

THE ARCHITECTURE OF DRAMA

By David Letwin, Joe Stockdale, Robin Stockdale

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large.

Because of time restrictions, I rarely review books that I receive. However, "The Architecture of Drama" approaches the issues of dramatic writing and production with such clarity and ease I feel obligated to make the theatres of Hampton Roads, where I review national tours, local productions of plays, musicals and operas for WHRO-FM, aware of it. While the book is probably of greatest importance to college students who are aspiring playwrights or directors, to youngsters at the Governor's School of the Arts in Norfolk, Virginia and various professional and nonprofessional theatre groups, it is in fact of value to anyone who cares about dramatic writing in its multiple forms from TV to Broadway

"The Poetics of Aristotle" is used throughout the book along with the authors' ideas and those of numerous writers and critics. However, a dry "scholarly dissertation" this book is not. There is considerable humor that makes it possible to laugh and learn. Aristotelian thought leads to the architectural building blocks as explained by the authors. It is the architecture of drama that aids us in conveying coherency and conflict and an "imitation of life" to an audience in a manner that satisfies and entertains. Architecture in the arts is also concerned with aesthetics. It is indicative of the spirit of this study to note that the authors use Michelangelo's "David" and the overture to the musical "Gypsy" in the same paragraph as examples of artistic beauty.

As they are evident in plays ranging from "Oedipus Rex" to "The Wizard of Oz", the five building blocks listed below are examined separately and in their interdependent relationship to one another:

PLOT (the selection and arrangement of events in the story)

CHARACTER (the choices and actions of the people in the plot)

THEME (the artist point of view on the topic addressed)

STYLE (the characteristic mode through which the drama expresses itself)

GENRE (the type of story being presented)

Too often the local productions I see seem to be happening without a plan. I frequently remark that the director, and consequently the cast, do not know what the play is about or how to present it. There is no architect. "The Architecture of Drama" assumes this role to help in situations such as these.

It is important to note that there are no rules laid down, no do's or don'ts that the theatre artist must follow. In the epilogue the writers say, "Plot, character, theme, genre and style are as much about real human actions as they are about the art forms of plays or film." They go on to say that the words of the text are not written in stone but on paper. Think and rethink they imply.

This richly detailed analysis of how dramatic literature is created and moved from page to stage or screen is a standing room only house full of down to earth knowledge. It belongs in all libraries, both personal and public.

This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.