

**THE DRAMA, ITS
LAW AND
TECHNIQUE**

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The drama, its law and technique by Elisabeth Woodbridge

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ELISABETH WOODBRIDGE

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The Drama



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ITS LAW AND ITS TECHNIQUE

BY

ELISABETH WOODBRIDGE, PH.D.

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Boston and Chicago

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PREFACE

FREYTAG'S *Technik des Dramas*, written thirty-five years ago, remains up to this time the best work of its kind. Yet its defects of manner and of arrangement are apparent even to the casual reader, and they become yet more evident when the book is subjected to the test of the college class-room. Such a test — one for which the book was never intended — obscures its merits, which are many, and emphasizes its defects, which might appear few and superficial, but which are peculiarly irritating to both teacher and student. Yet the need of such a book is indicated by the number of treatises on the drama which have appeared since Freytag wrote. All of these that I have seen, however, are either too exclusively philosophical, and in their theorizing about the art ignore the practical details of the craft, or they are not philosophical enough, and in their preoccupation with the craft lose sight of the fundamental principles, the absolute standards, of the art.

In this, as in all other essentials, Freytag was sound; his proportionate emphasis is right, and when I first began to realize the defects of the

book, I thought that by making some changes it could be rendered more practically available while no less suggestive. I soon discovered, however, that it was not possible to fit Freytag's discussion into the Procrustean framework of my own plan. His book lacks system, but it does possess the unity that must always characterize the utterances, however careless, of an honest and conscientious thinker. My book, I saw, might rectify some of the faults of the original, but would fall short of its merits. So I laid Freytag quite aside, and wrote the following chapters with as little regard as possible to the discussions in the *Technik*. "As little as possible," — for to make any claim to entire independence would be preposterous. No one can read the utterances of a thoughtful critic and veteran in stage-craft like Freytag without being influenced by them. Even if one has arrived independently at the theories and the judgments therein contained, the formulation and illustration of these theories and judgments by another mind must affect him, if not by altering his thought, at least by enriching its subject-matter. I wish, therefore, to make a comprehensive acknowledgment of my indebtedness to the *Technik*. Comprehensive and general it must be, for just because his book, despite its diffuseness and its desultoriness, is vital and fundamental, it is impossible to lay a finger on the exact places where I am in its debt.

One of the chief merits of Freytag's work is its mass of illustrative comments on ancient and

modern dramas. More especially was his use of the Greek dramatists valuable and suggestive, and I hesitated before determining to omit from this treatment any such detailed discussion. Without a sympathetic familiarity with Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides for tragedy, and with Aristophanes for comedy, no one can claim the right to "judge righteous judgment" in things dramaturgic. When Freytag wrote, such a familiarity was scarcely to be gained without years of toil; since his time, modern classical scholarship has experienced a wonderful growth, bearing fruit in a number of critical treatises whose profound learning is informed by philosophic insight and delicate taste, is directed by a sense for historic proportion, is dominated by just æsthetic standards. With such works at hand as the treatises of Jebb, of Butcher, of Haigh, any detailed treatment of the ancient drama would be presumptuous, not to say superfluous, and its place is more fittingly taken by the bibliography at the end of the volume, which points out to the student some of the guides to whom he will commit himself when he shall explore this part of the field.

Of Freytag's illustrations from modern drama, many are based on German plays, and are thus less illuminating to the average American reader — even the college student — than to the German audience for whom they were intended; hence they greatly increase the bulk of the book without adding proportionately to its effectiveness. I have confined my illustrations more strictly to English literature,