

**PAPERS ON PLAY-  
MAKING III. THE  
LAW OF THE DRAMA**

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Papers on Play-Making III. The Law of the Drama by Ferdinand Brunetière & Henry Arthur Jones

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**FERDINAND BRUNETIÈRE & HENRY ARTHUR JONES**

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PAPERS ON PLAY-MAKING

III

The Law of the Drama

BY

FERDINAND BRUNETIÈRE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

HENRY ARTHUR JONES



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## INTRODUCTION

Has Brunetière in this fruitful and suggestive essay really discovered the universal law of the theatre,—or rather the universal law of the drama?

[It is convenient that in English we use the word *drama* to signify the entire art of dramatic writing, while in French the word *théâtre* has to be used to signify the art of the written drama. The drama and the theatre are so often antagonistic to each other; they so often differ, if not in their body and essence, yet in their interests and aims, that we should always be careful to distinguish between them. Much of our confusion of thought in matters dramatic and theatrical arises from our constant habit of using the words *drama* and *theater* as if they were always interchangeable terms. And tho' for the purposes of the present paper they might be so used without much risk of confusion, yet I will lose no chance of noting that there is often a wide distinction between *theatrical* and *dramatic*, between



the *theater* and the *drama*. So much so that I have often said that the greatest enemy of the English drama is the English theater.]

Has then Brunetière, in this remarkable essay, discovered and expounded the veritable and universal law of drama?

Those who are concerned to know should first carefully read the essay itself. They should then study Professor Brander Matthews's comments and illustrations in the first chapter of his volume the 'Development of the Drama' and also the chapter on the 'Law of the Drama,' in his later book 'A Study of the Drama.' With these things fresh in their minds they should turn to the chapter 'Dramatic and Undramatic' in Mr. William Archer's finely analytical and comprehensive book on 'Playmaking'—a useful manual for young playwrights, full of valuable hints.

By the time the inquirer has studied all these things he will have both sides of the question before him. His decision in favor of Brunetière's theory, or against it, will probably be taken according as he has the more lately read Professor Brander Matthews or Mr. William Archer. Or, seeing that our opinions on most subjects are gen-

erally molded by our instinctive sympathies rather than by facts and arguments, the inquirer may decide the one way or the other according as he implicitly accepts the doctrine of free will with Professor Brander Matthews, or ranges himself as a determinist with Mr. William Archer.

For myself, I am a rigid, inflexible determinist. No other theory of the universe is credible, or will bear examination. I firmly believe it—in theory. But in practice I find myself lapsing and backsliding all the day long into the unrestrained indulgence of my free will. Therefore my lurking sympathies are with Brunetière; and I think that, with a little coaxing and enlargement, such as indeed he asks from his readers—with this little adjustment and explanation, I think Brunetière's law will be found to be valid and operative, if not universal, thruout the drama.

But Mr. William Archer is not only, like myself, a convinced, inflexible determinist, I am persuaded that he is also, unlike myself, a consistent one. I am sure he takes care that his practice agrees with his opinions—even when they are wrong. And in the

present matter Mr. William Archer makes out a good case against Brunetière. He presents it in his usual clear and logical way, and fortifies it with ample and varied illustrations. (See 'Playmaking' p.p. 23-33.)

Let us first challenge Mr. Archer's arguments and illustrations, and then let us see whether they cannot be agreeably "reconciled" with Brunetière's law. When a playwright finds eminent dramatic critics disagreeing, it becomes his business to "reconcile" them. Besides I love "reconciling", the favorite sport of theologians. Of course, one cannot get the same amount of genuine fun from "reconciling" doubts and difficulties in the drama that one gets from "reconciling" doubts and difficulties in theology. One ought not to expect it. Dramatic professors may not permit themselves those playful little dodges with words and facts which make theological "reconciling" such an amusing game. The Drama is a serious art, especially when serious persons like Mr. William Archer and myself get to work upon it. If then our present exercise affords us some small balance of mental profit we must be