta acts purely from selfish motives, hardly what one would call good. "I don't want Elwood that way. I don't like people like that." (III). Dr. Chumley is also not the evil antagonist who should be chastised, Veta is. We are left, then, with the sour after taste of defeat in our mouths, and there is nothing we as audience can do about it.

HARVEY AND THE PRINCIPLE RELATIONSHIPS

It is not unusual in the history of literature for the title character never to appear in a work; Ibsen did it with Ghosts and Albee with Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf? What is more important than the actual character is the way in which the other characters relate to the absent title role and how this relation affects their relationships with the other characters.

An important aspect of this problem that must be dealt with is who affects the characters most, the non-existent character, others or they themselves. For example; some critics hold that Hamlet's father is a relatively unimportant character. He is dead, so the living must affect Hamlet more.

Although Harvey is not of the same dramatic stature as Hamlet, the problem of the invisible pooka is a very real one. In the case of Dowd it is certainly important to determine just who has the most influence in his life, Harvey or Veta and why, since he is the protagonist.

Another aspect of this same problem, the use of a non-existent character, is of less concern but is still dramatically important. Why did Mary Chase choose to use a six foot invisible rabbit in the first place? Hamlet and the audience saw his father. Why couldn't Elwood have seen

his mother, or why couldn't we see Harvey as well?

To answer the later question, Mrs. Chase had originally intended for Harvey to be visible to the audience. When she went to one of the first rehearsals for the original production, however, she was appalled at the sight of the six foot white rabbit lumbering about the stage and quickly decided to do without him. The effect would have been to distract the audience and thereby to have destroyed the intended effect.

In answer to the first question, the rabbit adds to the comic effect. If Elwood had seen his mother, we would feel more sorrow and the effect would be to create a mood of extreme gloom. Harvey is also not likely to threaten the audience. We are not likely to be able to identify too closely with Elwood, so it is easier to feel distant from and to laugh at his actions. To return to Hamlet, no one laughs at his desire to see a dead loved one, but we can all laugh safely at the obviously ludicrously intended rabbit.

Since we have now determined that the pooka is appropriate for the play's purpose, we must go back to an early question. Why is it that Elwood sees Harvey, and what is the significance of his doing so?

It would seem safe to start on the basis that Elwood is a very lonely man and Harvey seems to provide an escape from this dilemma. The only relationship that Elwood ever had was with his mother who died in his arms. It must have been quite a shock for Elwood to lose the only reciprocated

love in his life. Her advice to him to be either smart or pleasant was all that guided him. Since Mrs. Dowd never wrote to Veta of Harvey, it is safe to assume that there was no Harvey before her death.

With his mother's death, it was no longer possible for Elwood to relate to others by being smart. Too shy to meet others, he created Harvey and, through Harvey learned to be pleasant.

Harvey alone, though, is not enough to meet all of Elwood's needs. This is not particularly surprising, since most of us require a number of friends. What is unusual about Elwood is that he seems to require so many of them. Anyone who spends all his time in bars with strangers obviously has a need to relate to someone. It is, though, a measure of his strength and dependency on drink that he is able to have Harvey with him and put up with the rejection that Harvey can cause.

This is not to say that Elwood is an alcoholic. An alcoholic would have drunk himself under the table and missed his date with Dr. Sanderson. He needs the alcohol to alleviate his shyness to the point that he can communicate about himself to others. Notice that he says "They drink with us. They talk to us. They tell . . . Then I introduce them to Harvey." (II ii)

The shyness is what really makes the ludicrousness of the play work. Since he is not forceful enough to get Harvey introduced, the doctors think that he is fine. Combine this with the fact that the others do not want to take the

time to communicate in the way that Elwood wants to and we have the situation at the end of Act I.

Elwood is very aware of the fact that Harvey turns people from him,

. . . he is bigger and grander than anything they offer me. When they leave, they leave impressed. The same people seldom come back-but that's envy, my dear.
(II ii)

His strength of personality shows when he does not rid himself of Harvey, and drinking makes keeping Harvey easier.

It is quite possible that Mrs. Chase has made Elwood too inconsistent in this sense. Most people would either have given up Harvey entirely or have shrunk wholly to his company. The only one that can truly challenge Elwood's affection for Harvey is Veta.

At this point it must become clear that Veta and Elwood do not communicate at all. He has the insight to know what Veta thinks of Harvey, but he does not realize just how much she hates him until the last act. It is my opinion that Veta is a substitute mother for Elwood. He has transferred the love that he gave his mother to Veta and added to it the loyalty he already had for her. He would do anything for her, which she clearly would not do for him. In this way we have a mental ménage à trois. Veta loves Elwood (in her own way) but will do nothing for him, Elwood would do anything for Veta or Harvey though he can not help Harvey at all, and Harvey would do anything for Elwood, seemingly even for Veta, but Elwood has nothing for

not frequent bars before his mother's death, therefore blames Harvey for his doing so. Surely Mrs. Dowd would have written to her if the situation had been otherwise.

What Veta does not know is what we have already discovered, that she cannot communicate with Elwood at all. Surprisingly, she knows he is lonely yet she will not do anything about it. On the basis of this evidence, it is hard for me to believe that Mrs. Chase put too much effort into her character. She has allowed Elwood to be someone that Veta can lean on, get a sense of security from, but whose intrusion into her tidy world upsets her tremendously. Notice the conflict in this statement, "The next time you take him, Judge. Wait until Elwood hears what they did to me. He won't stand for it." (II i).

Eventually, due to the necessary movement of the play Veta learns the true value of Elwood from the cab driver, and we see the climax of the play. I find it a little hard to believe that Veta would listen seriously to a cab driver, but that is beside the point. The point is that from here on, the rest of the action is set and irreversible.

Since Veta now accepts Elwood as he is, she will undoubtedly become more responsive to him and fulfill more of his needs. As she does so Elwood will need Harvey less and less until he stops seeing him altogether.

It is now time to return to one of the original questions that started this essay, who affects who the most? All that I have written up to this point is not entirely irrelevant to the question. It is important that we realize

the depth of everyone's relationships to fully appreciate this point. As far as relations are concerned, Harvey is very unimportant. When Veta asks Elwood to give him up, he does. When she realizes that Harvey is responsible for the fracas about the coin purse, she does not send Elwood back in for the injection. He is more important. Elwood and Veta mean more to each other than anyone else. Again, this seems like a terrible inconsistency, but the script is already there.

HARVEY AND THE DRAMATIC ILLUSION

The Dramatic Illusion occurs when the artist succeeds in two things; in causing the audience to suspend their view of the subject, and in causing the audience to accept the artist's view of it. The audience is then in union with the work. The name given to this process is "creating a 'virtual history.'"

Creating a virtual history in the dramatic mode is the method by which the dramatist is able to produce the effect of dramatic illusion. Virtual history is more than places and things. Susan Langer lists no less than four principle factors that go into the creation of a virtual history and the dramatic illusion.

The first method is by creating a tension between the present and the future. We must feel that in some way the future is vital at every stage of the play. We want to know what is going to happen to the characters next, but the playwright does not allow the present to provide sufficient information to make accurate predictions about the future.

Since we know that the comic form involves the fall and resurrection of the comic protagonist, it is his future we are primarily worried about. In this case, it is the future of Elwood Dowd. Certainly we may worry about the others as well, but it is primarily for Elwood that we are

concerned.

Tension is very evident between Elwood's present and his future. The outside forces acting on him are trying to make a fundamental change on his person and he is all too willing to resist. This, though, does not explain why we become actively involved in the tension. That is where the playwright's craft is shown. Mrs. Chase chooses to use two different methods. The first is Elwood's own unconscious efforts to avoid it. He really only makes one conscious effort to avoid his fate, and that comes late in the third act. The other method used is to evoke our sympathy for Elwood.

By using these, efforts and sympathy, we become actively involved in the tension of the present and the future. The present is unacceptable and the foreseeable future is not clear at all. To resolve this tension, it is necessary to do something i.e., the situation must be advanced. This is the second method that Miss Langer sets forth.

The situation is the complex of the present and future actions. That is to say, it is the mental uncertainty that comes with knowledge of the present and hypothetical knowledge of the future. This differs from tension between present and future because it is a concern for the future for its own sake, i.e. we want to know what happens next because we are interested in the action because it is unknown, not because of the techniques used to gain tension.

The situation is of necessity organic, it grows and

moves with the action. It should not be static. This seems to be an almost ridiculous point to bring up, of course the situation cannot be static. Certainly in Harvey it is not. The tension is practically the same throughout, but the situation is constantly changing. The absurdists though, seemed to have developed the static situation into a fine art, such as in Waiting for Godot.

Because life is nearly always an arena of cause and effect, drama must also show causes as well as effects if it is to present a virtual history. This is Miss Langer's third, and probably most important, part of the dramatic illusion; the necessity of showing the cause or background of every action that occurs. In the actors' terminology, this is called 'motivation.'

Miss Langer does not hesitate to make a difficult problem worse; she calls everything an action, even the lines that are spoken. The playwright has to make each line consistent with the previous ones and show that there is a reason for it that has its origin in the past.

In the populist terminology, what this all boils down to is character development, the act of making a characters' words and actions consistent with himself and the situation he is in. It is almost certainly here that Mrs. Chase has her worst problems.

This is not to say that she fails. Veta's actions are arranged for her during II, and for the most part she is very consistent. Wilson is extremely well done in this respect. It is possible to see exactly where he is coming

from and predict accurately where is going to.

Unfortunately, she is not quite so successful all the way through. Dr. Chumley is something of an enigma. Why does he, for instance, suddenly start believing in Harvey, even before he has met him? There is no reason for him to, but he does.

For the most part though, Mrs. Chase is successful in showing us the thought patterns behind her characters' words and deeds. It is only occasionally that she fails completely.

Lastly, I would like to deal with the fourth part of Miss Langer's theory, the need for detachment. According to Miss Langer, in order to fully appreciate art, the audience must be separated from it; the degree of which is dependant on both the work and the individual's capacity for distance. The artist is required to create and cultivate this distance.

Without going into further details about the nature of detachment, it is obvious that overt comedy creates a certain amount of detachment. Harvey is certainly a case in point.

Furthermore, the comic, and thereby the detachment, master stroke of Harvey is Harvey himself. His presence throws the play out of reality, and allows us to get only as close as we want.

Once again, though, Dr. Chumley manages to get in the way. He is too real to allow us to detach ourselves. He almost certainly should not have been in this play.

We have discussed briefly the four principle methods that Miss Langer suggests for achieving Dramatic Illusion and how they work in Harvey. Harvey is not perfect by any means, but it does work fairly well. It is a pity that Mrs. Chase did not proceed as a playwright. She quite obviously had potential.