

DRAMATICA

or

Rational Poetics

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Contents

Introduction I
or *About this Text*

Introduction II
or *About Drama*

1. I Write

or *Drama and Fiction: Similarities and Differences*

2. Spectator and Sleep I

or *Creating and Maintaining the Spectator's Interest*

3. Digression: The Almighty

or *Author and Manipulator: Are they Synonymous?*

4. Spectator and Sleep II

or *Conceptual Message: Guarantee of Genuine Involvement*

5. Doubt with Confidence

or *Dramatist's Thinking and Creative Doubt*

6. I Know Him

or *Person and Character: Similarities and Differences*

7. We Are All Alike

or *Character Creation: The Process of Human Studies*

8. Perfection Itself

or *Completeness of Character: Guaranteeing Motivated Actions*

9. Everything Is Alive

or *Creating a Character without the Person*

10. Indispensable People and Bad Friends

or *Characters and Types: The Gallery of Characters*

11. There Is Only Myself

or *Egoism: The Sole Motivation for a Character's Actions*

12. Am I Not?

or *Negation in Drama*

13. Who Does Not Love Me?

or *The Universal Substantiation of a Character's Dream: A Study of the Mystery of Existence*

14. Whose Blame Is It? I

or *The Universal Logic of the Dramatic Structure: The Paradox*

15. Digression: All About Me

or *The Leading Character*

16. Whose Blame Is It? II

or *Conclusion: The Precision Gauge of the Paradox*

17. The Formula

or *Form and Transcript of the Paradox*

18. Taking A Page Out Of Someone Else's Book

or *Paradox and Idea*

Afterword

or *Do I Know Where I live?*

Workshop

First Step I

or *When to Start?*

First Step II

or *Location*

First Step III

or *Ask Yourself!*

First Step IV

or *The Personal Trainer*

Introduction I

or *About this Text*

Even if the author of a text has a perfectly good idea of what they should be writing and why, which is the case in this particular instance, they are nevertheless worried if the reader will eagerly follow their words until the final letter. To make it happen, an introduction of sorts is usually crafted, in which the reasons are laid out as to why the reader actually should begin to pay attention to whatever is said in the text. What is the genre of this work? How do you read it; how do you approach it? Let's first cover a definition of what the text **is not**.

This book is neither a guide nor a manual. It's not a collection of tests, questions, answers, instructions, formulae, or schemes—and even less a recipe for earning good money with playwriting. While the text does contain bits and pieces of all of the above, it cannot be pigeonholed as one of said genres. But still, how do you describe what this piece *is*? Who would benefit from reading it and why?

Who? Of course, the reader's level of life experience and encyclopaedic knowledge may—and does—differ: from a determined enthusiast to an award-winning creative or analytical professional, which is why this book is not intended as a compilation of *pure knowledge*. The response from the readers of the first Latvian edition of *DRAMATICA* was quite telling. The author was approached by people from many walks of life—both those seeking professional knowledge and those who had just discovered the unique form of human self-expression that is playwriting (and its surprisingly simple rules). These experiences have helped the author come up with a more clear definition: *DRAMATICA* is a means, an opportunity, and a tool that almost forces the reader to reflect upon their own existence. What this phenomenon also demonstrates is a certain professional aspect of the matter: an ideal dramatic text is a direct reflection of life itself. And so—whom is *DRAMATICA* aimed at then?

Everyone. Even when the text lists specific instructions on structuring a dramatic text, their intrinsic logic will only *enhance* the awareness of the life exploration process in a reader who does not have the ambition of turning into a professional dramatist.

Why? Texts dealing with the laws of drama share a common feature: they tend to tackle the foundation of the craft. While some people may find this too simple, even primitive, it is a self-evident, even commendable peculiarity to the informed reader. The specific character of dramatic material demands starting from scratch every time: each new story presumes its own uniqueness, if only for the sole reason that it features a complete new set of people or characters. This, in turn, determines the creation of a one-of-a-kind construction. And yet all dramatic structures do have something in common: they share a set of unconditional laws, the objective existence of which stipulates that the body of dramatic knowledge must be activated, *warm*, at all times. It is exactly the same as with a sports enthusiast of any level: a once-acquired physical form means nothing if it is not kept up to date through regular training. In a gym we see a fitness fan, an experienced body-builder, and an Olympic champion toiling away at the same exercise machines, and they are motivated by the same goal: *I want to be prepared whenever I might need it*. In the case of writing drama: *I will be prepared at any moment to create/understand a dramatic text that will be something completely new every time*. In other words: I am aware of the *tools* necessary to try to make sense of life itself. Because life is also completely different and completely new every day.

We could use a possibly not too appealing—but very apt—term to describe this creation: a *training book*. In other words, a text that will teach something entirely new to some people, while providing others with substantiation for things they have long since realized on their own.

Anyone who is seriously interested in anything will always benefit from a repetition of things they already know. Even if they should feel inclined to disagree with any of the postulates of this text, it will only encourage them to work on developing their own dramatic muscles. Or, in other words, their life-exploration skills. It may seem a somewhat pompous way of putting it, but there is no need for us to be so modest. Let's get busy!

Similarly, encouraged by the readers of the first edition, the audience, and like-minded professionals, there is a new chapter in this edition called “Workshop.” It contains a set of tools that could be used by those who want to write plays and yet, constantly finding new, mostly trivial excuses, habitually postpone acting on this decision. By the time we get to this chapter, we will have explored the common

features shared by all dramatic texts. As for the “Workshop,” it’s worth reading if you are about to start working on an actual piece of playwriting. Sticking with the analogy already used in this preface, “Workshop” could be compared to a sort of fitness instructor who will not let you go too easy on yourself in the gym.

Introduction II

Or About Drama

Laws of drama do exist!

The author deliberately opens with such an elementary statement to demonstrate an all but impossible fact: More than two millennia after Aristotle, who postulated said obvious truth, there are still fundamental fights going on between its supporters and deniers. And that means that it is a study of this incredible phenomenon that we have to start with.

Even confirmed naysayers are forced to concede the existence of dramatic laws after you mention an ostensibly simple fact: significant financial resources are spent on opening and running playwriting schools, classes, and workshops of varying scope worldwide. The mission of these educational programs is training people who are guaranteed—to a greater or lesser degree—to be able to produce texts that could be described as “dramatic” and, accordingly, suitable for use in the theater and cinema. This, in turn, is an indication that knowledge of said dramatic laws can be acquired and also that understanding them is a necessity for humankind.

While all of the above might seem somewhat obvious, it is still worthwhile to present the arguments of the opposing camp. Naysayers believe that drama belongs to the area of so-called *arts*, where everything has always been, still is, and always will be centered around the creative contribution of the author—which, due to its uniqueness or inimitability and unreproducibility, should, logically, not be a thing that can be taught. This contradiction is the basis for relentless fights between the so-called *pure artists* and the so-called *art mechanics*.

The first and most significant argument of the *artists* is always delivered in either an aggressive or sneering manner: *So you think that playwriting (implying art) can be*

taught? Sadly, the very wording of the question speaks of the asker's bellicosity, definitely not of their inclination to pursue a reasoned debate. They are questioning the possibility of teaching someone to make the above-mentioned creative contribution, completely ignoring the equally objective existence of the objective laws of playwriting, long since pointed out by Aristotle. It should be noted here that, judging from the author's experience, advocates of this viewpoint never engage in discussions, which yet again signals their adherence to a conviction rooted in general preconceptions instead of actual arguments. Furthermore, what this also demonstrates inadvertently is a fact most inconvenient for the *artists*: preconceptions are the exact opposite of uniqueness.

While the author agrees that playwriting cannot be *taught*, the specific principles of dramatic structure and mechanisms of operation can be *studied* and put to work afterward. The author would even go as far as declare that it is not only possible but also absolutely necessary if one wants to upgrade their writing from a hobby to a profession.

So, placing an emphasis on the word *study* once again, it would be worth our while to define this phenomenon.

Study: An attempt to understand objectively existing and rationally applicable laws, as opposed to the process that can be described with the word learn, and should be understood as mechanical memorizing of the principles of shaping a dramatic text and further uncritical, uncreative application of these principles.

Only a rational approach to the work—based, of course, on a unique creative contribution—can help reveal the special qualities of inimitability, while memorizing of selected recommendations and equally mechanical further application thereof can completely destroy the original unique creative idea. Being aware of the existence of objectively existing causes and effects, the potential author of a dramatic text is able to work even more *creatively*—hindered neither by his own ignorance nor by a burden of mechanically memorized knowledge (the equally mechanical application of which already seems pointless by then). Because there are things that simply exist. Like the air that we breathe.

It is the aforementioned principle—that these laws are here to be studied, not memorized—that lies at the basis of this text. The book avoids both repeating mechanical concepts and instructions, and critiquing and criticizing these approaches, which would be unproductive speculation, the direct opposite of the genuine creativity of the dramatic process itself. The motto of this work is:

Genuine creativity is rational creativity.

The laws are called on here to speak for themselves: the author of this *training book* is but a mediator.