

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-09984-4 - The Dramatic Experience  
J. L. Styan  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

The DRAMATIC  
EXPERIENCE  
A guide to the  
reading of plays

*By the same author*

THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA  
THE DARK COMEDY  
SHAKESPEARE'S STAGECRAFT  
CHEKHOV IN PERFORMANCE  
DRAMA, STAGE AND AUDIENCE

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-09984-4 - The Dramatic Experience  
J. L. Styan  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)



Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-09984-4 - The Dramatic Experience  
J. L. Styan  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

**J. L. STYAN**

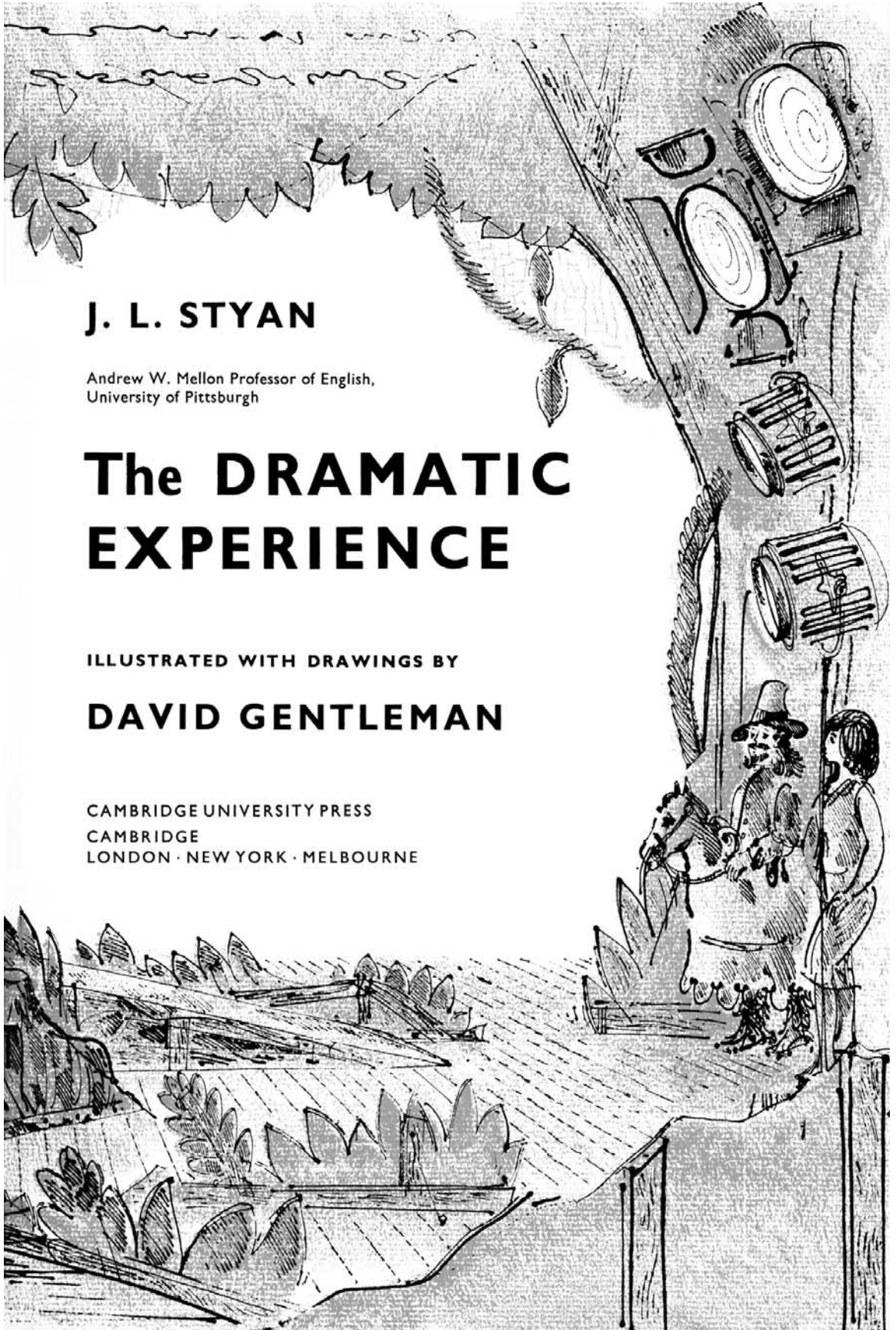
Andrew W. Mellon Professor of English,  
University of Pittsburgh

# The DRAMATIC EXPERIENCE

ILLUSTRATED WITH DRAWINGS BY

**DAVID GENTLEMAN**

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
CAMBRIDGE  
LONDON · NEW YORK · MELBOURNE



Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-09984-4 - The Dramatic Experience  
J. L. Styan  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,  
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo

Cambridge University Press  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521099844](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521099844)

© Cambridge University Press 1965

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written  
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1965  
Reprinted 1971  
First paperback edition 1975  
Re-issued in this digitally printed version 2010

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

ISBN 978-0-521-06573-3 Hardback  
ISBN 978-0-521-09984-4 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or  
accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in  
this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is,  
or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-09984-4 - The Dramatic Experience  
J. L. Styan  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

TO **L, D, K** AND **V**

## Contents

PREFACE	ix
PREFACE TO THE PAPERBACK EDITION	x
<b>1</b> SEEING AND HEARING	1
<i>A play is not like a novel or a poem; the playwright's system of signals; a play must be particular</i>	
<b>2</b> THE STAGE ALIVE	15
<i>The playwright and theatre practice; the relation of stage and audience: in the Greek theatre; in medieval drama; in the Elizabethan theatre; in Restoration times; in modern times</i>	
<b>3</b> WORDS AND VOICES	38
<i>Feeling and meaning; hearing tones and contrasts; pace and tempo; verse or prose?</i>	
<b>4</b> HOW REAL IS A CHARACTER?	54
<i>Convention and the actor; character in Greek and medieval times; in Shakespeare; in Ben Jonson; in the comedy of manners; the naturalistic character; kinds of character, flat and round</i>	
<b>5</b> WHAT'S IN A PLOT?	71
<i>Plot versus theme; total dramatic experience; true dramatic structure; subplots; planes of action and related devices; the manipulation of interest and the Unities</i>	
	vii

<b>6</b>	<b>COMEDY, TRAGEDY AND THE MOOD OF THE AUDIENCE</b>	<b>92</b>
	<i>Kinds of drama; comedy, farce and burlesque; tragedy and melodrama; tragicomedy and problem drama</i>	
<b>7</b>	<b>DRAMA IN ITS MEDIUM</b>	<b>112</b>
	<i>In the cinema; radio drama; the television play; styles of presentation in the theatre; theatre: the great adventure</i>	
	<b>CHARTS OF THEATRICAL HISTORY</b>	<b>129</b>
	<b>GLOSSARY</b>	<b>141</b>
	<b>BASIC READING LISTS</b>	<b>147</b>
	<b>INDEX OF PLAYWRIGHTS AND PLAYS</b>	<b>151</b>
	<b>INDEX OF SUBJECTS</b>	<b>153</b>

## Preface

---

The purpose of this short book is to offer simple guidance to students faced with the cold text of a play and having no chance to act it themselves or to see it alive in the theatre. With its help, it is hoped that a few of the misconceptions which readily arise from the mere reading of drama will be avoided, and that a better understanding of the dramatist's intentions and a fuller enjoyment of the play will follow. The book aims, in effect, to make a contribution towards the stage-centred reform of drama teaching and appreciation.

As far as possible, reference in the text has been restricted to those plays most commonly met with in a study of English drama, especially those of Shakespeare; but the book is not intended as a substitute for the many useful commentaries available on English drama and the theatre, some of which are listed for further reading. It is written very much as a supplement to these, as a practical working aid to reading a play fully, a tool to keep to hand.

In writing the book I am much indebted to my wife, Brian Holbeche and Pat Roberts for sound advice and help, to Muriel Crane for valuable suggestions with the Reading Lists, and to Leonard Tibbitts from whose scholarly work on expression notation I borrowed my simplified version a number of years ago.

J. L. STYAN

UNIVERSITY OF HULL



## Preface to the paperback edition

---

The issue of this edition suggests that the number of students is growing who think of a play, not as a book of words, but as a performance. Reading a play is not like reading a newspaper or a novel, and if we apply non-dramatic ideas to a play-text, like as not we will come to non-dramatic conclusions. We may enjoy unravelling a story or a character or a theme from the dialogue, but a play is not made of threads, nor does it work by ravelling them. It works by the simultaneous impact of all these elements and many more, constantly bombarding us, constantly changing.

It is deceptive because the text is written in words, superficially the same sort as are used for novels and insurance policies. But words in a play have merely the convenience of a code to be deciphered by the actors, and by an audience in a creative act of perception. The reader suffers the great handicap of working only from words on the page, when he must first perceive what they stand for.

In this edition I have tried to bring the book's modest reading lists up to date.

J. L. STYAN

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH