II

CHARACTER

1. The Bone Structure

IN THE previous chapter we showed why premise is necessary as the first step in writing a good play. In the following chapters we shall discuss the importance of character. We shall vivisect a character and try to find out just what elements go into this being called "man." Character is the fundamental material we are forced to work with, so we must know character as thoroughly as possible.

Henrik Ibsen, speaking of his working methods, has said:

When I am writing I must be alone; if I have eight characters of a drama to do with I have society enough; they keep me busy; I must learn to know them. And this process of making their acquaintance is slow and painful. I make, as a rule, three casts of my dramas, which differ considerably from each other. I mean in characteristics, not in the course of the treatment. When I first settle down to work out my material, I feel as if I have to get to know my characters on a railway journey; the first acquaintance is struck up, and we have chatted about this and that. When I write it down again, I already see everything much more clearly, and I know the people as if I had stayed with them for a month at a watering place. I have grasped the leading points of their characters and their little peculiarities.

What did Ibsen see? What did he mean when he said, "I have grasped the leading points of their characters and their

little peculiarities." Let us try to discover the leading points not only in one, but in all characters.

Every object has three dimensions: depth, height, width. Human beings have an additional three dimensions: physiology, sociology, psychology. Without a knowledge of these three dimensions we cannot appraise a human being.

It is not enough, in your study of a man, to know if he is rude, polite, religious, atheistic, moral, degenerate. You must know why. We want to know why man is as he is, why his character is constantly changing, and why it must change whether he wishes it or no.

The first dimension, in the order of simplicity, is the physiological. It would be idle to argue that a hunchback sees the world exactly opposite from a perfect physical specimen. A lame, a blind, a deaf, an ugly, a beautiful, a tall, a short person —each of these sees everything differently from the other. A sick man sees health as the supreme good; a healthy person belittles the importance of health, if he thinks of it at all.

Our physical make-up certainly colors our outlook on life. It influences us endlessly, helping to make us tolerant, defiant, humble, or arrogant. It affects our mental development, serves as a basis for inferiority and superiority complexes. It is the most obvious of man's first set of dimensions.

Sociology is the second dimension to be studied. If you were born in a basement, and your playground was the dirty city street, your reactions would differ from those of the boy who was born in a mansion and played in beautiful and antiseptic surroundings.

But we cannot make an exact analysis of your differences from him, or from the little boy who lived next door in the same tenement, until we know more about both of you. Who was your father, your mother? Were they sick or well? What was their earning power? Who were your friends? How did you influence or affect them? How did they affect you? What kind of clothes do you like? What books do you read? Do you

go to church? What do you eat, think, like, dislike? Who are you, sociologically speaking?

The third dimension, psychology, is the product of the other two. Their combined influence gives life to ambition, frustration, temperament, attitudes, complexes. Psychology, then, rounds out the three dimensions.

If we wish to understand the action of any individual, we must look at the motivation which compels him to act as he does. Let us look first at his physical make-up.

Is he sick? He may have a lingering illness that he knows nothing of, but the author must know about it because only in this way can he understand the character. This illness affects the man's attitude toward things about him. We certainly behave differently during illness, convalescence, and perfect health.

Does a man have big ears, bulging eyes, long hairy arms? All these are likely to condition him to an outlook which would affect his every action.

Does he hate to talk about crooked noses, big mouths, thick lips, big feet? Perhaps it is because he has one of these defects. One human being takes such a physical liability with resignation, another makes fun of himself, a third is resentful. One thing is certain, no one escapes the effect of such a shortcoming. Does this character of ours possess a feeling of dissatisfaction with himself? It will color his outlook, quicken his conflict with others, or make him sluggish and resigned. But it will affect him.

Important as this physical dimension is, it is only part of the whole. We must not forget to add the background for this physical picture. These two will round out each other, unite, and give birth to the third dimension, the mental state.

A sex pervert is a sex pervert, as far as the general public is concerned. But to the psychologist he is the product of his background, his physiology, his heredity, his education.

If we understand that these three dimensions can provide the reason for every phase of human conduct, it will be easy for us to write about any character and trace his motivation to its source.

Analyze any work of art which has withstood the ravages of time, and you will find that it has lived, and will live, because it possesses the three dimensions. Leave out one of the three, and although your plot may be exciting and you may make a fortune, your play will still not be a literary success.

When you read drama criticisms in your daily papers you encounter certain terminology time and again: dull, unconvincing, stock characters (badly drawn, that is), familiar situations, boring. They all refer to one flaw—the lack of tridimensional characters.

Don't believe, when your play is condemned as "familiar," that you must hunt for fantastic situations. The moment your characters are rounded, in terms of the three dimensions, you will find that they are not only exciting theater, but novel as well.

Literature has many tridimensional characters—Hamlet, for instance. We not only know his age, his appearance, his state of health; we can easily surmise his idiosyncrasies. His background, his sociology, give impetus to the play. We know the political situation at the time, the relationship between his parents, the events that have gone before and the effect they have had upon him. We know his personal premise, and its motivation. We know his psychology, and we can see clearly how it results from his physical and sociological make-up. In short, we know Hamlet as we can never hope to know ourselves.

Shakespeare's great plays are built on characters: Macbeth, King Lear, Othello, and the rest are striking examples of tridimensionality.

(It is not our intention here to go into a critical analysis of

famous plays. Suffice it to say that in every case the author created characters, or intended to. How he succeeded, and why, will be analyzed in another chapter.)

Euripides' *Medea* is a classical example of how a play should grow out of character. The author did not need an Aphrodite to cause Medea to fall in love with Jason. It was the custom of those times to show the interference of the gods, but the behavior of the characters is logical without it. Medea, or any woman, will love the man who appeals to her, and will sometimes make sacrifices hard to believe.

Medea had her brother slain for her love. Not long ago, in New York, a woman lured her two children into a forest, cut their throats, poured gasoline over them and burned them —for love. There is no indication of the supernatural in this. It is merely the good old-fashioned mating instinct run riot. If we knew the background and the physical composition of this modern Medea, her terrible deed would become comprehensible to us.

Here is a guide, then, a step-by-step outline of how a tridimensional-character bone structure should look.

PHYSIOLOGY

1. *Sex*
2. *Age*
3. *Height and weight*
4. *Color of hair, eyes, skin*
5. *Posture*
6. *Appearance:* good-looking, over- or underweight, clean, neat, pleasant, untidy. Shape of head, face, limbs.
7. *Defects:* deformities, abnormalities, birthmarks. Diseases.
8. *Heredity*

SOCIOLOGY

1. *Class:* lower, middle, upper.
2. *Occupation:* type of work, hours of work, income, con-

dition of work, union or nonunion, attitude toward organization, suitability for work.

3. *Education:* amount, kind of schools, marks, favorite subjects, poorest subjects, aptitudes.
4. *Home life:* parents living, earning power, orphan, parents separated or divorced, parents' habits, parents' mental development, parents' vices, neglect. Character's marital status.
5. *Religion*
6. *Race, nationality*
7. *Place in community:* leader among friends, clubs, sports.
8. *Political affiliations*
9. *Amusements, hobbies:* books, newspapers, magazines he reads.

PSYCHOLOGY

1. *Sex life, moral standards*
2. *Personal premise, ambition*
3. *Frustrations, chief disappointments*
4. *Temperament:* choleric, easygoing, pessimistic, optimistic.
5. *Attitude toward life:* resigned, militant, defeatist.
6. *Complexes:* obsessions, inhibitions, superstitions, phobias.
7. *Extrovert, introvert, ambivert*
8. *Abilities:* languages, talents.
9. *Qualities:* imagination, judgment, taste, poise.
10. *I.Q.*

This is the bone structure of a character; which the author must know thoroughly, and upon which he must build.

QUESTION: How can we fuse these three dimensions into a unity?

ANSWER: Take the kids in Sidney Kingsley's *Dead End,* for instance. All but one are physically well. There are no ap-

parently serious complexes resulting from physical deficiencies. In their lives, then, environment will be the deciding factor. Hero worship; lack of education, of clothing, of supervision; and, above all, the constant presence of poverty and hunger will shape their views of the world, and, as a consequence, their attitude and conduct toward society. The three dimensions have combined to produce one outstanding trait.

QUESTION: Would the same environment produce the same reaction on each child, or will it affect them differently as they differ from each other?

ANSWER: No two individuals react identically, since no two are the same. One boy may have no mental reservations: he looks upon his juvenile crimes as preparation for a glorious career as a gangster; another participates in the mob activities from a sense of loyalty, or from fear, or to build up a reputation for courage. Still another is aware of the danger of his course, but sees no other way out of poverty. Minute physical differences between the individuals, and their psychological development, will influence their reactions to the same sociological conditions. Science will tell you that no two snowflakes have ever been discovered to be identical. The slightest disturbance in the atmosphere, the direction of the wind, the position of the falling snowflake, will alter the pattern. Thus there is endless variety in their design. The same law governs us all. Whether one's father is always kind, or only kind occasionally, or kind but once, or never kind, will profoundly affect one's development. And if the paternal kindness coincided with one's happiest and most contented moments, it might pass unrecognized. Every move hinges upon the peculiar circumstances of the given moment.

QUESTION: There are certain human manifestations which do not appear to fall into the three categories. I've noticed in myself periods of depression, or excitement, which seem

unmotivated. Being observant, I've tried to track down the source of these mysterious disturbances, without success. I can truthfully say that these periods sometimes occurred when I had no economic stress or mental anxiety. Why are you laughing?

ANSWER: You remind me of a friend of mine—a writer—who told me a strange story about himself. The incident occurred when he was thirty years old. He was apparently healthy; he had won recognition for his work; he earned more money than he knew what to do with; he was married and loved his wife and two children dearly. One day, to his utter astonishment, he realized that he didn't give a hoot about what was going to happen to his family, his career, or his life. He was bored to distraction. Nothing under the sun interested him; he anticipated everything his friends said and did. He couldn't stand the same horrible routine day after day, week after week; the same woman, the same food, the same friends, the same murder stories in the papers day in and day out. They almost drove him mad. It was as mysterious as your case. Perhaps he had ceased to love his wife? He had thought of that, and was desperate enough to experiment. He did but with no success. He found no difference in his love. He was honestly and truly bored with life. He stopped writing, stopped seeing his friends, and finally decided that he'd be better off dead. The thought did not come in a moment of despair. He reasoned it out coolly, without missing a heartbeat. The earth had gone on for billions of years before his birth, he mused, and would go on after his demise. What difference could it make if he left a little before his appointed time?

So he sent his family away to a friend's home and sat down to write his last letter, explaining his course of action to his wife. It was not an easy letter to write. It did not sound convincing, and he sweated over it as he had never done over his plays. Suddenly he felt a sharp, abdominal

cramp. There was a stabbing pain, persistent, excruciating. He found himself in an awkward situation. He wanted to kill himself, but it was idiotic to die with an ache in the stomach. Besides, he had to finish his letter.

He decided that the sensible thing would be to take a cathartic and ease the pain. He did so. When he went back to his desk again to finish his last epistle, he found it harder to write than ever. The reasons he had marshaled previously sounded fantastic to him—even stupid. He became aware of the brilliant sunshine which played over his desk, of the alternate light and shadow on the houses across the street. The trees had never seemed so green and refreshing; life had never seemed so desirable. He wanted to see, smell, feel, walk. . . .

QUESTION: Do you mean to say that he had entirely lost his desire to die?

ANSWER: Precisely. He found himself minus a clogged-up body and plus a million reasons to live. He really was a new man.

QUESTION: Then physical conditions can really influence the mind so completely as to mean the difference between life and death?

ANSWER: Ask your family doctor.

QUESTION: It seems to me that not every reaction of the mind or body springs from a physical or economic cause. I know cases—

ANSWER: We know cases, too. Let's say X falls in love with a desirable girl. His love is unrequited, so he feels frustrated, becomes despondent, and winds up seriously ill. But how can this be? Love, according to many, is ethereal, outside the pale of economy or mere materialism. Shall we investigate? Love, like all emotions, originates in the brain. Brain, however one looks at it, is composed of tissue, cells, blood vessels. This is purely physical. The slightest physical disturbance registers first on the brain, which re-

acts instantaneously. A serious disappointment has its effect on the brain—the physical brain—which transmits the message to the body. Remember that love, however ethereal, affects such physical functions as digestion and sleeping.

QUESTION: But suppose the emotion isn't physical at all? Suppose there aren't any factors like desire in it?

ANSWER: All emotion has physical effects. Let us take what is supposed to be the noblest emotion of them all—mother love. This particular mother has no financial difficulties. She has plenty of money, she's healthy, she's happy. Her daughter falls in love with a young man whom the mother considers a liability rather than an asset. He is not dangerous in any way, merely unsuitable from the mother's point of view. But the daughter runs away with him.

The mother's first reaction will be shock, followed by bitter disappointment. Then will come shame, self-pity. All of these might usher in an attack of hysteria. These attacks increase in frequency and kind, weaken the resistance of the body, and culminate in actual illness—even invalidism.

QUESTION: Is all psychological reaction the result of your three dimensions?

ANSWER: Let us see. Why did the mother object so strenuously to the daughter's choice of husband? His appearance? Perhaps, although the average mother hides her disappointment when her son-in-law is not an Adonis. Unless he is actually a monster, his appearance should not cause a violent reaction. But in any case, the mother's disapproval of his appearance would have been conditioned by her own background, by what her father looked like, her brothers, her favorite motion-picture star.

Another source of disappointment—and a more probable one—would be the young man's financial status. If he cannot support her daughter well, or at all, the mother

will be a prey to fear for her daughter and for herself. Even if she can afford to keep her daughter from poverty, she cannot keep her friends from sneering at the poor match. She may have to set the boy up in business—only to find him a poor businessman who may lose all her savings. Or perhaps the young man is handsome, and financially stable, and of another race? All of the mother's training will rise up against him. She will have a host of memories springing up from her past: warnings of social ostracism, of mythical differences between the races, of superstitions and chauvinism completely without foundation.

Think of any reason you like, from the young man's physical state through the birthplace of his great-grandfather, and you will find that anything to which the mother objects has a physical or sociological foundation, both in him and in her. Try as you will, you must come back to the three dimensions.

QUESTION: Might not this principle of tridimensionality limit the scope of material for the writer?

ANSWER: On the contrary. It opens up undreamed-of perspectives and an entirely new world for exploration and discovery.

QUESTION: You mentioned height, age, skin coloring, in your outline of a character's bone structure. Must all these be incorporated in our play?

ANSWER: You must know all of these, but they need not be mentioned. They come through in the behavior of the character, not in any expository material about him. The attitude of a man who is six feet in height will differ considerably from that of a man who measures four feet, eight inches. And the reaction of a woman with a pock-marked face will not be the same as that of a girl famed for her lovely complexion. You must know what your character is, in every detail, to know what he will do in a given situation.

Anything that happens in your play must come directly

from the characters you have chosen to prove your premise, and they must be characters strong enough to prove the premise without forcing.

2. *Environment*

When a friend invites you to a party, and after a moment's hesitation you reply, "All right, I'll be there," you are making an unassuming statement. But that statement is the result of a complicated mental process.

Your acceptance of the invitation may have sprung from loneliness, from a desire to avoid a dull evening, from excess physical energy, from desperation. You may have felt that mingling with people would bring forgetfulness of a problem, or new hope, or inspiration. The truth, however, is that even such a simple matter as saying "yes" or "no" is the product of elaborate reviewing, reshifting, revaluating of fancied or real, mental or physical, economic or sociological conditions around us.

Words have a complex structure. We use them glibly, without realizing that they too are compounds of many elements. Let us vivisect the word "happiness," for instance. Let us try to discover what elements go into the making of complete happiness.

Can a person be "happy" if he has everything but health? Obviously not, since we refer to utter happiness, happiness without reservations. So health must be put down as a necessary element for "happiness."

Can a person be "happy" with nothing but health? Hardly. One may feel joy, exuberance, freedom, but not happiness. Remember that we are speaking of happiness in its purest form. When you exclaim, "Boy, how happy I am!" upon receiving a long-desired gift, what you are experiencing is not happiness. It is joy, fulfillment, surprise, but not happiness.

Then we are not daring too much if we say that a man needs, besides health, a job in which he can make a comfortable living. We shall take it for granted that the man is not abused on his job, for that would negate the possibility of his being happy. The ingredients for happiness, so far, are health and a satisfactory position.

But can a man be happy who possesses both of these and no warm, human affection? There need be little argument on this point. A man needs someone whom he can love and who loves him in return. So let us add love to the other requirements.

Would you be happy if your position, although satisfactory, held no chance for advancement? Would a good job, health, and love suffice, if the future held for you no hope of development, of improvement? We don't think so. Perhaps your position will never change, but you can be happy in the hope that it will. Let us therefore add hope to our list of ingredients.

Our recipe now reads: health, a satisfactory position, love, and hope equal happiness. Further subdivisions might be made, but the four main ingredients are enough to prove that a word is the product of many elements. Of course, the meaning of the word "happiness" will go through innumerable metamorphoses, according to the place, climate, conditions, under which it is used.

Protoplasm is one of the simplest of living substances, yet it contains carbon, oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, sulphur, phosphorus, chlorine, potassium, sodium, calcium, magnesium, iron. Simple protoplasm, in other words, contains the same elements as complex man.

We referred to protoplasm as "simple," in comparing it with man. Yet protoplasm is complex, compared with inanimate things. It occupies both a high and a low place on the scale of complexity. Contradictory? No more so than anything

else in nature. The principle of contradiction and tension makes motion possible, and life is motion, essentially.

What would have happened to the protoplasm at the beginning of time as we know it, if it had not possessed motion? Nothing. It could not have existed and life would have been impossible. Through motion higher forms of life developed, the specific form being determined by the place, climate, type of food, abundance of food, light or lack of light.

Give a person all the elements required for life, but alter one of them—heat, let us say, or light—and you will completely change his life. If you doubt this, you can experiment on yourself. Let us suppose that you are happy, that you have all the four necessary elements. Bandage your eyes for twenty-four hours. Close out all light. You are still healthy, still employed, still loved and loving, still hopeful. Moreover, you know that after twenty-four hours you will remove the bandages. You are not really blind, you are merely refraining from sight at your own will. Yet that experiment will change your entire attitude.

You will find the same thing to be true if you stop hearing for one day, or temporarily deprive yourself of the use of one limb. Eat any one food you like and nothing else, for months —even for a couple of weeks. What do you think your reaction will be? You'll loathe that food the rest of your life.

Would it make a great difference in your life if you were forced to sleep in a bug-infested, foul room, on a dirty floor, with only a few rags for covering or a mattress? Undoubtedly. Even if you lived in foul surroundings for only a day, it would multiply your appreciation of cleanliness and comfort.

It seems that human beings react to environment exactly as the original one-celled creatures did when they changed their shape, color, and species *under the pressure of environment.*

We are forcing this point strenuously because it is of the utmost importance that we understand the principle of change

in character. A character is in constant change. The smallest disturbance of his well-ordered life will ruffle his placidity and create a mental upheaval, just as a stone which slides through the surface of a pond will create far-reaching rings of motion.

If it is true that every man is influenced by his environment, health, and economic background, as we have tried to prove, then it is evident that, since everything is in a process of constant change (environment, health, and economic background, naturally, being part of everything), the man too will change. As a matter of fact, he is the center of this constant movement.

Don't forget a fundamental truism: everything is changeable, only change is eternal.

Take, for instance, a prosperous businessman—a drygoods merchant. He is happy. His business is on the upgrade. His wife, his three children are also contented. It is a rare case, in fact, an almost impossible case, but it will illustrate our point. As far as he and his family are concerned, this man is contented. Then a big industrialist somewhere starts a movement to cut wages and destroy unions. It seems to our man that this is a wise thing to do. The worker, he thinks, has become too uppish lately. Why, if things continue at the rate workers wish, they may very well take over industry and ruin the country. Since our man has something to lose, he feels that he and his family are in danger.

A slow but persistently growing uneasiness steals over him. He is profoundly disturbed. He reads more about this grave problem. He may or may not know that his fear is being created by a few rich industrialists who wish to cut wages and are spending fabulous sums to spread panic over the country. Our man is caught in this web of propaganda. He wants to do his share in saving his nation from destruction. He cuts wages, unaware that by this act he has not only antagonized his employees, but has helped a movement which will prove

a boomerang in the end, and may even destroy his own livelihood. With the reduction of purchasing power, which he has caused, his business may be one of the first to suffer.

Our man will suffer even if he knows what it is all about and does not cut wages. He will be caught in the reaction to his fellow employers' wage cutting. Changing conditions will mold him, whether or not he wants to be molded, and they will affect his family with him. He can't give them as much money as he did, because the source of easy money has dried up. This will precipitate some dissension among the members of the family and may even cause an eventual split.

A war in Europe or China, a strike in San Francisco, Hitler's attack on the democracies, will affect us as surely as if we had been at the scene. Every human event comes home, at long last, to roost. We find to our sorrow, perhaps, that even seemingly unrelated things are very much related to each other—and to us.

There is no escape—for our drygoods merchant or anyone else.

Banks and governments are as subject to change as the rest of us. We saw this in the 1929 depression. Countless millions of dollars were lost. After the First World War, government after government toppled, and new governments or new systems took their places. Your money, your investments, were swept away overnight, and your security with them. You, as an individual, are only as secure as the rest of the world is under prevailing circumstances.

A character, then, is the sum total of his physical make-up and the influences his environment exerts upon him. Look at the flowers. It makes a great difference in their development if they receive the morning sun, the midday sun, or the afternoon sun.

Our minds, no less than our bodies, respond to external influences. Early memories are so deep-rooted that we are often unconscious of them. We can make determined efforts

to rid ourselves of past influences, to escape from our instincts, but we remain in their grip. Unconscious recollections color our judgment regardless of how fair we try to be.

Woodruff says, in *Animal Biology:*

It is impossible to consider protoplasm except in connection with its surroundings, whatever they may be, variations in its environment and variations in its activities being reflected directly or indirectly in its appearance.

Watch women walking in the rain under their colored umbrellas, and you'll notice that their faces reflect the color of the umbrellas they carry. Our own childhood recollections, memories, experiences, become an indelible part of us and will reflect upon and color our minds. We cannot see things otherwise than this reflection permits us to see them. We may argue against this coloration, we may put up a conscious fight against it, we may even act against our natural inclinations, but we still reflect all we represent.

Life is change. The smallest disturbance alters the pattern of the whole. The environment changes, and man with it. If a young man meets a young lady under the right circumstances, he may be drawn to her by their common interest in literature, or the arts, or sports. This common interest toward a subject may deepen until they feel fondness and sympathy. The sympathy grows, and before they realize it, it will be attachment, which is deeper than sympathy or fondness. If nothing disturbs this harmony, it will become infatuation. Infatuation is not yet love, but it approaches love as it moves on to the stage of devotion and then to rapture, or adoration which is already love. Love is the last stage. It can be tested by sacrifice. Real love is the capacity to endure any hardship for the beloved.

The emotions of two people might follow this course if everything worked out just right; if nothing interferes with

their budding romance, they may marry and live happily ever after. But suppose that when this same young couple reaches the stage of attachment, a malignant gossiper informs the young man that the lady in question had an affair before she knew him. If the young man had a bad experience before, he will shy away from the young woman. From attachment he will change to coolness, from coolness to malice, from malice to antipathy. If the girl is defiant and not sorry for the past, antipathy might ripen into bitterness, and bitterness to detestation. On the other hand, if the mother of the same young man had an experience like this young lady's, and became a better wife and mother in consequence, then the young man's attachment might grow into love much more quickly than otherwise.

This simple love affair is subject to any number of variations. Too much or too little money will influence its course. A steady or insecure job will do the same. Health or sickness may speed up or slow down love's consummation. The financial and social status of either family may affect the courtship for better or worse. Heredity may upset the applecart.

Every human being is in a state of constant fluctuation and change. Nothing is static in nature, least of all man.

As we pointed out before, a character is the sum total of his physical make-up and the influences his environment exerts upon him at that particular moment.

3. *The Dialectical Approach*

What is dialectics? The word comes to us from the old Greeks who used it to mean a conversation or dialogue. Now, the citizens of Athens regarded conversation as a supreme art—the art of discovering truth—and contested against one another to find the best conversationalist, or dialectician. Above all other Greeks, Socrates stands out as most perfect.

We may read some of his conversations in Plato's *Dialogues,* which yield us, on close study, the secret of his art. Socrates discovers truth by this process: he states a proposition, finds a contradiction to it, and, correcting it in the light of this contradiction, finds a new contradiction. This continues indefinitely.

Let us look further into this method. Movement of the conversation is secured by three steps. First, statement of the proposition, called *thesis.* Then the discovery of a contradiction to this proposition, called *antithesis,* being the opposite of the original proposition. Now, resolution of this contradiction necessitates correction of the original proposition, and formulation of a third proposition, the *synthesis,* being the combination of the original proposition and the contradiction to it.

These three steps—thesis, antithesis, and synthesis—are the law of all movement. Everything that moves constantly negates itself. All things change toward their opposites through movement. The present becomes the past, the future becomes the present. There is nothing which does not move.

Constant change is the very essence of all existence. Everything in time passes into its opposite. Everything within itself contains its own opposite. Change is a force which impels it to move, and this very movement becomes something different from what it was. The past becomes the present and both determine the future. New life arises from the old, and this new life is the combination of the old with the contradiction which has destroyed it. This contradiction that causes the change goes on forever.

A human being is a maze of seeming contradictions. Planning one thing, he at once does another; loving, he believes he hates. Man oppressed, humiliated, beaten, still professes sympathy and understanding for those who have beaten, humiliated, and oppressed him.

How can we explain these contradictions?

Why does the man you befriend turn against you? Why does son turn against father, daughter against mother?

A boy runs away from home because his mother insists that he sweep their dingy, two-room apartment. He hates sweeping. But he is quite content with a job as assistant janitor in a big house—his main function being to sweep the halls and street. Why?

A twelve-year-old girl marries a fifty-year-old man—and is sincerely happy. A thief becomes a worthy citizen, a wealthy gentleman becomes a thief. The daughter of a respectable and religious family crashes into the underworld and prostitution. Why?

On the surface, these examples are part of a riddle, part of the so-called "mystery of life." But they can be explained, dialectically. It is a Herculean task, but not an impossible one if we remember that without contradiction there would be no motion and no life. Without contradiction there would be no universe. Stars, moon, earth would not exist—nor would we. Hegel said: *

It is only because a thing contains a contradiction within itself that it moves and acquires impulse and activity. That is the process of all motion and all development.

Adoratsky, in his *Dialectics,* writes:

The general laws of dialectics are universal: they are to be found in the movement and development of the immeasurable, vast, luminous nebulae from which in the spaces of the universe the stellar systems are formed . . . in the internal structure of molecules and atoms and in the movement of electrons and protons.

Zeno, in the fifth century B.C., was father of dialectics. Adoratsky quotes Zeno's demonstrations:

An arrow, in the course of its flight, is bound to be at some definite point of its path and occupy some definite place. If that be so, then

* *The Science of Logic.*

at each given moment it is at a definite point in a state of rest, that is, motionless; hence, it is not moving at all. We therefore see that motion cannot be expressed without resorting to contradictory statements. The arrow is at a given place, yet at the same time is not in that place. It is only by expressing both these contradictory affirmations coincidentally that we can depict motion.

Let us stop here and freeze a human being into immobility. Let us analyze thoroughly the girl who left a religious home to become a prostitute. It is not enough to say that certain forces caused her degeneration. There were forces, of course, but what were they? Did some supernatural guidance move her? Did she honestly find prostitution alluring? Hardly. She had read about it, heard from her parents, from the pastor of her church, that prostitution is one of the worst evils in society, full of uncertainty, disease, horror. She knew that a prostitute is hunted by the law, fleeced by pimps, taken advantage of by clients and masters alike, and finally left to die a lonely, miserable death.

It is almost impossible that a normal, well-bred girl would wish to become a prostitute. Yet this one did become a prostitute—and others have.

To understand the dialectical reasons for this girl's action we must know her thoroughly. Only then can we perceive the contradictions within and without her, and through these contradictions, the movement which is life.

Let us call this girl Irene; here is the bone structure of Irene's character.

PHYSIOLOGY

Sex: Female.
Age: Nineteen.
Height: Five feet, two inches.
Weight: 110 pounds.
Color of hair: Dark brown.
Color of eyes: Brown.

Skin: Fair.
Posture: Straight.
Appearance: Attractive.
Neat: Yes, very.
Health: She had an appendix operation when she was fifteen. She is susceptible to colds, and the whole family is morbidly afraid that she will become tubercular. She is seemingly unconcerned, but actually she is convinced that she will die young, and wishes to enjoy life while she can.
Birthmarks: None.
Abnormalities: None, if we overlook her hypersensitivity.
Heredity: A weak constitution, from her mother.

SOCIOLOGY

Class: Middle class. Her family lives in comfort. Father has a general store, but of late competition has been making his life miserable. He fears that he will be frozen out by younger people. This fear is eventually proved valid, but he would never burden his family with it.
Occupation: None. Irene is supposed to help around the house, but she prefers to read and let the burden fall on her seventeen-year-old sister, Sylvia.
Education: High school. She wanted to drop out in the second year, but her parents' insistence and outright threats made her finish the course somehow. She never liked school or study. She had no comprehension of mathematics or geography, but she liked history. The bravery, love affairs, betrayals, fascinated her. She read history profusely, but not as nonfiction. Dates and names were unimportant, and only the glamour mattered. Her memory was not retentive, and her sloppy working habits led to constant conflict with her teachers. Her physical neatness was not reflected in her untidy, misspelled compositions. Graduation was the happiest day of her life.
Home life: Both her parents are alive. Her mother is about

forty-eight, her father, fifty-two. They married late. Her mother's life was fairly turbulent. She had a love affair lasting two and a half years, at the end of which time the man ran away with another woman. She tried to kill herself. Her brother caught her in the act of taking gas. She had a nervous breakdown and was sent to an aunt to recuperate. She stayed there a year, regained her health, and met the man who is now her husband. They became engaged, although she did not love him. Her contempt for men made her indifferent to the identity of the man she married. He, on the other hand, was a plain-looking man, proud that such a pretty girl should consent to marry him. She never told him of her affair with the other man, but did not worry about his finding out. He never did, since he cared nothing about her past. He loved her although she made a very poor wife at first.

After Irene's birth, she changed completely. She took interest in her household, her child, and even in her husband. But now her gall bladder, which has troubled her for years, will never be cured without an operation. She has become nervous and irritable. She no longer reads as she once did—not even a newspaper. She had only an elementary-school education and dreamed that Irene would go to college. But her daughter's abhorrence of learning frustrated this ambition.

Her bringing up was sadly neglected, and she attributes her early misstep to her parents' negligence. As a result, she exercises close supervision over Irene's every step. This leads to constant squabbling between mother and daughter. Irene hates supervision, but her mother insists it is not only her prerogative but her sacred duty.

Irene's father is of Scotch descent. He is frugal, but will go to any length to satisfy his family's needs. Irene is his pet. He worries about her health and often takes her

part in her squabbles with her mother. He knows that his wife means well, however, and agrees that Irene should be looked after. He took over his father's store when his parents died, and became sole owner. He, too, went only to elementary school. He reads the local paper, the *Courier*. His parents were Republican, so he too is a Republican. If questioned, he could not give any reason for his beliefs. He believes firmly in God and country. He is a simple man with simple tastes. He makes a modest, annual contribution to the church and is highly respected in the community.

I.Q.: Irene is low normal.

Religion: Presbyterian. Irene is agnostic, when she thinks of religion at all. She's too preoccupied with herself.

Community: She belongs to a singing society and the "Moonlight Sonata Social Club," where young people congregate to dance and play games. Sometimes the games degenerate into outright petting parties. Irene is admired for her grace. She is a good dancer—nothing more. The praises she absorbs here give rise to a desire to go to New York and be a dancer. Of course, when Irene mentions this to her mother, an hysterical scene occurs. Mother's desire to squelch Irene's ambition arises from her fears of what a free life in the city might do to Irene's morals and, to a lesser extent, to Irene's delicate health. The girl never dares mention the matter again.

Irene is not particularly popular with girls, due to a certain delight she takes in malicious gossip.

Political affiliations: None. Irene never could figure out the difference between the Republican and Democratic parties and was not aware that there were any others.

Amusements: Motion pictures, dancing. She is mad about dancing. She smokes secretly.

Reading: Pulp magazines: love stories, romance, screen news.

PSYCHOLOGY

Sex life: She had an affair with Jimmy, a club member. Her fears that some dire fate would overtake her proved groundless. Now she does not go with him, because he flatly refused to marry her when she thought herself in trouble. She was not very much disappointed at his refusal, since her favorite plan is to go to New York and be a chorus girl. Dancing before an admiring public is the apex of her dreams.

Morality: "There is nothing wrong with any sexual relationship if you can take care of yourself."

Ambition: Dancing in New York. For over a year she has been putting aside her pin money. If everything else fails, she will run away. She's glad Jimmy refused to marry her. She can't picture herself as a domesticated wife whose main function is childbearing. She feels that Plainsville would be a terrible place to die in and is unspeakable for living purposes. She was born in the town and knows every stone in it. She feels that even if she fails as a dancer, just being out of Plainsville will make her happy.

Frustration: She has had no dancing lessons. There is no studio in town, and to have sent her to another town would have entailed more expense than her father could meet. She has worn a tragic halo about her head and let the family know that she is sacrificing her life for their good.

Temperament: Quick-tempered. The slightest provocation will send her into a rage. She is vengeful and boasting. But when her mother was ill, she astounded the town by her devotion. She insisted on being with her until she had completely recovered. When Irene was fourteen, her canary died, and she was inconsolable for weeks.

Attitude: Militant.

Complexes: Superiority complex.

Superstitions: Number thirteen. If something unpleasant hap-

pens on a Friday, something unpleasant will happen during the week.

Imagination: Good.

The *thesis* in this case will be the desire of the parents to marry off Irene as advantageously as possible.

The *antithesis* will be Irene's intention of not marrying at all, but of being a dancer at any cost.

The *synthesis* will be the resolution: Irene's running away and eventually finding herself on the streets.

SYNOPSIS

Irene, instead of going to the singing society, has been going out with a young man. A girl, meeting Irene's mother on the street, asks, casually, why Irene has dropped out of the group. The mother can barely hide her shock, but explains that Irene has not been well lately. At home, there is a terrible interview. Mother suspects that Irene is no longer a virgin and wishes to marry her off as quickly as possible to a clerk in her father's store. Irene is aware of her mother's determination. She decides to run away and accomplish her ambition. She finds no employment in the theater and, having no profession with which to earn a living, she soon succumbs to pressing necessity and turns to prostitution.

There are thousands of girls who run away from thousands of homes. Naturally, they do not all become prostitutes—because their physical, mental, and sociological make-ups differ in a thousand ways from each other and from Irene. Our synopsis is only one version of how a girl from a respectable home becomes a prostitute.

Suppose a hunchback had been born into the same family. That would never create the type of conflict Irene does. A deformed person would do something else in a pinch. Our character must have a good figure to think of being a dancer. Irene is intolerant; a humble or appreciative person would be

systems that fail are those that rely on the permanency of human nature, and not its growth and development.

—Oscar Wilde, *Soul of Man under Socialism*

Regardless of the medium in which you are working, you must know your characters thoroughly. And you must know them not only as they are today, but as they will be tomorrow or years from now.

Everything in nature changes—human beings along with the rest. A man who was brave ten years ago may be a coward now, for any number of reasons: age, physical deterioration, changed financial status, to name a few.

You may think you know someone who never has changed, and never will. But no such person has ever existed. A man may keep his religious and political views apparently intact through the years, but close scrutiny will show that his convictions have either deepened or become superficial. They have gone through many stages, many conflicts, and will continue to go through them as long as the man lives. So he does change, after all.

Even stone changes, although its disintegration is imperceptible; the earth goes through a slow but persistent transformation; the sun, too, the solar system, the universe. Nations are born, pass through adolescence, achieve manhood, grow old, and then die, either violently or by gradual dissolution.

Why should man, then, be the only thing in nature which never changes? Preposterous!

There is only one realm in which characters defy natural laws and remain the same—the realm of bad writing. And it is the fixed nature of the characters which makes the writing bad. If a character in a short story, novel, or play occupies the same position at the end as the one he did at the beginning, that story, novel, or play is bad.

A character stands revealed through conflict; conflict begins with a decision; a decision is made because of the prem-

ise of your play. The character's decision necessarily sets in motion another decision, from his adversary. And it is these decisions, one resulting from the other, which propel the play to its ultimate destination: the proving of the premise.

No man ever lived who could remain the same through a series of conflicts which affected his way of living. Of necessity he must change, and alter his attitude toward life.

Even a corpse is in a state of change: disintegration. And while a man is arguing with you, attempting to prove his changelessness, he is changing: growing old.

So we can safely say that any character, in any type of literature, which does not undergo a basic change is a badly drawn character. We can go further and say that if a character cannot change, any situation in which he is placed will be an unreal situation.

Nora, from *A Doll's House,* who starts as Helmer's "scatterbrain" and "singing bird," becomes a grown-up woman at the end of the play. She begins as a child, but the terrible awakening catapults her into maturity. First she is bewildered, then shocked, then about to do away with herself, and finally she revolts.

Archer says:

> In all modern drama, there is perhaps no character who "develops," in the ordinary sense of the word, so startlingly as Ibsen's *Nora.*

Look at any truly great play, and you will see the same point illustrated. Molière's *Tartuffe,* Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice,* and *Hamlet,* Euripides' *Medea,* all build upon the constant change and development of character under the impact of conflict.

Othello starts with love, ends with jealousy, murder, and suicide.

The Bear starts with animosity, ends with love.

Hedda Gabler starts with egotism, ends with suicide.

Macbeth starts with ambition, ends with murder.

The Cherry Orchard starts with irresponsibility, ends with loss of property.

Excursion starts with the longing to fulfill a dream, ends with awakening to reality.

Hamlet starts with suspicion, ends with murder.

Death of a Salesman starts with illusions, ends in painful knowledge.

Dead End starts with poverty, ends with crime.

The Silver Cord starts with domination, ends in dissolution.

Craig's Wife starts with overscrupulousness, ends with loneliness.

Waiting for Lefty starts with uncertainty, ends with conviction.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof starts with frustration, ends with hope.

The Iceman Cometh starts with hopefulness, ends in despair.

Career starts with hopelessness, ends in success and triumph.

Raisin in the Sun starts with despair, ends with understanding and new values.

All these characters move relentlessly from one state of mind toward another; they are forced to change, grow, develop, because the dramatists had a clear-cut premise which it was their function to prove.

When a person makes one mistake, he always follows up with another. Usually the second mistake grows out of the first and the third from the second. Orgon, in *Tartuffe,* made the grievous mistake of taking Tartuffe into his home, believing in his saintliness. The second mistake was entrusting Tartuffe with a small box containing papers "which, if they were brought to light might, for aught I know, cost my friend all his estate, and—if he were caught—his head."

Orgon believed in Tartuffe so far, but now, by putting this box in his care, Orgon jeopardizes a human life. Orgon's growth from trust to admiration is obvious, deepening with every line.

TARTUFFE: It is well hidden. [*The box*] You may feel easy concerning it. As *I* do.

ORGON: My best friend! What you have done is beyond all thanks. It has knit us even closer together than before.

TARTUFFE: Nothing could do that.

ORGON: One thing could, as I have just seen, if it could but be accomplished.

TARTUFFE: A dark saying, brother. Expound it, I pray you.

ORGON: You said a while ago that my daughter needed a husband who could keep her footsteps from straying.

TARTUFFE: I did. And I cannot think that a worldling such as M. Valere—

ORGON: Nor I. And this has lately been borne in upon me—she could have no safer, tenderer guide through the pitfalls of this life than *you,* beloved friend.

TARTUFFE: [*Who is genuinely taken back for the moment*] Than *I,* brother? Oh, no. No!

ORGON: What? Would you refuse to be my son-in-law?

TARTUFFE: It is an honor to which I have never dreamed of aspiring. And—and—I have some cause to think that I have found no favor in the eyes of Mlle Mariane.

ORGON: That matters little if she has found favor in *yours.*

TARTUFFE: Eyes that are fixed on Heaven, brother, have no regard for the beauty that perisheth.

ORGON: True, brother, true—but would you hold that a reason for refusing a bride who is not without comeliness?

TARTUFFE: [*Who is uncertain how a marriage with Mariane would assist his designs on Elmire*] I would not say so. Many saintly men have wedded comely maidens and sinned not. But—to be plain with you—I fear that a marriage with your daughter might not be altogether pleasing to Madame Orgon.

ORGON: What if it be not? She is only her stepmother, and her con-

sent is not needed. I might add that Mariane will bring her husband an ample dowry, but that I know will not weigh with you.

TARTUFFE: How *should* it?

ORGON: But what, I hope, *will* weigh with you is that by declining her hand you would disappoint me grievously.

TARTUFFE: If I thought *that,* brother—

ORGON: More than that, I should feel that you did not think such an alliance worthy of you.

TARTUFFE: It is I who am unworthy. [*He decides to take the risk*] But, rather than you should so misjudge me, I will—yes, I *will* overcome my scruples.

ORGON: Then you consent to be my son-in-law?

TARTUFFE: Since you desire it, who am I that I should say you nay?

ORGON: You have made me a happy man again. [*He rings handbell*] I will send for my daughter and tell her what I have arranged for her.

TARTUFFE: [*Going toward his door right*] Meanwhile I will crave your permission to retire. [*At door*] If I may offer my counsel, it will be better, in laying this matter before her, to dwell less on any poor merits of my own than on your wishes as a father. [*He goes in*]

ORGON: [*To himself*] What humility!

Orgon's third mistake is in trying to force his daughter to marry this scoundrel. His fourth mistake is in deeding his whole estate to Tartuffe to manage. He sincerely believes that Tartuffe will save his wealth from his family, who, he thinks, wants to squander it. This is his most grievous mistake. He has sealed his own doom. But the ridiculousness of this deed is only a natural outgrowth of his first mistake. Yes, Orgon grows perceptibly from blind belief to disillusionment. The author achieved this with step-by-step development in his character.

When you plant a seed, it seems for a while to lie dormant. Actually, moisture attacks it immediately, softening the shell of the seed so that the chemical inherent in the seed, and those which it absorbs from the soil, may cause it to sprout.

The soil above the seed is hard to push through, but this very handicap, this resistance to the soil, forces the young sprout to gather strength for the battle. Where shall it get this additional strength? Instead of fighting ineffectively against the topsoil, the seed sends out delicate roots to gather more nourishment. Thus the sprout at last penetrates the hard soil and wins through to the sun.

According to science, a single thistle needs ten thousand inches of root to support a thirty- or forty-inch stem. You can guess how many thousands of facts a dramatist must unearth to support a single character.

By way of parable, let a man represent the soil; in his mind we shall plant a seed of coming conflict: ambition, perhaps. The seed grows in him, though he may wish to squelch it. But forces within and without the man exert greater and greater pressure, until this seed of conflict is strong enough to burst through his stubborn head. He has made a decision, and now he will act upon it.

The contradictions within a man and the contradictions around him create a decision and a conflict. These in turn force him into a new decision and a new conflict.

Many kinds of pressures are required before a human being can make a single decision, but the three main groups are the physiological, the sociological, and the psychological. From these three forces you can make innumerable combinations.

If you plant an acorn, you reasonably expect an oak sapling, and eventually an oak tree. Human character is the same. A certain type of character will develop on his own line to fruition. Only in bad writing does a man change without regard to his characteristics. When we plant an acorn we would be justified in expecting an oak tree and shocked (at the very least) if it turned out to be an apple tree.

Every character a dramatist presents must have within it the seeds of its future development. There must be the seed,

or possibility, of crime in the boy who is going to turn criminal at the end of the play.

Although Nora, in *A Doll's House,* is loving, submissive, and obedient, there is in her the spirit of independence, rebellion, and stubbornness—a sign of possible growth.

Let us examine her character. We know that at the end of the play she is not only going to leave her husband, but her children as well. In 1879 that was an almost unheard-of phenomenon. She had little, if any, precedent to go by. She must have had within her that something, *at the beginning of the play,* which develops into the independent spirit she has at the end. Let us see what this something was.

When the play opens, Nora enters, humming a tune. A porter follows with a Christmas tree and a basket.

PORTER: Sixpence.
NORA: There is a shilling. No, keep the change.

She has been trying to save every penny to pay off her secret debt—yet still she is generous. Meanwhile she is eating macaroons, which she is not supposed to have. They are not good for her, and she has promised Helmer that she will not eat sweets. So the first sentence she says shows us that she is not close with money, and the first thing she does shows her breaking a promise. She is childlike.

Helmer enters:

HELMER: Has my little spendthrift been wasting money again?
NORA: Yes, but Torvald, we may be a wee bit more reckless now, mayn't we?

(Helmer cautions her. It will be a whole quarter before he receives his salary. Nora cries out like an impatient child: "Pooh! We can borrow till then!")

HELMER: Nora! [*He is appalled at her featherheadedness. He resents this "borrow."*] Suppose, now, that I borrowed fifty pounds

today, and you spent it all in the Christmas week, and then on New Year's Eve a slate fell on my head and killed me, and . . .

(Just like Helmer. He would not be at peace, even in the grave, with one unpaid debt on his conscience. He is certainly a stickler for propriety. Can you imagine his reaction if he were to discover that Nora had forged a name?)

NORA: If that were to happen, I don't suppose I should care whether I owed money or not. [*She has been kept in perpetual ignorance of money matters, and her reaction is imperious. Helmer is tolerant, but not enough so to forgo a lecture.*]

HELMER: . . . There can be no freedom or beauty about a home life that depends on borrowing and debt. [*At this Nora is very discouraged. It seems that Helmer will never understand her.*]

The two characters have been sharply drawn. They are facing each other—clashing already. No blood has been drawn yet, but it inevitably will come.

(Loving her as he does, Helmer now shifts the responsibility to her father.)

HELMER: You're an odd little soul. Very like your father. You always find some new way of wheedling money out of me, and, as soon as you have got it, it seems to melt in your hands. . . . Still, one must take you as you are. It is in the blood; for indeed it is true that you can inherit these things, Nora.

(With a master stroke Ibsen has sketched in Nora's background. He knows her ancestry better than she does. But she loves her father, and is not slow to answer: "Oh, I wish I had inherited many of Papa's qualities."

Right after this she lies shamelessly about having eaten the macaroons, like a child who feels that the prohibitions set down by her elders are necessarily senseless. There is no great harm in this lying, but it shows what material Nora is made of.)

NORA: I should not think of going against your wishes.
HELMER: No, I am sure of that; besides, you gave me your word.

(Life and Helmer's business have schooled him to think that a given word is sacred. Here again, an insignificant thing shows Helmer's lack of imagination, his complete inability to realize that Nora is anything but what she seems to be on the surface. He is unaware of what goes on behind his back at home. Every penny that Nora wheedles out of him goes to the money-lender, to pay off the debt she has incurred.

Nora is living a double life at the beginning of the play. The forgery was committed long before the play opened, and Nora has been hugging her secret to herself, calm in the knowledge that her deed was a heroic sacrifice to save Helmer's life.)

NORA: [*Talking to her schooltime friend, Mrs. Linde*] But it was absolutely necessary that he should not know! My goodness, can't you understand that? It was necessary he should have no idea what a dangerous condition he was in. It was to me that the doctors came and said his life was in danger and that the only thing to save him was to live in the South. . . . I even hinted that he might raise a loan. That nearly made him angry, Christine. He said I was thoughtless and that it was his duty as my husband not to indulge me in my whims. . . . Very well, I thought, you must be saved—and that was how I came to devise a way out of the difficulty.

(Ibsen takes his time about starting the main conflict. Very precious time is consumed by the scene in which Nora confesses to Mrs. Linde what she did for Helmer. There is something too coincidental about Mrs. Linde's visit at this opportune moment, and also Krogstad's visit. But we are not discussing Ibsen's deficiencies here. We are tracing the completeness of Nora's development. Let us see what else we can learn about her.)

MRS. LINDE: Do you mean never to tell him about it? [*the forgery*]

NORA: [*Meditatively, and with a half-smile*] Yes, someday, perhaps, after many years, when I am no longer as nice-looking as I am now. [*This throws an interesting light on Nora's motive. She expects gratitude for her deed.*] Don't laugh at me! I mean, of course, when Torvald is no longer as devoted to me as he is now, when my dancing and dressing up and reciting have palled on him, then it may be a good thing to have something in reserve.

(Now we can surmise the tremendous shock Nora is in for when Helmer denounces her as a bad wife and mother, instead of praising her. This, then, will be the turning point in her life. Her childhood will die a miserable death, and with a shock she will see, for the first time, the hostile world about her. She has done everything in her power to make Helmer live and be happy, and when she needs him most he will turn against her. Nora has all the necessary ingredients for growth in one direction. Helmer, too, acts in accordance with the character Ibsen has given him. Listen to his storm of impotent rage after learning of the forgery.)

HELMER: What a horrible awakening! All these eight years—she who was my joy and pride—a hypocrite, a liar—worse—worse—a criminal! The unutterable ugliness of it all! For shame! For shame! [*"Nora is silent and looks at him steadily. He stops in front of her." These are Ibsen's stage directions. Nora is looking at Helmer with horror, seeing a strange man, a man who forgets her motive and thinks only of himself.*] I ought to have suspected that something of the sort would happen. I ought to have foreseen it, all your father's want of principle—be silent!

(Apparently Nora's sociological background helped Ibsen draw her mind. Her physiological make-up helped, too—she is aware of her beauty, mentions it several times. She knows she has many admirers, but they mean nothing to her until she makes up her mind to leave.)

HELMER: All your father's want of principle has come out in you. No religion, no sense of duty.

All these things are discernible in Nora's character at the beginning of the play. She has brought upon herself everything that happened. These things were in her character and they necessarily directed her actions. Nora's growth is positive. We can watch her irresponsibility change to anxiety, her anxiety to fear, her fear to desperation. The climax leaves her at first numb, then she slowly understands her position. She makes her final, irrevocable decision, a decision as logical as the blooming of a flower, a decision which is the result of steady, persistent evolution. Growth is evolution; climax is revolution.

Let us trace the seed of possible growth in another character—Romeo. We want to know if he possesses the characteristics which will lead him to the inevitable end.

Romeo, in love with Rosalind, is walking around in a daze, when on the street he meets one of his relatives, Benvolio, who accosts him.

BENVOLIO: Good morning, cousin.
ROMEO: Is the day so young?
BENVOLIO: But now struck nine.
ROMEO: Ay me! Sad hours seem long.
Was that my father that went hence so fast?
BENVOLIO: It was. What sadness lengthens Romeo's hours?
ROMEO: Not having that which, having, makes them short.
BENVOLIO: In love?
ROMEO: Out.
BENVOLIO: Of love?
ROMEO: Out of her favor, where I am in love.

Romeo bitterly complains that his ladylove has "not been hit with Cupid's arrow."

> She is too fair, too wise, wisely too fair,
> To merit bliss by making me despair:
> She hath forsworn to love; and in that vow
> Do I live dead, that live to tell it now.

Benvolio advises him to "examine other beauties," but Romeo cannot be consoled.

> He that is stricken blind cannot forget
> The previous treasure of his eyesight lost:
> . . . . . .
> Farewell: thou canst not teach me to forget.

But later, through a queer coincidence, he learns that his beloved Rosalind will be in the house of his family's deadly enemy, the Capulets, where they are entertaining guests. He decides to go, defying death, to steal, if only a glance, at his love. And there, among the guests, he beholds a lady so enchanting that he has no eyes for Rosalind and breathlessly asks a servingman:

> What lady's that, which doth enrich the hand of yonder knight?
> SERVANT: I know not, sir.
> ROMEO: O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
> It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
> Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear;
> Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!
> So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows,
> As yonder lady o'er her fellows shows.
> The measure done, I'll watch her place of stand,
> And, touching hers, make blessed my rude hand.
> Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight!
> For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night.

And with this decision his die is cast.

Romeo is haughty, impetuous. Finding that his true love is the daughter of the Capulets, he does not hesitate to storm this citadel of hate where murderous intent is constant against him and his family. He is impatient, brooks no contradiction. His love for the fair Juliet has made him still more high strung. For his love, he is willing even to humble himself. No price is too great for his beloved Juliet.

If we consider his death-defying exploit—jeopardizing his life just to have a glance at Rosalind—then we may surmise what he is capable of doing for Juliet, the true love of his life.

No other type of man could have faced so much danger without flinching. The possible growth was inherent in his character from the very beginning of the play.

It is interesting to note that a certain Mr. Maginn in his *Shakespeare Papers* states that Romeo's hard luck throughout his life was attributable to the fact that he was "unlucky," that had any other passion or pursuit occupied Romeo, he would have been as unlucky as in his love.

Mr. Maginn forgets that Romeo, like everyone else, acts as his character dictates. Yes, Romeo's downfall is inherent; it does not occur because he is "unlucky." His impetuous temperament, which he cannot control, drives him to do what another person could easily have avoided.

His temperament, his background—in short, his character was the seed which ensured growth and proved the author's premise.

The important thing we wish the reader to remember is that Romeo was fashioned from that kind of stuff which made him what he was (impulsive, and so on) and forced him to do what he did later (murder and suicide). This characteristic was apparent in the first line uttered.

Another fine example of growth is found in *Mourning Becomes Electra,* by Eugene O'Neill. Lavinia, the daughter of a brigadier general, Ezra Mannon, and his wife Christine, says almost at the very beginning of the play, when a young man who loves her alludes to love:

LAVINIA: [*Stiffening, brusquely*] I don't know anything about love. I don't want to know anything. [*Intensely*] I hate love!

Lavinia is the pivotal character, and lives up to this statement throughout the play. Her mother's illicit love affair

made her what she became later—relentless, vengeful to death.

We have no intention of stopping anyone from writing a pageant or imitating the indefatigable Saroyan, who writes limping cadences to the beauty of life. Any of these things can be moving, even beautiful to behold. We wouldn't eliminate Gertrude Stein, either, from the groaning arena of literature for the simple reason that we enormously enjoy her vagaries and her style (although, we confess, frequently we don't know what she is talking about). From decay springs a new, vibrant life. Somehow these formless things belong to life. Without disharmony there could never be harmony. But some playwrights obviously write about character and want to build it into a well-constructed edifice, and when it turns out to be a pageant or a pseudo-Saroyan, they insist that we treat their work as a play. We can't do that, no matter how hard we try, just as we can't compare the mental capacity of a child to an Einstein.

Robert E. Sherwood's *Idiot's Delight* is such a work. Although it won the Pulitzer Prize, it is far from being a well-constructed play.

Harry Van and Irene are supposed to be the leading characters in this play, but we can't discern any possible growth in them. Irene is a liar and Harry is a good-natured, happy-go-lucky fellow. Only at the end we see some growth, but then the play is over.

Lavinia, Hamlet, Nora, and Romeo, even without a magnificent production, are still characters; living, pulsating, dynamic personalities. They know what they want and fight for it. But poor Harry and Irene just amble around without a visible goal to pursue.

QUESTION: What do you mean, explicitly, when you say "growth"?

ANSWER: For example, King Lear is ready to distribute his kingdom among his daughters. This is a blunder, and the play must prove to the audience that it is folly. It does this through showing the effect of Lear's action on himself, his "growth," or logical development, as a consequence of his mistake. First, he *doubts* that the power he gave his children is being misused. Then he suspects that it is. Then he is sure, and becomes indignant. He is furious, next, and flies into a rage. He is stripped of all authority and is shamed. He wishes to kill himself. In shame and grief, he goes mad, and dies.

He planted a seed which grew and bore the kind of fruit that seed was bound to bear. He never dreamed the fruit would be so bitter—but that is the result of his character, which caused his original mistake. And he pays the price.

QUESTION: Would his growth have been the same if he had chosen the right person—his youngest daughter—as the most trustworthy?

ANSWER: Naturally not. Each mistake—and its reaction upon him—grew from the mistake before it. If Lear had made the right choice in the first place there would have been no motivation for the later action. His first blunder was in deciding to invest his authority in his children. He knew this authority was great, coupled with the highest honor, and he never doubted the ready assurance from his daughters that they loved and revered him. He was shocked by the relative coolness of Cordelia and so made his second mistake. He asked for words rather than deeds. Everything that happened thereafter grew from these roots.

QUESTION: Weren't his mistakes simply stupidity?

ANSWER: Yes, but don't forget that all blunders—yours and mine—are stupid *after* they are made. At the time they may grow out of pity, generosity, sympathy, understanding. What we term stupid at the last may have been a beautiful gesture at the first.

"Growth" is a character's reaction to a conflict in which he is involved. A character can grow through making the correct move, as well as the incorrect one—but he *must* grow, if he is a real character.

Take a couple. They are in love. Leave them for a while, and they may produce the elements of a drama. Perhaps they drift apart, and there is conflict between them; perhaps their love grows deeper, and conflict comes from *outside.* If you ask, "Does real love deepen through adversity?" or if you say, "Even a great love suffers in adversity," your characters will have a goal to achieve, and a chance to grow to prove the premise. The proving of a premise indicates growth on the part of the characters.

II

Every good play grows from pole to pole.

Let us examine an old motion picture and see whether or not this is true.

"Professor Mamlock"

(*He will go from Isolation, Pole I, to Collective Action, Pole II*)

STEP 1. Isolation. He was unconcerned under the Nazi tyranny. He was an outstanding personality; he felt above politics. He never dreamed that anyone could harm him, although he saw terror all around.

STEP 2. Nazi power reaches into his own class and tortures his colleagues. He starts to worry. But he still doesn't believe that anything can happen to him. He sends away friends who beg him to escape.

STEP 3. At last, he senses that a tragic fate might smash him, as it did others. He calls his friends, and rationalizes that he had been justified in being an isolationist. He still is not ready to give up the ship.

STEP 4. Fear grips him. At last he realizes that his previous stand was sheer blindness.

STEP 5. He wishes to escape, but doesn't know how or where to turn.

STEP 6. He becomes *desperate.*

STEP 7. He *joins common struggle* against Nazism.

STEP 8. He becomes a member of the underground organization.

STEP 9. *Defies tyranny.*

STEP 10. Collective action and death.

Let us now take Nora and Helmer from *Doll's House.*

NORA: *From:* submissive, happy-go-lucky, naïve, trusting
To: cynical, independent, adult, bitter, disillusioned

HELMER: *From:* bigoted, domineering, sure of himself, practical, precise, patronizing, conventional, ruthless
To: bewildered, unsure, disillusioned, dependent, submissive, weak, tolerant, considerate, confused

III

HATRED TO LOVE

Before curtain

1. Insecurity
2. Humiliation
3. Resentment
4. Fury

Curtain

5. Hatred
6. Causing injury
7. Satisfaction
8. Remorse
9. Humility
10. False generosity
11. Reevaluation
12. Real generosity
13. Sacrifice
14. Love

LOVE TO HATRED

Before curtain	*Curtain*
1. Possessive love	5. Suspicion
2. Disappointment	6. Testing
3. Doubt	7. Hurt
4. Questioning	8. Realization
	9. Bitterness
	10. Reevaluation and failure to adjust
	11. Anger
	12. Fury (at self)
	13. Fury (at object)
	14. Hate

5. *Strength of Will in a Character*

A weak character cannot carry the burden of protracted conflict in a play. He cannot support a play. We are forced, then, to discard such a character as a protagonist. There is no sport if there is no competition; there is no play if there is no conflict. Without counterpoint there is no harmony. The dramatist needs not only characters who are willing to put up a fight for their convictions. He needs characters who have the strength, the stamina, to carry this fight to its logical conclusion.

We may start with a weak man who gathers strength as he goes along; we may start with a strong man who weakens through conflict, but even as he weakens he must have the stamina to bear his humiliation.

Here is an example, in O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra.* Brant is talking to Lavinia. He is the illegitimate child of a servant girl and an almighty Mannon. He is an outcast, as far as the Mannons are concerned, and his mother brought him up in a distant place. But now he has returned,

under an assumed name, to avenge the humiliation his mother and he have undergone. He is a captain, and he makes love to Lavinia to hide his affair with her mother. But Lavinia's servant puts her on her guard.

(Brant tries to take her hand, but at his touch she pulls away and springs to her feet.)

LAVINIA: [*With cold fury*] Don't touch me! Don't you dare! You liar! You—! [*Then, as he starts back in confusion, she seizes this opportunity to follow Seth's (the servant's) advice—staring at him with deliberately insulting scorn*] But I suppose it would be foolish to expect anything but cheap romantic lies from the son of a low Canuck nurse girl.

BRANT: [*Stunned*] What's that? [*Then, rage at the insult to his mother overcoming all prudence, springs to his feet threateningly*] Belay, damn you!—or I'll forget you're a woman. No Mannon can insult her while I—

LAVINIA: [*Appalled now she knows the truth*] So it is true—you are her son! Oh!

BRANT: [*Fighting to control himself—with harsh defiance*] And what if I am? I'm proud to be! My only shame is my dirty Mannon blood! So that's why you couldn't stand my touching you just now, is it? You're too good for the son of a servant, eh? By God, you were glad enough before—!

These characters are vital, full of fight, and they will easily carry the play to a crescendo. Brant has been planning his revenge for a long time, and now, when it is almost within his grasp, he is thwarted. At this point the conflict ripens into a crisis. We are really eager to know what he is going to do when he is unmasked. Unfortunately, O'Neill bungles and distorts his characters in this play—but more about this in our analysis of plays.

Martha, one of the dead soldiers' wives, is speaking in Irwin Shaw's *Bury the Dead:*

MARTHA: A house should have a baby. But it should be a clean house with a full icebox. Why shouldn't I have a baby? Other people have babies. They don't have to feel their skin crawl every time they tear a page off the calendar. They go off to beautiful hospitals in lovely ambulances and have babies between colored sheets. What's there about them that God likes that he makes it so easy for them to have babies?

WEBSTER: [*One of the soldiers*] They're not married to mechanics.

MARTHA: No! It's not eighteen-fifty for them. And now—now it's worse. Your twenty dollars a month. You hire yourself out to be killed and I get twenty dollars a month. I wait on line all day to get a loaf of bread. I've forgotten what butter tastes like. I wait on line with the rain soaking through my shoes for a pound of rotten meat once a week. At night I go home. Nobody to talk to, just sitting watching the bugs, with one little light because the government's got to save electricity. You had to go off and leave me to that! What's the war to me that I have to sit at night with nobody to talk to? What's the war to you that you had to go off and—

WEBSTER: That's why I'm standing up now, Martha.

MARTHA: What took you so long, then? Why now? Why not a month ago, a year ago, ten years ago? Why didn't you stand up then? Why wait until you're dead? You live on eighteen-fifty a week, with the roaches, not saying a word, and then when they kill you, you stand up! You fool!

WEBSTER: I didn't see it before.

MARTHA: Just like you! Wait until it's too late! There's plenty for live men to stand up for! All right, stand up! It's about time you talked back. It's about time all you poor, miserable, eighteen-fifty bastards stood up for themselves and their wives and the children they can't have! Tell 'em all to stand up! Tell 'em! Tell 'em! [*She shrieks. Blackout.*]

These characters, too, are pulsating with fighting strength; whatever they do, they'll force opposite wills to clash.

Go through all great dramas and you will find that the characters in them *force the issue* in question until they are beaten or reach their goal. Even Chekhov's characters are so strong

in their passivity that the accumulated force of circumstance has a hard time crushing them.

Some weakness which seems inconsequential may easily provide the starting point of a powerful play.

Look at *Tobacco Road.* Jeeter Lester, the central figure, is a weak-kneed man, without the strength to live or die successfully. Poverty stares him in the face, his wife and children starve, and he twiddles his thumbs. No catastrophe is great enough to move him. This weak, useless man has phenomenal strength in waiting for a miracle; he can cling tenaciously to the past, he can ignore the fact that the present offers a new problem to be solved. He laments endlessly the great injustice done him in the past—it is his pet theme, yet he does nothing to correct it.

Is he a weak or a strong character? To our way of thinking he is one of the strongest characters we have seen in the theater in a long time. He typifies decay, disintegration, and still he is strong. This is a natural contradiction. Lester stubbornly maintains his *status quo,* or *seems* to maintain it, against the changes of time. Even to put up a noticeable fight against natural laws requires tremendous strength, and Jeeter Lester has that strength, although ever-changing conditions will liquidate him as they have liquidated all things which could not adapt themselves. Jeeter and the dinosaur are of one spirit.

Jeeter Lester represents a class: the dispossessed small farmers. Modern machinery, the accumulation of wealth in a few hands, competition, taxes, assessments have put him and his class out of business. He will not organize with the dispossessed because he is unaware of the value of organization. Because his ancestors never organized, he lives in miserable isolation, ignorant of the outside world. He is stubborn in his ignorance. His tradition is against change. But in his weakness he is exceptionally strong, and condemns himself and his class to slow death rather than change. Yes, Jeeter Lester is a strong man.

Can anyone imagine a sweeter and weaker character than the classic mother? Can one forget her eternal vigilance, tender care, anxious warnings? She subordinates herself to one goal, the success of her child, sacrificing even her life, if necessary. Isn't your mother like that? Enough mothers are, to have built up a maternal tradition. Haven't you been haunted in your dreams, at least once, by your mother's smile, her sullen silence, her persistent admonitions, her tears? Haven't you, at least once, felt like a murderer in going against your mother's wishes? All the sins in the world, put together, have never made mankind into greater liars than their sweet mothers.

Seemingly weak, always ready to retreat and give in, yet almost always the winner in the end, such is Mother. You don't always know how you have been roped and tied, but you find that you have made a promise your mind rebels at breaking.

Are mothers weak? Emphatically no! Think of *The Silver Cord,* by Sidney Howard. Here is a mother wrecking the lives of her own children—not with brutality, but with sweet, weak words, with bitter tears, with seemingly ineffectual silence. In the end she ruined the lives of all about her. Is she weak?

Who, then, are the weak characters as opposed to the strong ones? They are those who have no power to put up a fight.

Jeeter Lester, for instance, is inactive in the face of starvation. To go hungry without doing anything about it is queer, to say the least. The man has stamina, even if it is misdirected. Self-preservation is a natural law, and it leads both animals and men to hunt, steal, and murder, to get food. Jeeter Lester disobeys this law. He has his tradition, he has his ancestral home. The property belongs to him as it did to his ancestors, and he feels that to run away from it in adversity would be cowardly. He thinks it is fortitude to take all the punishment he gets for the sake of what belongs to him. It may be that

basic laziness, even cowardice, has made him the tenacious man he is, but the resultant behavior is strong.

The truly weak character is the person who will not fight because the pressure is not strong enough.

Take Hamlet. He is persistent and with bulldog tenacity proves the facts of his father's death. He has weaknesses, else he would not have had to hide behind assumed insanity. His sensitivity is a drawback in his fight, yet he kills Polonius who he thinks is spying on him. Hamlet is a complete character, hence he is ideal material for a play, as is Jeeter. Contradiction is the essence of conflict, and when a character can overcome his internal contradictions to win his goal, he is strong.

The stool pigeon in *Black Pit* offers a good example of a weak, badly drawn character. He could never make up his mind what to do. The author wanted us to see the danger of compromise, but the audience felt sympathy and pity for the man they were supposed to despise.

The man was never really a stool pigeon. He was not defiant, but ashamed. He knew he was doing something wrong, but couldn't help it. On the other hand, he wasn't a class-conscious worker, because he was unfaithful to his class—and he could not do anything about that, either.

Where there is no contradiction there is no conflict. In this case the contradiction was ill-defined, as was the conflict. The man let himself be entangled in a web and lacked the courage to get out. His shame was not deep enough to force him into a decision—the only compromise—nor was his love for his family great enough to overcome all opposition and make him a stool pigeon in earnest. He could not make up his mind one way or the other, and such a person is incapable of carrying a play. We can now define a weak character in another way: "A weak character is one who, for any reason, cannot make a decision to act."

Is Joe, the stool pigeon, so inherently weak that he would have remained undecided under any conditions? No. If the

situation in which he finds himself is not pressing enough, it is the author's duty to find a more clearly defined premise. Under greater pressure Joe would have reacted more violently than he did. It was not enough to arouse Joe that his wife would have to give birth to her child without a midwife. That was an everyday occurrence in his world, and most of the women survived.

But there is no character who would not fight back *under the right circumstances.* If he is weak and unresisting, it is because the author has not found the psychological moment when he is not only ready, but eager to fight. The point of attack was miscalculated. Or it might be put this way: a decision must be permitted to mature. The author may catch a character in a period of *transition,* when he is not yet ready to act. Many a character fails because the author forces him into action he is not ready to take, action he will not be ready to take for an hour, or a year, or twenty years.

We find this little item on the editorial page of *The New York Times.*

MURDER AND INSANITY

After studying some 500 murders, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company expresses in its Bulletin mild astonishment at the reasons. An irate husband beats his wife to death because *dinner* is not ready; one friend kills another over a matter of *25 cents;* a lunchroom proprietor shoots a customer after an argument over *a sandwich;* a youth kills his mother because she upbraids him about his *drinking;* a barfly slashes another to death over a dispute as to who shall drop a nickel into a slot and *play* a mechanical piano first.

Were these people all mad? What could have motivated them to take human life over a pittance, for a grudge? Normal people do not commit such atrocities—perhaps they really were insane.

There is only one way to find out and that is to examine the physiological, sociological, and psychological make-up of a murderer in a case which, on the surface, is brutal and shocking.

Our man is fifty years old. He killed a man—stabbed him—because of a joke. Everyone thought him a vicious, unsocial creature, a beast. Let us see what he was.

The murderer's history shows that he was patient and harmless, a good provider, an excellent father, a respected citizen, an esteemed neighbor. He had worked as bookkeeper in one firm for thirty years. His employers found him honest, responsible, inoffensive. They were shocked when he was arrested for murder.

The groundwork for his crime began thirty-two years ago, when he was married. He was eighteen, and in love with his wife, although she was exactly his opposite in nature. She was vain, unreliable, flirtatious, untruthful. He had to close his eyes to her constant indiscretions, because he sincerely believed that she would someday change for the better. He never did anything decisive to stop her shameful behavior, although he threatened her now and again. But it remained only a threat.

A playwright, seeing him at this point, would have found him too weak and inoffensive to make a dramatic character. He felt the humiliation deeply, but he was powerless to do anything about it. There is no hint of what the man will become.

Years pass. His wife gives him three beautiful children, and he hopes that with advanced age she will finally change. She does. She becomes more careful, and seems really to settle down, to be a good wife and mother.

Then one day she disappears, never to return. At first, the poor man almost goes mad, but he recovers and takes over her duties around the house along with his work. He re-

ceives no thanks from his children for his sacrifice. They abuse him, and leave him at the first opportunity.

On the surface our man has been bearing all this stoically. Perhaps he is a coward, lacking the energy to resist or revolt. Perhaps he has superhuman energy and the courage to bear abuse and injustice.

Now he loses the house which was his pride. He is deeply moved and makes efforts to save it. But he cannot, and he is crushed, although not to the point where he would take drastic action. He is still the timid Milquetoast: changed, yes; bitter, yes; uneasy, yes. Looking for an answer, and not finding one, he is bewildered, alone. Instead of revolting, he becomes a recluse.

So far he's still not much good to a dramatist—he still has not made a decision.

Now only his job, which has lately become insecure, holds him to sanity. Then the last straw breaks his back. A younger man is put into the place where he slaved for thirty years. He is aroused to an unbelievable fury, for at last he has reached the breaking point. And when a man makes a harmless joke —about the depression, perhaps—he kills him. He murders for no apparent cause a man who never hurt him.

If you look hard enough, you will find that there is always a long chain of circumstances leading to a seemingly unmotivated crime. And these "circumstances" can be found in the criminal's physical, sociological, and mental make-up.

This is related to what has been said about miscalculation. An author must realize how vitally important it is to catch a character at the high point of mental development, a subject we'll discuss more fully when we speak of "Point of Attack." Suffice it to say here that every living creature is capable of doing anything, if the conditions around him are strong enough.

Hamlet is a different man at the end of the play from what he was at the beginning. In fact, he changes on every page—not illogically, but in a steady line of growth. We are all changing with every passing minute, hour, day, week, month, and year. The problem is to find the moment at which it is most advantageous for the playwright to deal with a character. What we call Hamlet's weakness is his delay in taking a step (sometimes fatal) until he has full evidence. But his iron determination, his devotion to his cause, are strong. He makes a decision. Jeeter Lester, too, made a decision to *stay,* whether or not this decision was conscious. As a matter of fact, Jeeter's will was unconscious—subconscious, let us say—whereas Hamlet's determination to prove that the king murdered his father was conscious. Hamlet was acting in accordance with a premise he was aware of, while Lester stayed because he did not know what else to do.

The dramatist may use either type. This is the point at which inventiveness comes to the fore. The trouble starts when the author puts a Chekhovian character into a blood-and-thunder play, or vice versa. You cannot force a character to make a decision before he is good and ready. If you try that, you will find that the action is superficial and trite—it will not reflect the real character.

So as you see, there is really no such thing as weak character. The question is: did you catch your character at that particular moment when he was ready for conflict?

6. Plot or Character—Which?

What is a weed? A plant whose virtues have not yet been discovered. —EMERSON

Despite the frequent quotations from Aristotle, and the work done by Freud on one of the three elements of a human being, character has not been given the penetrat-

ing analysis which scientists give the atom or the cosmic ray.

William Archer, in his *Playmaking, a Manual of Craftsmanship,* says:

. . . To reproduce character can neither be acquired nor regulated by theoretical recommendations.

We readily agree that "theoretical recommendations" are of no use to anyone—but what of concrete recommendation? While it is true that the seemingly inanimate objects are easier to examine, the involved, ever-moving character of man must also be analyzed—and the task is organized, made simpler, by recommendations.

Specific directions for character-drawing would be like rules for becoming six feet high. Either you have it in you, or you have it not,

says Mr. Archer. This is a sweeping, and unscientific, statement. And it has a familiar ring. It is, in essence, the answer that was given to Leeuwenhoek, inventor of the microscope; to Galileo, who was almost burned as a heretic when he said the earth moved. Fulton's steamboat was received with derision. "It won't move!" the crowds shouted, and when it did move they cried, "It won't stop!"

Yet today cosmic rays are made to photograph and measure themselves.

"Either you have it in you, or you have it not," says Mr. Archer, thus admitting that one man has the ability to draw character, to peneterate the impenetrable, whereas another has not. But if one man can do it, and if we know how he did it, can we not learn from him? One man does it by observation. He is privileged to see things which others pass by. Is it that these less fortunate men cannot see the obvious? Perhaps. When we read a bad play carefully, we are struck by the author's ignorance of his characters; and when we read a good play carefully, we are struck by the wealth of information the writer displays. Then why may we not sug-

gest to the less-privileged playwright that he train his eye to see, and his mind to understand? Why may we not recommend observation?

If the "have-not" playwright has imagination, selectivity, writing ability, he will be a better man for learning consciously what the "have" playwright knows only by instinct.

How is it that even the genius who has it within his power to be six feet tall frequently misses the mark? Why is it that the man who once knew how to draw character now makes a fool of himself? Might it be because he relied solely upon his instinctive powers? Why shouldn't these powers work all the time? The privileged one either has the power in him or he has not.

We trust you will admit that any number of geniuses have written any number of bad plays—because they relied on an instinctive power which is, at best, a hit-or-miss affair. One is not supposed to conduct important business on a hunch, a feeling, a whim—one is supposed to *act upon knowledge.*

Mr. Archer's definition of character follows:

> . . . for the practical purposes of the dramatist it may be defined as a *complex of intellectual, emotional,* and nervous habit.

This hardly seems enough, so we turn to *Webster's International Dictionary.* Perhaps Mr. Archer's words hold more than appeared on the surface.

> *Complex:* composed of two or more parts; composite; not simple.
> *Intellectual:* apprehensible by intellect alone; hence of a spiritual nature; perceptible only to inspired vision or by spiritual insight.
> *Emotion:* an agitation, disturbance, a tumultuous movement whether physical or social.

Now we know. It is so simple and so complex at the same time. Not much help, it's true, but refreshing, nevertheless.

It is not enough to know that a character consists of "complex intellectual, emotional, and nervous habit." We must know precisely what this "complex intellectual" means. We have found that every human being consists of three dimensions: physiological, sociological, and psychological. If we make a further breakdown of these dimensions, we shall perceive that the physical, social, and mental make-up contains the minute genes—the builder, the mover in all our actions which will motivate everything we do.

A shipbuilder knows the material he is working with, knows how well it can withstand the ravages of time, how much weight it can carry. He must know these things if he wishes to avoid disaster.

A dramatist should know the material he is working with: his characters. He should know how much weight they can carry, how well they can support his construction: the play.

There are so many conflicting ideas about character that it might be a good idea for us to review a few of them before we attempt to go further.

John Howard Lawson writes in his book, *The Theory and Technique of Playwriting:*

People find it curiously difficult to consider a story as something which is in the process of *becoming:* confusion on this point exists in all textbooks on playwriting, and is a stumbling block to all playwrights.

Yes, it is a stumbling block, because they start to build their house from the roof down, instead of starting with premise and showing a character in relation to his environment. Lawson says as much in his introduction:

A play is not a bundle of isolated elements: dialogue, characterization, etc., etc. It is a living thing, in which all of these elements have been fused.

This is true, but on the very next page he writes:

We can study the form, the *outwardness* of a play, but the *inwardness,* the soul, eludes our grasp.

It will elude us forever if we fail to understand a basic principle: the so-called "inwardness," the seemingly unpredictable soul, is nothing more nor less than character.

Lawson's fundamental mistake is using dialectics upside down. He accepts Aristotle's basic error, "character is subsidiary to action," and from this springs his confusion. It is vain for him to insist on a "social framework" when he puts the cart before the horse.

We contend that character is the most interesting phenomenon anywhere. Every character represents a world of his own, and the more you know of this person, the more interested you become. We have in mind just now George Kelly's *Craig's Wife.* It is far from being a well-constructed play but there is a conscious attempt to build character. Kelly shows us a world through the eyes of Craig's wife, a drab and monotonous world, but a real one.

George Bernard Shaw said that he was not governed by principle, but by inspiration. If any man, inspired or not, builds on character, he is going in the right direction and is employing the right principle, consciously or otherwise. The vital thing is not what the playwright says, but what he does. Every great literary work grew from character, even if the author planned the action first. As soon as his characters were created they took precedence, and the action had to be reshaped to suit them.

Let us suppose we were building a house. We started at the wrong end and it collapsed. We began again—at the top—and it collapsed. And so a third and a fourth time. But eventually we make it stand up, without the slightest idea of what change in our method was responsible for our suc-

cess. Can we now, without compunction, give advice on the construction of houses? Can we honestly say: it must collapse four times before it can stand?

The great plays came down to us from men who had unlimited patience for work. Perhaps they started their plays at the wrong end, but they fought themselves back inch by inch, until they made character the foundation of their work, although they may not have been objectively conscious that character is the only element that could serve as the foundation.

Says Lawson:

> Of course it is hard to think of situations, and this depends upon the power of the writer's "inspiration"

If we know that a character embodies in himself not only his environment, but his heredity, his likes and dislikes, even the climate of the town where he was born, we do not find it hard to think of situations. *The situations are inherent in the character.*

George P. Baker quotes Dumas the Younger:

> Before every situation that a dramatist creates, he should ask himself three questions: What should *I* do? What would *other people* do? What *ought* to be done?

Isn't it strange to ask everyone what should be done in a situation, except the character who created the situation? Why not ask him? He is in a position to know the answer better than anyone else.

John Galsworthy seems to have grasped this simple truth, for he claims that character creates plot, not vice versa. Whatever Lessing had to say about the matter, he built on character. So did Ben Jonson—in fact, he sacrificed many theatrical devices to bring his characters into sharper relief. Chekhov has no story to tell, no situation to speak of, but his plays are popular and will be so in time to come, because he per-

mits his characters to reveal themselves and the time in which they lived.

Engels says in *Anti-Dühring:*

Every organic being is at each moment both the same and not the same; at each moment it is assimilating matter drawn from without and excreting other matter; every moment the cells of its body are dying and new ones are being formed; in fact, within a longer or shorter period the matter of its body is completely removed and is replaced by other atoms of matter, so that every organic thing is at all times itself and yet something other than itself.

A character thus has the capacity to completely reverse himself under internal and external stimulus. Like every other organic being, he changes continuously.

If this is true, and we know it is true, how can one invent a situation, or a story, which is a static thing, and force it upon the character who is in a state of constant change?

Starting with the premise "Character is subsidiary to action," it was inevitable that the textbook writers should become confused. Baker quotes Sardou, who replied as follows to the question of how plays revealed themselves to him:

The problem is invariable. It appears as a kind of equation from which the unknown quantity must be found. The problem gives me no peace till I have found the answer.

Perhaps Sardou and Baker have found the answer, but they have not given it to the young playwright.

Character and environment are so closely interrelated that we have to consider them as one. They react upon each other. If one is faulty, it affects the other, just as the disease of one part of the body causes the whole to suffer.

The plot is the first consideration, and as it were, the soul of the tragedy. Character holds the second place,

writes Aristotle in his *Poetics.*

Character comes in as subsidiary to the action. Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of a tragedy. . . . Without action there cannot be a tragedy; there may be without character. . . . The drama interests us, not predominantly by its depiction of human nature, but primarily by the situations and only secondarily by the feelings of those therein involved.

After checking through volumes and volumes in search of the answer to which is more important, character or plot, we concluded that ninety-nine per cent of the writings on this issue are confused and barely understandable.

Consider this statement by Archer, in *Playmaking:*

A play can exist without anything that can be called character, but not without some sort of action.

But a few pages later:

Action ought to exist for the sake of character: when the relationship is reversed the play may be an ingenious toy, but scarcely a vital work of art.

To find the real answer is not an academic problem. It is an answer which will make a deep impression on the future of playwriting, since it is *not* the answer which was dictated by Aristotle.

We are going to take the oldest of all plots, a trite, worn-out triangle, a vaudeville skit, to prove our point.

A husband starts on a two-day trip, but forgets something and comes back to the house. He finds his wife in another man's arms. Let us suppose that the husband is a man of five feet three. The lover is a giant. The situation hinges on the husband—what will he do? If he is free of the author's interference, he will do what his character dictates, what his physical, social, and psychological make-up tell him to do.

If he is a coward, he may apologize, beg forgiveness for

his intrusion, and flee—grateful that the lover let him go unmolested.

But perhaps the husband's short stature has made him cocky, has forced him to be aggressive. He springs at the big man in a fury, unmindful that he may be the looser.

Perhaps he is a cynic, and sneers; perhaps he is imperturable, and laughs; perhaps any number of things—depending on the character.

A coward might create a farce, a brave man might create a tragedy.

Take Hamlet, the brooding Dane, and let him—not Romeo—fall in love with Juliet. What would have happened? He might have contemplated the matter too long, muttering to himself beautiful soliloquies about the immortality of the soul and the deathlessness of love, which, like the phoenix, rises anew every spring. He might have consulted his friends, his father, to make peace with the Capulets, and while these negotiations went on, Juliet, not suspecting that Hamlet loved her, would have been safely married to Paris. Then Hamlet could have brooded still more and cursed his fate.

While Romeo runs into trouble with reckless abandon, Hamlet looks into the mechanism of his problem. While Hamlet hesitates, Romeo acts.

Obviously their conflicts grew out of their character, and not vice versa.

If you try to force a character into a situation where he does not belong, you will be like Procrustes who cut the feet off the sleeper to make him fit the bed.

Which is more important, plot or character? Let us trade the sensitive, brooding Hamlet for a pleasure-loving prince, whose one reason for living is the privileges his princehood affords him Would he avenge his father's death? Hardly. He would turn the tragedy to comedy.

Let us trade the naïve Nora, ignorant of money matters,

forging a note for her husband, for a mature woman, aware of finance, too honest to let her love for her husband lead her astray. This new Nora would not have forged the note, and Helmer would have died then and there.

The sun, along with its other activities, creates rain. If it is true that the characters are secondary in importance, there is no reason why we should not use the moon instead of the sun. Do we get the same plot results? Emphatically: *no!*

Something will happen, however. The moon will witness the slow death of the earth, in place of the turbulent life created by the sun. We substituted only one character. This, of course, changed our premise and made a considerable alteration in the outcome of the play. With the sun: life. With the moon: death.

The inference is unmistakable: character creates plot, not vice versa.

It is not difficult to understand why Aristotle thought of character as he did. When Sophocles wrote *Oedipus Rex,* when Aeschylus wrote *Agamemnon,* when Euripides wrote *Medea,* Fate was supposed to have played the chief role in the drama. The gods spoke, and men lived or died in accordance with what they said. "The structure of the incidents" was ordained by the gods—the characters were merely men who did what had been prearranged for them. But, while the audience believed this, and Aristotle based his theories upon it, *it does not hold true in the plays themselves.* In all important Greek plays, the characters create the action. The playwrights substituted the *Fates* for the *premise* as we know it today. The results, however, were identical.

If Oedipus had been any other type of man, tragedy would not have befallen him. Had he not been hot-tempered, he would not have killed a stranger on the road. Had he not been stubborn, he would not have forced the issue of who killed Laius. With rare perseverance he dug out the smallest details, continuing because he was honest, even when the

accusing finger pointed at him. Had he not been honest, he would not have punished the murderer by blinding himself.

CHORUS: O doer of dread deeds, how couldst thou mar
Thy vision thus? What demon goaded thee?
OEDIPUS: Apollo, friends, Apollo, he it was
That brought these ills to pass;
But the right hand that dealt the blow
Was mine, none other.

Why should Oedipus blind himself if the gods had ordained that he should be punished anyway? They would certainly have taken care of their promise. But we know that he punished himself because of his rare character. He says:

> How could I longer see when sight
> Brought no delight?

A scoundrel would not have felt that way. He might have been exiled and the prophecy fulfilled—but that would have played havoc with the majesty of *Oedipus* as a drama.

Aristotle was mistaken in his time, and our scholars are mistaken today when they accept his rulings concerning character. Character was the great factor in Aristotle's time, and no fine play ever was or ever will be written without it.

Through Medea's conniving her brother was killed. She sacrificed him for the husband, Jason, who later brushed her aside to marry King Creon's daughter. Her grim deed brought its own poetic justice. What kind of man was it who would marry such a woman? Exactly the kind Jason proved to be —a ruthless betrayer. Both Jason and Medea were made of stuff that any playwright might envy. They stand on their own feet, without any help from Zeus. They are well drawn, tridimensional. They are constantly growing, which is one of the fundamental principles of great writing.

The Greek plays which have come down to us boast many extraordinary characters which disprove the Aristotelian

contention. If character were subsidiary to action, Agamemnon would not inevitably have died by the hand of Clytemnestra.

Before the action starts, in *Oedipus Rex,* Laius, King of Thebes, knew *"of the prophecy that the child born to him by his queen, Jocasta, would slay his father and wed his mother."* So, when in time a son was born, the infant's feet were riveted together and he was left to die on Mount Cithaeron. But a shepherd found the child and tended him and delivered him to another shepherd who took him to his master, the King of Corinth. When Oedipus learned of the prophecy, he fled to thwart the fulfillment of the Delphic oracle. In his wanderings he killed his father, Laius, without knowing his identity, and entered the kingdom of Thebes.

But how did Oedipus learn of the prophecy? At a banquet, he was told by a drunkard, "Thou art no true son of thy sire." Disturbed, he sought to learn more.

So privily without their leave I went to Delphi, and Apollo sent me back, baulked of the knowledge that I came to seek.

Why did Apollo withhold the information Oedipus wanted?

> But other grievous things he prophesied,
> Woes, lamentations, mourning, portents dire,
> To wit, I should defile my mother's bed,
> And raise seed too loathsome to behold.

It would seem that Apollo deliberately withheld the real identity of Oedipus' father. Why? Because *"Fate," as premise, drives the character to the inevitable end,* and Sophocles needed that driving force. But let's take it for granted that Apollo wished to make Oedipus flee, and at the end fulfill the prophecy. We shan't ask the reasons for the dire fate of two innocent beings. Instead, let us go to the opening of the play and watch Oedipus' character grow.

He was traveling incognito, a grown warrior, just and noble, fleeing to escape his fate. He was in no easy mood when he drew near the triple-branching road where the murder occurred. He says:

> A herald met me and a man who sat
> In a car drawn by colts—as in the tale—
> The man in front and the old man himself
> Threatened to thrust me rudely from the path.

So they were rude to him and used force, and only then:

> I struck him, and the old man, seeing this,
> Watched till I passed and from his car brought down
> Full on my head the double-pointed goad.

Only then Oedipus struck.

> . . . . one stroke
> Of my good staff sufficed to fling him clean
> Out of the chariot seat and laid him prone.

The incident shows that the attack on Laius and his escorts was motivated. They were rude, Oedipus was in a bad mood, and hot-tempered besides, and he acted according to his character. Apollo is certainly secondary here. Again, you may say that Oedipus is still carrying out the desire of the *Fates*—when he is only proving the *premise.*

Once in Thebes, Oedipus answers the riddle of the Sphinx, at which thousands had failed. The Sphinx would ask those who entered or left the city: what was it which in the morning walks on four legs, at midday on two, in the evening on three? Oedipus answered: man, proving himself the wisest among them. The Sphinx departed in shame, and the Thebans, in joy at the end of their bondage, elected him their king.

So we know that Oedipus was brave, impulsive, wise—and by way of further proof, Sophocles tells us that the Thebans

prospered under his rule. Anything that happened to Oedipus happened because of his character.

If you forget the "Argument" which states the ancient beliefs concerning the part played by the gods, and read the play as it stands, you will see the validity of our assertion. Character makes the plot.

The moment Molière established Orgon as Tartuffe's dupe, the plot automatically unfolded itself. Orgon represents a religious fanatic. It stands to reason that a converted bigot disapproves of everything he believed before.

Molière needed a man who was intolerant of everything worldly. Through conversion, Orgon became this man. This state of affairs suggests that such a man should have a family who indulged in all the innocent joys of life. Our man, Orgon, must necessarily regard all these earthly activities as sinful. Such a man will go the limit to change the ways of those under his influence or domination. He will try to reform them. They will resent it.

This determination forced the conflict, and, as the author had a clear-cut premise, the story grew out of this character.

When the author has a clear-cut premise, it is child's play to find the character who will carry the burden of that premise. When we accept the premise "Great love defies even death," we necessarily will think of a couple who defy tradition, parental objections, and death itself. What kind of person has the capacity to do all this? Certainly not Hamlet or a professor of mathematics. He must be young, proud, impetuous. He is Romeo. Romeo fits the part assigned to him as easily as Orgon does in *Tartuffe*. Their characters create the conflict. A plot without character is a makeshift contraption, dangling between heaven and earth like Mohammed's coffin.

What would the reader think of us if we were to announce that, after long and arduous study, we had come to the conclusion that honey is beneficial to mankind, but that the

bee's importance is secondary, and that the bee is therefore subsidiary to its product? What would you think if we should say that the fragrance is more important than the flower, the song more important than the bird?

We should like to alter the quotation from Emerson with which we opened this chapter. For our purposes it should read:

What is a character? A factor whose virtues have not yet been discovered.

7. *Characters Plotting Their Own Play*

"Shallow men believe in luck," said Emerson. There is no luck involved in the success of Ibsen's plays. He studied, he planned, he worked hard. Let us try to look into his workroom and see him at work. Let us try to analyze Nora and Helmer of *A Doll's House* as they start to plot their own story, according to the premise and character principle.

There is no doubt that Ibsen was struck by the inequality of women in his time. (The play was written in 1879.) Being a crusader of a sort, he wanted to prove that "Inequality of the sexes in marriage breeds unhappiness."

To begin with, Ibsen knew he needed two characters to prove his premise: a husband and a wife. But not any couple would do. He had to have a husband who would epitomize the selfishness of all the men of the time, and a wife who would symbolize the subjugation of all the women. He was looking for a self-centered man and a sacrificing woman.

He chose Helmer and Nora, but as yet they were only names bearing the tags "selfish" and "unselfish." The next natural step was to round them out. The author had to be very careful in constructing his characters, because later, in conflict, they would have to make their own decisions as to what to do or what not to do. And since Ibsen had a clear-

cut premise which he was eager to prove, his characters had to be people who could stand alone without the author's help.

Helmer became manager at a bank. He must have been a very industrious, conscientious man to earn the highest rank in an important institution. He oozes responsibility, suggesting a merciless superior who is a stickler for order. No doubt he demands punctuality and devotion from his subordinates. He has an overdose of civic pride; he knows the importance of his station and guards it with the utmost care. Respectability is his highest aim, and he is ready to sacrifice anything, even love, to gain it. In short, Helmer is a man who is hated by his subordinates and admired by his superiors. He is human only at home, and then with a vengeance. His love for his family is boundless, as is often the case with a man who is hated and feared by others, and he thus needs more love than the average man.

He is about thirty-eight years old, a man of average height with a determined nature. His speech, even at home, is unctuous, grave, constantly admonishing. He suggests a middle-class background, honest and not too well off. The constant thought he gives to his beloved bank seems to indicate that his ambition, as a youngster, was to hold just such a post in just such an organization. He is extremely satisfied with himself and has no doubts for the future.

He has no harmful habits, and does not smoke or drink except for a glass or two on special occasions. We see him, then, a self-centered man with high moral principles which he demands that others observe.

All these things can be seen in the play, and while they make only a sketchy character study, they indicate that Ibsen must have known a great deal about Helmer. He also must have known that the woman would have to oppose all the ideals the man represented.

So he sketched Nora. She is a child: spendthrift, irresponsible, lying, cheating as a child might. She is a skylark, danc-

ing, singing, careless—but loving her husband and children sincerely. It is the crux of her character that she loves her husband enough to do things for him which she would not dream of doing for anyone else.

Nora has a fine, searching mind, but she knows little of the society in which she lives. Because of her love and admiration for Helmer she is willing to be a doll wife, and as a result her mental growth is retarded despite her intelligence. She was a pampered daughter, given over to her husband for further pampering.

She is twenty-eight or thirty years old, charming, attractive. Her background is not as spotless as Helmer's, for her father, too, was happy-go-lucky. He had peculiar ideas, and there was a hint of scandal in the family closet. Nora's one selfishness, perhaps, is her desire to see everyone as happy as she.

Here stand the two characters which will generate conflict. But how? There is not a single hint that a triangle situation can ever develop between them. What possible conflict can arise between a couple who love each other so? If we are in any doubt, we must go back to the character studies and to the premise. There we shall find a clue. We look, and find one. Since Nora represents unselfishness, love, she will do something for her family, preferably for her husband, which will be misunderstood by him. But what kind of act will it be? If we are stuck again, we can again read the character studies which must point the answer. Helmer represents *respectability*. Well and good. Nora's act should undermine or threaten the position he holds. But since she is unselfish, the deed must be done for *his* sake, and his reaction must show the hollowness of his love when it is matched against his respectability.

What type of act would throw this man off balance to such an extent that he forgets everything when his position is threatened? Only an act which he knows *from his own ex-*

perience to be most contemptible and most disgraceful: something concerning money.

Theft? That might be it, but Nora is not a thief, nor does she have access to much money. But what she does must have something to do with securing money. She must need the money badly, and it must be an amount which is larger than she could put her hands on, but small enough for her to obtain without raising a great to-do.

Before we go further we must know her motive for obtaining money in some way annoying—to put it mildly!—to her husband. Perhaps he is in debt— No, no. Helmer would never contract debts which could not be taken care of. Perhaps she needs some household accessory? No, that would not be to Helmer's vital interest. Sickness? Excellent idea. Helmer himself is ill, and Nora needs money to take care of him.

Nora's reasoning is easy to follow. She knows little of money matters. She needs money for Helmer, but *Helmer would rather die than borrow.* She cannot go to friends, lest Helmer discover what she has done and be humiliated. She cannot steal, as we have seen. The only course open is to go to a professional money-lender. She is aware, however, that as a woman, her signature will not be enough. She cannot ask a friend to countersign without encountering the unpleasant questions she is trying to avoid. A stranger? She could hardly approach a man she does not know without leaving the way open for an immoral proposition. She loves her husband too much even to think of such a thing. Only one person would do it for her—her father. But he is a very sick man, on the verge of dying. Healthy, he would help her get money, but there would be no play then. The characters must prove the premise through conflict; therefore Nora's father is, of necessity, dead.

Nora bemoans this fact, and that gives her an idea. She

will forge her father's signature. She's elated, once she has found this only way out. The idea is so perfect that she bubbles with joy. She not only has a way of getting the money, but of concealing from Helmer the manner in which it will be obtained. She will tell him that her father left it to her, and he will not be able to refuse it. It will be his.

She goes through with it, receives the money, and is supremely happy.

There is one hitch in the scheme. The money-lender knows the family—he works in the same bank as Helmer. He has known all along that the signature was forged, but the forgery is worth more to him than the best guarantee or deposition. If Nora cannot pay it (live up to it) Helmer will do so a thousandfold. That's why he is Helmer. With his respectability at stake, his position to be considered, he would do anything. The money-lender is safe.

If you read over the character sketches of Nora and Helmer, you will see that their characters made the story possible.

QUESTION: Who forced Nora to do what she did? Why couldn't she have overcome the various considerations and borrowed money legally?

ANSWER: The premise forced her to choose only one direction—the one which will prove it. You will say—and we shall agree—that a person has the privilege of choosing a hundred different ways to achieve his purpose. But *not* when you have a clear premise which you wish to prove. After close scrutiny and elimination you must find the *one way* which will lead you to your goal—prove your premise. Ibsen chose that one way, by drawing characters who would naturally behave in a way to prove his premise.

QUESTION: I don't see why there should be only one way to build a conflict. I don't believe that there was nothing for Nora to do but forge her father's name.

ANSWER: What would you have her do instead?

QUESTION: I don't know, but there must be some other way.

ANSWER: If you refuse to think, the argument is over.

QUESTION: Well, why wouldn't stealing be as plausible as forging?

ANSWER: We have already pointed out that she had no access to money, but let us pretend that she did. From whom would she steal? Not Helmer, certainly, since he has no money. Relatives? All right—but would they expose her when they learned of the theft? They could not do so without disgracing the family name, and the chances are all in favor of their saying nothing. Would she steal from neighbors, strangers? That's foreign to her character. But suppose she does—it serves only to complicate matters.

QUESTION: Isn't that what you want—conflict?

ANSWER: Only when it proves the premise.

QUESTION: Doesn't stealing do that?

ANSWER: No. When she forged her father's name, she put only her husband and herself in jeopardy; by stealing she hurts innocent people, not otherwise involved in the story. Besides, by stealing she changes the premise. The fear of discovery and inevitable disgrace would overshadow the original premise. It would be a denunciation of theft, not a plea for woman's equality.

But, you ask, what if Nora stole and was not caught? That would prove her a good thief—but not a woman meriting equality. And if she were caught? A heroic struggle would ensue in which Helmer would fight to get her out of prison—and then discard her. This is what his respectability would force him to do, thereby proving the exact opposite of the premise with which you began. No, my friend. *You have a premise on the one side and a perfect character study on the other. You must stay on the straight road marked by these limits and not wander off on a byway.*

QUESTION: It seems you can't get away from that premise.
ANSWER: It seems so. *The premise is a tyrant who permits you to go only one way—the way of absolute proof.*
QUESTION: Why couldn't Nora prostitute herself?
ANSWER: Would that prove that she was carrying the burden and responsibility of the household? That she's equal with man? That there should be no doll's house? Would it?
QUESTION: How should I know?
ANSWER: If you don't know, the argument is over.

8. Pivotal Character

The pivotal character is the *protagonist.* According to Webster's dictionary, the protagonist is—"one who takes the lead in any movement or cause."

Anyone who opposes the protagonist is an opponent or *antagonist.*

Without a pivotal character there is no play. The pivotal character is the one who creates conflict and makes the play move forward. The pivotal character knows what he wants. Without him the story flounders . . . in fact, there is no story.

In *Othello,* Iago (the pivotal character) is a man of action. Slighted by Othello, he revenges himself by sowing dissension and jealousy. He started the conflict.

In *A Doll's House,* Krogstad's insistence on rehabilitating his family almost drove Nora to suicide. He is the pivotal character.

In *Tartuffe,* Orgon's insistence to force Tartuffe on his family started the conflict.

A pivotal character must not merely desire something. He must want it so badly that he will destroy or be destroyed in the effort to attain his goal.

You might say: "Suppose Othello had given Iago the office he so passionately coveted?"

In that case there would not have been a play.

There must always be something a person wants more than anything else in life if he is to be a good pivotal character; revenge, honor, ambition, etc.

A good pivotal character *must have something very vital at stake.*

Not everyone can be a pivotal character.

A man whose fear is greater than his desire, or a man who has no great, all-consuming passion, or one who has patience and does not oppose, cannot be a pivotal character.

By the way, there are two types of patience; positive and negative.

Hamlet had no patience to *endure* (negative), but he did have patience to persevere (positive). Jeeter Lester, in *Tobacco Road,* had the kind of patience that made you marvel at human endurance. The patience of a martyr, despite torture, is a powerful force that we can use in a play or in any other type of writing.

There is a positive kind of patience which is relentless, death defying. Then there is a negative patience which has no resilience, no inner strength to endure hardship.

A pivotal character is necessarily aggressive, uncompromising, even ruthless.

Even though Jeeter Lester appears to be a "negative" character, he is nevertheless as provocative as the "aggressive" Iago. Both of them are pivotal characters.

We might as well clarify just what we mean when we say "negative" and "positive" (aggressive) pivotal characters.

Everybody understands what an aggressive character is, but we must explain the "negative" one. To withstand hunger, torture, physical and mental suffering for an ideal, whether real or fancied, is strength in Homeric proportions. This negative strength is really aggressive in the sense that it provokes

counter-action. Hamlet's snooping, Jeeter Lester's maddening insistence to stay on his land and actually die from sheer hunger, are actions which certainly provoke counter-action. So a negative force, if it is enduring, becomes a positive force.

Either one of these forces is good for any type of writing.

Once more, a pivotal character is necessarily aggressive, uncompromising, even ruthless, whether he is the "negative" or "positive" type.

A pivotal character is a driving force, not because he decided to be one. He becomes what he is for the simple reason that some inner or outer necessity forces him to act; there is something at stake for him, honor, health, money, protection, vengeance, or a mighty passion.

Oedipus, in *Oedipus Rex,* insists upon finding the King's murderer. He is the pivotal character and his aggressiveness is motivated by Apollo's threat to punish his Kingdom with pestilence if he doesn't find the murderer. It is the happiness of his people which forces him to become a pivotal character.

The six soldiers in *Bury the Dead,* refuse to be buried, not because of themselves, but because of the great injustice befallen on the majority of the working people. They refuse to be buried for the sake of mankind.

Krogstad in *A Doll's House,* is relentless for the sake of his children whom he wants to rehabilitate.

Hamlet ferrets out his father's murderers not to justify himself, but to bring the guilty to justice.

As we see, a pivotal character never becomes a pivotal character because *he wants to.* He is really forced by circumstances within him and outside of him to become what he is.

The growth of a pivotal character cannot be as extensive as that of the other characters. For instance, the *other* characters might go from *hate* to *love* or from *love* to *hate,* but not the pivotal character, because *when your play starts the pivotal character is already suspicious or planning to kill.* From suspicion to the discovery of unfaithfulness is a much shorter

road than from absolute faith to the discovery of unfaithfulness. Therefore, if it would take the average character ten steps to go from love to hate, the pivotal character would only travel the last four, three, two or even just one step.

Hamlet starts with a certainty (his father's ghost tells him about the murder), and he ends with murder. Lavinia in *Mourning Becomes Electra,* starts with hatred, plots for revenge, and ends in desolation.

Macbeth starts with coveting the King's throne, and ends in murder and death.

The transition between blind obedience and open revolt is much greater than that between an oppressor's *anger* and his *vengeance* against a rebellious peon. Yet there is transition in both cases.

Romeo and Juliet experience hate, love, hope, despair, and death, while their parents, the pivotal characters, experience only hate and regret.

When we say that poverty encourages crime, we are not attacking an abstraction but the social forces which make poverty possible. These forces are ruthless, and their ruthlessness is represented by *a man.* In a play we attack the man and through him, the social forces which make him what he is. This representative *cannot* relent: the forces behind him back him up. And if he does weaken, you know he was a poor choice of character and another representative was needed who could faithfully serve the forces behind him.

The pivotal character can match the emotional intensity of his adversaries, but he has a smaller compass of development.

QUESTION: A few things still puzzle me about growth. In the movie *Juarez,* for instance, every character goes through a transition: Maximilian from vacillation to determination; Carlotta from love to madness; Diaz from faith in his cause to vacillation. Only Juarez did not grow; yet his

stolidity, his unwavering faith, make him a monumental figure. What was wrong? Why didn't he grow?

ANSWER: He does grow, constantly, but not as obviously as the others. He is the pivotal character, whose strength, determination and leadership are responsible for the conflict. We shall come back to this and see why his central position makes his growth less apparent. But first let us show you that he does grow. He warns Maximilian—and then carries out his threat. Growth. When he finds that his forces cannot stand against the French, *he changes tactics,* disbands his army. Growth. We see him in transition. We know why he changes his mind when we hear the shepherd boy describe how his dogs unite to fight a wolf. We see how Juarez handles treachery and faces his enemies in their own camp. The scene in which he walks through a firing squad shows him in actual conflict and confirms our belief that he is a very brave man.

His depth of love for his people is proved by his relentlessness toward Maximilian. Through the constant exposition of his character we learn that his motivation is honest and unselfish.

An imperceptible transition is revealed on the surface when he murmurs, "Forgive me," over Maximilian's coffin. His love is revealed conclusively and we know that his cruelty was not directed against Maximilian, but against Imperialism.

QUESTION: Then his growth is from *resistance* to *stronger resistance,* instead of from *hate* to *forgiveness.* I see. Why wasn't it necessary for Juarez' change to be as great as Maximilian's?

ANSWER: Juarez is the pivotal character. Remember, the growth of the pivotal character is much less than that of the other characters for the simple reason that he has reached a decision *before the story starts.* He is the one who *forces the others to grow.* Juarez' strength is the strength of the

masses who are willing to fight and die for their liberty.

He is not alone. He is not fighting because he wants to fight. Necessity forces a liberty loving person to try to destroy his oppressor or die, rather than submit to slavery.

If a pivotal character has no inner or outer necessity to fight, except his own caprice as a motive, there is the danger that any minute he might stop being a driving force, thus betraying the premise, and with it, the play.

QUESTION: What about the people who want to write, act, sing, paint? Would you call this inner urge for self-expression a caprice?

ANSWER: With ninety-nine per cent of them it might be a caprice.

QUESTION: Why ninety-nine per cent?

ANSWER: Because ninety-nine per cent usually give up before they have a chance to achieve anything. They have no perseverence, no stamina, no physical or mental strength. Although there are people who have both physical and mental strength, the inner urge to create is not strong enough.

QUESTION: Is it possible for an element like cold, heat, fire, water, to be a pivotal character?

ANSWER: No. These elements were the absolute rulers on earth when man ambled along from the darkness of his primitive existence. It was the eternal status quo, a state of affairs which had existed unquestioned, unchallenged, for billions of years. The protozoa, pleuroccocus, bacteria, amoeba, did nothing to counteract the existing order. Man did. Man started the conflict. Man became the pivotal character in the drama of existence. He has not only harnessed the elements but is on the verge of conquering disease with the new drugs which are constantly being discovered.

Man's aggressiveness against the elements is not dependent upon a whim. It arises out of dire necessity and is implemented by intelligence. This necessity and intelligence forced him to split the atom and create that frightfully

destructive force, atomic energy; but if he is to survive, this very frightfulness will force him again to use it for the elevation of mankind instead of for destruction. He'll do this not from nobility, but because dire *"necessity"* will force his hand again.

Once more: a pivotal character is forced to be a pivotal character out of sheer necessity, and not because he wills it.

9. *The Antagonist*

Anyone who opposes a pivotal character necessarily becomes the opponent or *antagonist*. The antagonist is the one who holds back the ruthlessly onrushing protagonist. He is the one against whom the ruthless character exerts all his strength, all his cunning, all the resources of his inventive power.

If for any good reason the antagonist cannot put up a protracted fight, you might as well look for another character who will.

The antagonist in any play is necessarily as strong and, in time, as ruthless as the pivotal character. A fight is interesting only if the fighters are evenly matched. Helmer, in *Doll's House,* is the antagonist against Krogstad. The protagonist and the antagonist must be dangerous foes to each other. Both of them are ruthless. The mother in *The Silver Cord* finds a worthy opponent in the women her sons brought home. Iago, in *Othello*, is the ruthless, conniving protagonist. Othello is the antagonist. Othello's authority and power are so great that Iago cannot show his hand openly—but he courts great danger anyway, nay, his very life is in danger. Othello, then, is a worthy antagonist. The same is the case in *Hamlet.*

Let me now repeat it again: the antagonist must be as strong as the protagonist. The wills of conflicting personalities must clash.

If a big brute manhandles a little fellow, we turn against him, but this does not mean that we shall wait with bated breath to see the outcome of this uneven encounter. We know it beforehand.

A novel, play, or any type of writing, really is a crisis from beginning to end growing to its necessary conclusion.

10. Orchestration

When you are ready to select characters for your play, be careful to orchestrate them right. If all the characters are the same type—for instance, if all of them are bullies—it will be like an orchestra of nothing but drums.

In *King Lear,* Cordelia is gentle, loving, faithful; Goneril and Regan, the older daughters, are cold, heartless, and deceitful plotters. The King himself is rash, headstrong, and given to unreasoning anger.

Good orchestration is one of the reasons for rising conflict in any play.

It is possible to choose two liars, two prostitutes, two thieves for one play, but necessarily they will be different in temper, philosophy, and speech. One thief might be considerate, the other ruthless; one could be a coward, the other fearless; one might respect womanhood, the other might despise women. If both have the same temperament, the same outlook on life, there will be no conflict—and no play.

When Ibsen selected Nora and Helmer for *A Doll's House,* it was inevitable that he should choose a married couple, since the premise dealt with married life. This phase of selection is obvious to everyone.

The difficulty starts when the dramatist chooses people of the same type and tries to generate conflict between them.

We are thinking of Maltz' *Black Pit,* in which Joe and Iola are very much alike. They are both loving and considerate. They have the same ideals and desires and fears. No wonder, then, that Joe makes his fatal decision almost without conflict.

Nora and Helmer love each other, too. But Helmer is *domineering* where Nora is *obedient,* scrupulously *accurate and truthful* where Nora *lies and cheats* as a child would. Helmer is responsible for everything he does; Nora is careless. *Nora is everything Helmer is not; they are perfectly orchestrated.*

Suppose that Helmer had been married to Mrs. Linde. She is mentally mature, aware of Helmer's world and standards. She and Helmer might have quarreled, but they would never have created the great conflict which comes of the contrast between Nora and Helmer. A woman like Mrs. Linde would scarcely have committed the forgery, but if she had done so, she would have been aware of the seriousness of her deed.

Just as Mrs. Linde is different from Nora, Krogstad is different from Helmer. And Dr. Rank is different from all of them. Together, these contrasting characters are instruments which work together to give a well-orchestrated composition.

Orchestration demands well-defined and uncompromising characters in opposition, moving from one pole toward another through conflict. When we say "uncompromising," we think of Hamlet, who goes after his objective—to ferret out his father's murderer—as a bloodhound follows his quarry. We think of Helmer, whose rigid principle of civic pride causes the drama. We think of Orgon, in *Tartuffe,* who in his religious fanaticism deeds his fortune to a villain and willingly exposes his young wife to his advances.

Whenever you see a play, try to find out how the forces are lined up. The forces may be groups, as well as individuals; Fascism vs. democracy, freedom vs. slavery, religion vs. atheism. Not all religious persons who fight atheism are the same. The divergencies between their characters can be as wide as between heaven and purgatory.

In *Dinner at Eight,* Kitty and Packard are well orchestrated. Although Kitty resembles Packard in many ways, a world separates them. They both wish to be accepted in high society, but Packard wishes to reach the top in politics. Kitty abhors politics and Washington. She has nothing to do; he has no moment for relaxation. She lies in bed awaiting her lover; he rushes from place to place to do business. Between such characters there are endless possibilities for conflict.

In every big movement there are smaller movements. Let us suppose that the big movement in a play is from *love* to *hate.* What are the smaller movements within it? *Tolerance* to *intolerance* is one, and it can be broken down into *indifference* to *annoyance.* Now, whichever movement you choose for your play will affect the orchestration of your characters. Characters orchestrated for the *love*-to-*hate* movement would be far too violent for the smaller movement from *indifference* to *annoyance.* Chekhov's characters fit the movements he chose for his plays.

Kitty and Packard, for instance, would never do for *The Cherry Orchard,* and *The Cherry Orchard* characters would never get to first base in *King Lear.* Your characters should be as contrasted as the movement you are using will permit. Fine plays can be written on the smaller movements, but even on this smaller scale the conflict must be sharp, as the plays of Chekhov indicate.

When someone says, "It is a rainy day," we really don't know what kind of rain he refers to. It can be:

drizzle (fine drops)
rain (steady fall)
downpour (heavy rain)
storm (rain plus disturbed atmosphere).

Similarly, someone might remark, "So-and-so is a bad person." We haven't the slightest idea what that "bad" means. Is he:

unreliable
untrustworthy
a liar
a thief
a racketeer
a rapist
a killer?

We have to know exactly in what category every character belongs. As the author, you have to know every character's exact status, because you will orchestrate him with his opposites. Different orchestration is necessary for different movements. But there must be orchestration—*well-defined, strong, uncompromising characters in conflict commensurate to the movement of the play.*

If, for instance, the movement was

from
indifference
to
boredom
to
impatience
to
irritation
to
annoyance
to
anger

your characters could not be black and white. They would be light gray against dark gray, perhaps—*but they would be orchestrated.*

If your characters are correctly orchestrated, as are those in *A Doll's House* or *Tartuffe* or *Hamlet,* their speech will necessarily be contrasted also. For instance, if one of your characters is virginal and the other a rake, their dialogue will

reflect their respective natures. The first has no experience, and her ideas will be naïve. Casanova, in contrast, has had a wealth of experience, which will be reflected in everything he says. Any meeting between the two is sure to reveal the knowledge of one, the ignorance of the other. If you are faithful to your tridimensional character outlines, your characters will be faithful to themselves in speech and manner, and you need have no fear about contrast. If you bring a professor of English face to face with a man who never utters a sentence without mangling it, you'll have all the contrast you need without going out of your way to find it. If these two characters happen to be in conflict, trying to prove the premise of a play, the conflict will be more colorful and exciting because of the contrast in speech. *Contrast must be inherent in character.*

Conflict is sustained through growth. The naïve virgin may become wiser. She may teach a lesson, in marriage, to Casanova, who becomes unsure of himself. The professor may become careless with his speech, while the other man turns into an eloquent speaker. Remember what growth did to Eliza in Shaw's *Pygmalion.* A thief may become honest—and an honest man may turn thief. The philanderer learns to be faithful, the faithful wife turns to philandering. The unorganized worker becomes strong through organization. These are bold outlines, of course. There are infinite variations of growth possible for any character—but growth there must be. Without growth you'll lose whatever contrast you had at the beginning of the play. The absence of growth signals the lack of conflict; and the lack of conflict indicates that your characters were not well orchestrated.

11. Unity of Opposites

Even assuming a play is well orchestrated, what assurance have we that the antagonists won't make a truce in the middle

and call it quits? The answer to this question is to be found in the "unity of opposites." It is a phrase that many people apply wrongly or misunderstand in the first place. Unity of opposites does not refer to any opposing forces or wills in a clash. Misapplication of this unity leads to a condition in which the characters cannot carry a conflict through to the finish. Our first insurance against this catastrophe is to define our terms—what is the unity of opposites?

If a man in a crowd is pushed by a stranger, and, after some insulting remarks on both sides, hits him, will the resulting fight be the result of a unity of opposites?

Only superficially, not fundamentally. The men have a desire to fight. Their egos have been slighted, they want physical revenge, *but the difference between them is not so deep-rooted that only an injury or death would straighten it out.* These are antagonists who might quit in the middle of a play. They might rationalize, explain, apologize, and shake hands. *The real unity of opposites is one in which compromise is impossible.*

We must go to nature again for an example before we apply the rule to human beings. Can anyone imagine a compromise between a deadly disease germ and the white corpuscles in a human body? It will be a fight to the finish, because the opposites are so constituted that they must destroy each other to live. There is no choice. A germ cannot say: "Oh, well, this white corpuscle is too tough for me. I'll find another place to live." Nor can the corpuscle let the germ alone, without sacrificing itself. They are opposites, united to destroy each other.

Now let's apply this same principle to the theater. Nora and Helmer were united by many things: love, home, children, law, society, desire. Yet they were opposites. It was necessary for their individual characters that this unity should be broken, or that one of them should succumb completely to the other—thus killing his individuality.

Like the germ and the corpuscle, the unity could be broken and the play ended *only by the "death" of some dominant quality in one of the characters*—Nora's docility, in the play. Naturally, death in the theater need not apply to the death of a human being. The severing of the unity between Nora and Helmer was a very painful thing, not at all easy. The closer the unity, the more difficult the breaking. And this unity, despite the qualitative change that has taken place in it, still affects the characters it has bound. In *Idiot's Delight,* the characters had nothing to bind them to each other. If one person was disagreeable he could leave.

In *Journey's End,* on the other hand, the ironclad unity of the soldiers was established beyond doubt. We were convinced that they had to stay in the trenches, perhaps die there, although they wished to be thousands of miles away. Some drank to keep up the courage that would enable them to do what was expected of them. Let us analyze their situation. These men lived in a society in which certain contradictions culminated in war. The men did not wish to fight, having no interests to safeguard, but they were sent to kill because they were subject to the desires of those who decided to solve their economic problem with war. Moreover, these young men had been taught since childhood that to die for one's country is heroic. They are torn between conflicting emotions: to escape and live will mean being stamped as a coward and despised; to stay will mean distinction—and death. Between these desires lies drama. The play is a good example of the unity of opposites.

In nature nothing is ever "destroyed" or "dead." It is transformed into another shape, substance, or element. Nora's love for Helmer was transformed into liberation and thirst for more knowledge. His smugness was transformed into a search for the truth about himself and his relation to society. A lost equilibrium tries to find a new equilibrium for itself.

Take the case of Jack the Ripper. This man, who killed so

indiscriminately, was never caught by the police, because his motivation was obscure. He seemed to have no relationship, no unity with his victims. No rancor, no anger, no jealousy, no revenge was connected with his acts. He and his victim represented opposites without unity. The motivation was missing. This same lack of motivation explains why so many bad crime plays are written. Theft, or murder, for money so that one can show off before a woman is never a real motivation. It is superficial. We do not see the irresistible force behind the crime. Criminals are people whose backgrounds have thwarted them, making crime necessary in the absence of more normal action. *If we are given the opportunity of seeing how a murderer is forced by necessity, environment, and inner and outer contradictions to commit a crime, we are witnessing the unity of opposites in action.* Proper motivation establishes unity between the opposites.

A pimp asks more money from a prostitute. Shall she give it to him? She has to. She has a sick husband whom she adores. If she refuses the pimp, he might give her secret away.

You insult your friend. He is angry and leaves, never to return. But if he lent you ten thousand dollars, can he leave so easily, never to return?

Your daughter falls in love with a man whom you abhor. Can she leave your home? Of course she can. But will she, if she expected you to put her future husband into business with your backing?

You are in partnership with your father-in-law. You don't like the old man's way of doing business. Can you dissolve this union? We don't see any reason why not. The only trouble is that the old man holds a check you have forged, and he can turn you into prison at his pleasure.

You are living with your stepfather. You hate him and still insist on staying in his house. Why? You have a horrible suspicion that he killed your father, and you stay to prove it.

You divided your fortune between your children, and in return you ask only one room in their spacious house. Later they become disagreeable, even insulting. Can you pack up and leave them, when you have no means left to support yourself?

(The last two examples may seem familiar. They should be, since they are *Hamlet* and *King Lear* again.)

Fascism and democracy in a death grip are a perfect unity of opposites. One has to be destroyed so that the other may live. Here are still others:

science—superstition
religion—atheism
capitalism—communism

We could go on endlessly, citing unities of opposites in which the characters are so bound to each other that compromise is impossible. Of course, the characters have to be made of such stuff that they will go the limit. The unity between opposites must be so strong that the deadlock can be broken only if one of the adversaries or both are exhausted, beaten, or annihilated completely at the end.

If King Lear's daughters had understood the King's plight, there would have been no drama. If Helmer could have seen the motivation of Nora's forgery, that it was done for him, *A Doll's House* would never have been written. If a warring country's government could only fathom the abysmal fear of the soldiers, they might let them go home and stop the war, but can they let them do such a thing? Of course not. King Lear's daughters are unrelenting because it is in their nature and because they have set their hearts on a goal. Governments are at war because inner contradictions force them on the road to destruction.

Here is a synopsis for a skit which establishes the unity of opposites as the story goes along:

It is a brisk winter evening, and you are going home from work. A little dog attaches himself to you. You say, "Nice

doggie," and since there is no unity between you two, you go on, forgetting about the dog. At the door you see that he is still there. He adopted you, so to speak. But you want no part of him, and say, "Go away, doggie, go away."

You go up, eat supper with your wife, read, listen to the radio, and go to bed. Next morning, with a shock, you see that the dog is still there, waiting hopefully for you, wagging his tail.

"What persistence!" you say, and pity him. You go to the subway, the dog trailing behind. You lose him at the entrance, and a few minutes later you forget him. But in the evening, coming home, just when you are about to go into your house, you stumble over him again. Apparently he was waiting, and greets you as a long-lost friend. He is freezing and emaciated by now, but happy and hopeful that you will take him in. You will, if your heart is in the right place. You don't want a dog, but this maddening persistence from a dumb animal wears you down. He wants you, he loves you, and it seems he is willing to die at your doorstep rather than give you up.

You take him upstairs. With his stubbornness, he has established a unity of opposites between you two.

But your wife is outraged. She wants no part of the dog. You defend your act, but to no avail. She is adamant. She says, "The dog or me—choose," so you give in. After feeding your little friend, you tell your wife "You take him out—I haven't the heart." She puts him out with alacrity, but afterwards feels a little sad as she remembers the sniveling animal out in the cold.

She starts to have misgivings. She is angry that she is forced to be heartless, but after all, she never wanted a dog, and she doesn't want one now.

The evening is ruined. You look at your wife with a strange, hostile eye, as if you saw her for the first time in her true colors.

In the morning you meet the dog again, but now you are really angry. He caused the first real breach between you and

your wife. You try to chase the darned animal away, but the dog refuses to be chased. He escorts you to the subway again, but now you are sure that you will stumble into him when you come back in the evening.

All day long you think of the dog and your wife. He is frozen to death by now, you think. You decide you have to do something about it, and can hardly wait to go home.

When you arrive home, there is no dog, and instead of going home, you start to look for him. But there is no sign of the animal. You are terribly disappointed. You wanted to bring him up again into your house and defy your wife. If she wants to leave you on account of the dog, let her—she never loved you, anyway.

You go up, bitterness in your heart, and you are confronted with the strangest spectacle you ever saw. You see the little stray dog sitting on your best armchair, washed, combed; and before him kneels your wife, talking baby talk to him.

The dog is the pivotal character in this case. His determination changed two human beings. One equilibrium was lost, but another was found. Even if your wife would not have taken the dog in, the old relationship would have been broken just the same.

The real unity of opposites can be broken only if a trait or dominant quality in one or more characters is fundamentally changed. In a real unity of opposites, compromise is impossible.

After you have found your premise, you had better find out immediately—testing if necessary—whether the characters have the unity of opposites between them. If they do not have this strong, unbreakable bond between them, your conflict will never rise to a climax.