Toward the Exoskeletal: the Development of Exposition as a Structuring Device in the Modern Theatre

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Following the completion of the Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou in Paris, Rudolph Chelminski referred to the modernistic structure as "exoskeletal."[1] This term, coined to describe a building in which, "everything that is usually hidden inside is on the outside,"[2] might also be employed to portray the positioning of exposition in the structure of a drama by some modern playwrights. What follows is an examination of some traditional and modern uses of expository material that traces the movement of exposition from a skeletal to an exoskeletal position in dramatic structure. In the interest of creating a common ground as a starting place, the examination begins with a brief look at the functional necessity of exposition.

Regardless of the degree of familiarity that an audience may have with the dramatic situation, events, or characters of a play, playwrights must present their work within a specified context. The context shaped by the writer may contain elements of myth, history, or fantasy in either pure or mixed states, may indeed encompass any combination of elements that an audience will believe and accept. The playwright may summon context from a revered past, as did the Greek dramatists, from a more recent past, as have the creators of many history plays and docudramas, or from an invented past, present, or future, as Karl Capek did for **R.U.R.** Whether factual or fictional, historic or fantastic, the context must possess credibility, and in this necessity lies the importance of exposition.

No script contains in its events the entire context of those events. Even a work as massive as Eugene O'Neill's **Mourning Becomes Electra** does not hold sufficient dramatic space for presentation in action of the full environment and history of its story; even a cosmos as detached and seemingly closed as that of Samuel Beckett's **Waiting for Godot** cannot exist completely without explanation; the playwrights had to include exposition. Nor does an audience's familiarity with the subject matter diminish the need for exposition. On the contrary, it frequently increases that need. The original audiences of the Greek drama knew the situations and characters presented in the plays, yet these dramas contain a good deal of exposition, because the manner of telling the story determined the play's value and the dramatist had to lead the audience to that particular understanding of the common pool of knowledge.[3]

In the traditional sense, then, exposition exists to acquaint the audience with that part of the context of the play not directly present in the on-stage action. Various texts on the subject of playwriting have defined this crucial term in slightly by significantly different ways. To give a selection, Josephine Niggli identifies as exposition, "everything in a play that takes place offstage (before the curtains open or during the run of the action)" and further states that, "it is always told to the audience, never shown."[4] Kenneth Macgowan narrows this field somewhat to include only "things out of the past that the audience needs to know in order to understand the characters or plot," without the restriction of oral presentation.[5] Sam Smiley includes as exposition "any information in the play about circumstances that precede the beginning, occur offstage, or happen between scenes," and subdivides it according to its description of the distant or the recent past.[6] None of these definitions includes (and one of them specifically excludes) any consideration of visual exposition. Yet nearly all modern playwrights have placed in their scripts descriptions, sometimes quite extensive and explicit, of scenery, lighting effects, furniture and hand props, costumes, and even of the physical appearances and activities of the characters.[7] All of these descriptions, whether on the page or realized by the director and designers, belong in the category of exposition. Aside from their non-verbal nature, they certainly conform to the principles set forth by Niggli, Macgowan, and Smiley by providing the audience information about the situation and characters not contained in the action proper.

Of course, directors and designers do not always choose to follow to the letter a playwright's delineation of the stage environment, but even the greatest departure from the written directions must in some way convey their spirit in order to communicate the complete concept of the author to the audience. Otherwise, the production either becomes a different play altogether or, worse, degenerates into a play about the technical elements, in which the relationship between action and exposition reverse in a most unfortunate manner. In order to prevent this from happening, the various production elements must form a coherent statement, a single context in which the active and passive dialog, the actions of the characters, and the various technical elements, all in a state as close as possible to the playwright's wishes, have a share proportional to their moment-to-moment importance.

Niggli, Macgowan, and Smiley have formulated definitions of exposition that have a literary core. Another possible definition concentrates on the work as produced rather than as written. In this case, exposition includes those verbal or visual elements that serve more to inform and illustrate than to advance the action.

This definition encompasses both basic categories of exposition, verbal and visual. A playwright employs verbal exposition in a number of ways and uses a variety of agents to communicate it to the audience. Macgowan, who

attempts an historic survey of the uses of verbal exposition, claims that the Greek dramatists used the Chorus to set forth the "basis of the play, explain the characters, and cover the antecedent action."[8] Yet anyone who has read or experienced a play from this period knows that the Greeks' use of exposition does not slip so neatly into a pigeonhole. True, the Chorus often presents the exposition, but it also enters into the action at times, while the actors frequently provide passive information. For example, in the opening speeches of Sophocles' **Antigone**, we encounter an Ismene who does not know as much about recent events as does her sister. Antigone explains the situation both to Ismene and to the audience. Other characters also convey exposition, particularly the messengers that occur in this and nearly every other Greek play. Indeed, despite the fact that the audience knew the mythic background of the plays, the action sequences in Greek dramas float like small islands in seas of exposition, probably due to the fact that these works remained quite close to their presentational, dithyrambic relatives despite the presence of actors as representational elements.[9]

Again, Macgowan offers a rather simplistic bit of history by writing that Shakespeare embodied his exposition in prologues and soliloquies while the seventeenth-century playwrights introduced the "confident" character as a receptor of expository information.[10] Here, too, the fact is that neat categories do not exist, nor will an historical survey such as Macgowan's provide a workable classification that asks how characters convey the exposition will work.

The most obvious method of conveying verbal exposition to the audience involves direct address. Information presented in this manner may take the form of a prologue spoken by a distinct character or by one of the regular **dramatis personae.** The distinctly expository character may also occur as a narrator, who presents information when and as the action requires it, as in Thornton Wilder's **Our Town.**

Characters within the action may step out of it and present exposition directly to the audience in the form of narrations, soliloquies, or asides. With the exception of the aside, direct exposition of this nature generally appears in blocks of information. The narrative may come from a single figure or from a group of any size, and the character or characters who deliver it may become a chorus, as is the case with the Women of Canterbury in T.S. Eliot's **Murder in the Cathedral.** Sometimes, the playwright prefers to disguise narrational exposition as a letter that either the writer or the recipient or both read to the audience, or as some modern analog of a letter, such as a dictated message, a tape recording, or one end of a telephone conversation.[11]

As opposed to the narrational form, associated primarily with presentational theatre, conversational exposition, which may occur in either presentational or representational plays, remains on stage, with the audience eavesdropping. At its most vacuuous level, conversational exposition takes place between two or more characters, frequently servants, who chat about facts already known to themselves for the purpose of enlightening the audience.[12] On a level of interest only slightly higher and less obvious than this, one character confides the information to another who, like the audience, does not already know its content. Such confidences attain a greater level of interest when the ignorant character questions the knowledgeable one, and achieve their highest level when neither one of the characters possesses the whole of the information and a true conversation results from their mutual assembly of the pieces of the puzzle.

A similar type of exposition comes about when a stranger enters the scene and seeks information, or when a character who for some reason has been separated from the action for a period of time returns to it. This type works best when the stranger or pseudo-stranger brings information from outside the scene that interacts with the facts elicited by the stranger's presence to create an expository synthesis, as, for example, in Arthur Miller's **All My Sons.**

As with narrational exposition, the conversational form may occur scattered throughout the play or in block form at the beginnings of acts or scenes. Generally speaking, conversational exposition has a more subtle and natural effect upon the audience than the narrational type, except in the case of a poorly used confidant or a character inserted for a solely expository purpose.[13]

The requirement for exposition can be fulfilled by physical as well as by verbal action. Particular gestures, ranging from a limp to a special way of holding or using a prop, may indicate something about the situational past or present of a character that dialog alone does not reveal. Since, with few exceptions, gestures tend to convey a more ambiguous message than words, they occur less frequently as expository elements and, when they do occur, often represent a directorial rather than an authorial choice.

Scenic descriptions provided by the playwright constitute another type of visual exposition, although they seldom reach the audience directly, but filter through the artistic efforts of the director and the production's designers. Audience members who have not read the original text (as opposed to the acting version, in which visual descriptions recorded by the stage manager of a particular production frequently augment or supplant the playwright's visual instructions) have no way of judging the playwright's intentions in regard to visual exposition and can only trust the production staff not to violate the script.

Conversely, a director or designer may deliberately choose to alter the playwright's directions concerning visual exposition in order to produce the script in an alternate format or to relate it to an audience other than that for which the script was originally intended. The former frequently happens when a play written for the proscenium undergoes an arena or thrust stage production. The latter occurred, for instance, in 1971 at the University of Missouri, when director Sam Smiley and designer James Hooks decided to separate **Death of a Salesman** from the

traditional theatrical realism described by Arthur Miller and realized by Jo Mielziner. Smiley and Hooks turned to an open stage backed by a large projection screen in an attempt to bring to the audience a different perspective on Miller's intent and to explore the application of modern scenographic techniques to a basically realistic play. The projections used by Hooks depicted the interior of the human body and, in a sense, returned to Miller's own early intention for **Death of a Salesman**, an early version of which carried the title, **The Inside of His Head**.[14] The production thus rejected the playwright's written scenic descriptions in favor of offering the audience an insight into Miller's intentions.[15]

In some cases, items of either visual or verbal exposition may become "plants." Sam Smiley defines a plant as "an item of information, one that the playwright inserts early in the play and that turns out to be significant later;" although not always expository, "plants establish the basis for. . .credibility."[16] The plant may occur as a physical object brought into the setting, or as a statement introduced narrationally or conversationally that sets up a character trait, a significant object, or a coming event.[17]

This discussion has thus far dealt with exposition as used by playwrights from the fifth century, B.C., to the nineteenth century, A.D. As stated in the definition offered above, the basic form of exposition during these twenty-four centuries involved the communication of information not contained in the dramatic action but essential to the audience's comprehension of that action, a form that can be labeled skeletal, in that it serves to support the dramatic structure and, at its best, provides that support from a concealed position. Most of the plays of Arthur Miller build firmly upon this foundation. Following the trail blazed by Ibsen, Miller uses exposition carefully and subtly, preferring the scattered to the block form, the conversational to the narrational type. Miller also employs the plant with consummate skill.

In **All My Sons**, for example, he plants the importance of the tree several times before revealing its true meaning and associative significance, thus transforming it from mere visual exposition into a visual symbol. With each plant, the audience learns a little more and simultaneously becomes more curious. Expository plants that develop information about Larry accompany those concerning the tree, so that the character and the object become linked in the minds of the audience members. These plants create the expectation of an emotional outburst from Mrs. Keller, and expectation that Miller realizes in reverse through her first on-stage reaction to the broken tree: "So much for that, thank God."[18]

Miller also introduces a rememorative form of conversational exposition. Characters speak nostalgically about past events rather than relate them objectively, and thus set an overall mood for the play. Two characters, Annie and George, act as returning familiars and achieve the expository synthesis described earlier. Annie's conversation with Joe Keller provides the information that her father is in prison for a crime of which Keller was acquitted, and describes that crime. It also contains a plant of Joe Keller's eventual admission of guilt. In his first exchange with Annie, Keller states his case in terms that justify his acquittal and her father's conviction:

> Keller: All of a sudden a batch comes out with a crack. That happens, that's business. A fine hairline crack. All right, so. . .so he's a little man, your father, always scared of loud voices. What'll the major say?—Half a day's production shot. What'll I say? You know what I mean? Human. (Slight pause.) So he takes out his tools and he. . .covers over the cracks. All right. . .that's bad, it's wrong, but that's what a little man does. If I could've gone in that day I'd a told him—junk 'em, Herb, we can afford it. But alone he was afraid. But I know he meant no harm. He believed they'd hold up a hundred per cent.[19]

Later, in Act II, Keller provides a different version of the same exposition during a conversation with his son, Chris:

> Keller: I'm in business, a man is in business; a hundred and twenty-one cracked, you're out of business;. . . .what could I do, let them take forty years, let them take my life away? (His voice cracking) I never thought they'd install them.[20]

The symmetry of these two passages embodies, in the form of exposition, a central action of the play, Joe Keller's admission of guilt. The second version of this exposition results in part from another chain of expository information.

At the end of Act I, Annie receives a telephone call from her brother, George. Miller very subtly diminishes the importance of this call and then uses it to plant the essence of George's information without revealing its exact nature. Ensuing conversations build upon this plant, establishing the threat that Joe Keller and his wife feel from George. At the start of Act II, a conversation between Mrs. Keller and Chris again plants this threat. When George finally arrives, as another returning familiar, his exposition reveals another piece of the puzzle, a version of the crime as related to him by his father. The entire plot thus turns upon skillful exposition, and by placing the events on this level Miller heightens the importance and value of their effect upon the actions of the Keller family.

Miller has stated that, in **All My Sons**, it "seemed necessary to prove the connections between the present and the past, between events and moral consequences, between the manifest and the hidden."[21] He established most of those connections through the careful use of exposition.

Improving upon but still following tradition, Miller employed exposition as a connective device, a concealed skeleton that supported the structure of the play. Like the architects of the Pompideau center, however, other playwrights of this century have turned to exoskeletal forms of exposition, frequently using this previously concealed element as a disconnective device. Rather than providing the audience with exposition, they have turned it against the audience in order to create a dialectic, to confuse, or to disinform.

In his 1931 text on playwrighting, Kenneth Rowe stated in regard to exposition that "the audience should never become aware that it is receiving information."[22] In 1951, Kenneth Macgowan espoused that "the secret of good exposition in the ordinary course of dialogue is to avoid the direct statement and provide the information obliquely."[23] And, in 1977, Sam Smiley warned that "obvious expositional devices impair the excellence of any play."[24] Yet the work of some twentieth-century playwrights points toward increasingly obvious uses of exposition, a trend similar to the exoskeletal movement in architecture in that it exposes the framework on which the play hangs and the devices that make the drama work.

Bertolt Brecht comes to mind most readily as a user of exoskeletal exposition, since it forms the very core of the **Verfremdungseffekt**. Brecht wanted actors to present rather than to represent their characters, so that each actor would serve as a narrator, an expositor, using verbal and visual exposition to communicate the text.

As many critics have noted, however, Brecht's plays in production often evade any attempt to realize the **Verfremdungseffekt** through acting. Nevertheless, the process appears in the texts. In his "Short Organum," Brecht thus describes the proper structure of a play:

> As we cannot invite the audience to fling itself into the story as if it were a river and let itself be carried hither and thither, the individual episodes have to be knotted together in such a way that the knots are easily noticed. The episodes must not succeed each other indistinguishably but must give us a chance to interpose our judgment. . . .The parts of the story have to be carefully set off one against another by giving each item its own structure as a play within the play.[25]

Nowhere has Brecht better carried out this plan of nesting a series of plays within each other than in **The Caucasian Chalk Circle**. The final action of this play, the test of the chalk circle, occurs in the last of three sections or plays and occupies far less than a quarter of the work's running time in production.[26] But in order to tell this story in a form with more depth than that of the simple folk-drama from which it springs, Brecht decides to also give us the stories of its two principle characters, Grusha and Azdak. The play of the chalk circle nests within the plays that contain their stories. Nor does this double structure satisfy Brecht, for mere presentation of the stories of Grusha, Azdak, and the trial would allow the audience to perceive them as simple, entertaining tales, unrelated to its own existence. So Brecht creates another level of nesting by constructing a prologue that demonstrates the chalk-circle principle as used in a contemporary situation. The contemporary characters of the prologue take part in the inner plays, thus creating a participatory unity. One can easily see that the prologue serves as a justificational exposition of the rest of the play. By extension, then, the stories of Grusha and Azdak become illustrative expositions of the story of the chalk circle. Viewed from another perspective, the story of the trial and its accompanying explications of Grusha and Azdak become illustrative expositions of the prologue situation, a complex of exoskeletal knots that satisfies Brecht's own demands from the "Short Organum."

Within each of these nestings, with the exception of the prologue, Brecht uses the Story-teller (Narrator) to introduce the action, to provide transitions from one episode to another, and to comment upon the action and its characters. The Narrator, sometimes joined by the Chorus, allows Brecht to move his scene quickly from place to place and to work rapidly through transitions in favor of more completely developed dialectical scenes. Thus, in the second section of Part One, "The Flight into the Northern Mountains," the prologue characters who represent Grusha and other characters act out some parts of the story and the Narrator describes other parts.

The use of expository narrative allows Brecht to concentrate upon the scenes in which confrontation occurs between characters and their ideologies rather than between a character and an external force. The Narrator makes the exposition visible and prevents it from intruding upon the true action. At the same time, the presence of the Narrator and the Chorus serves to remind the audience of the contemporary frame created in the prologue.

Brecht sets the pattern for an expository style of acting by introducing the Story-teller in the prologue and stating, in the stage direction that precedes Part One, that this Story-teller and a Chorus of listeners sit on the stage and that, "with appropriate gestures, [the Story-teller] gives the signal for each scene to begin."[27] A director who wished to preserve the expository frame throughout the performance might keep the characters of the prologue on stage as audience-actors, who take part in the Story-teller's presentation as he calls upon them. To make a success of this, the director would have to turn to plainly theatrical and expository effects to replace Brecht's seemingly realistic stage directions. In theory, an argument might exist for the juxtaposition of expository devices such as the Narrator and Chorus against such stage directions as,

> A wind has risen. The bridge on the glacier is visible in the dark. One rope is broken and half the bridge is hanging down the abyss. . . .One man is trying to catch the hanging rope with a stick.[28]

Particularly in a production that would properly emphasize the prologue frame and preserve it throughout the performance, some presentational props would have to come into play here, perhaps in the form of a board laid between two boxes with a rope stretched between it by the actors, to suggest the bridge and its one good handrope.

No such directorial decisions become necessary for Friedrich Durrenmatt's **The Marriage of Mr. Mississippi**. The opening stage direction sets up a visual exposition that immediately creates dialectical situations for the audience. According to the playwright, the upstage wall contains two windows, one opening onto a view of Northern

Europe, the other onto a Mediterranean site.[29] Later, Durrenmatt exploits this device to an even greater extent by having characters cross or stand behind or enter through these windows despite the fact that the room does not lie on the ground floor. Through such visual exposition, reinforced by narrative explanations, Durrenmatt immediately prepares his audience for the oxymoronic nature of the entire play.[30]

In the course of **The Marriage of Mr. Mississippi**, Durrenmatt employs a number of other exoskeletal expository devices. The play opens, without verbal exposition, on an execution that involves characters totally unknown to the audience. The executioners depart immediately—this part of the scene might take a minute or two to play—and St. Claude, whom they have just shot, launches a lengthy narrative exposition that introduces the story, several of its characters, and the setting, especially pointing out its oddities. During this exposition, various set props and other bits of visual exposition fly in and out as needed. Once the scene proper begins, Durrenmatt turns to a more conventional style of exposition, although the very untraditional nature of the facts presented therein sets up an immediate dialectic between style and content that inverts the earlier relationship between conventional information and unconventional exposition.

As the opening scene ends, Florestan Mississippi takes over the role of narrator and, again assisted by items of visual exposition that appear and vanish as needed, introduces the next scene and its characters and situation after establishing the passage of time.

Between the second and third episodes, another character, Count Bodo von Ubelohe-Zabernsee, takes over the narrational role and provides an expository segue. Before the third episode can begin, however, Mississippi interrupts with his own narration, introducing a short segment during which he and Anastasia describe their actions in an expository mode as they perform them in an active mode:

> **Anastasia.** I thought for a moment, then I went up to Mr. Mississippi and solemnly knelt before him. (she kneels)
> **Mississippi.** Deeply moved, I said: Madame, do you not despise me?
> **Anastasia.** Thereupon, I kissed his hand. (she kisses his hand)[31]

Durrenmatt uses such self-narrating scenes more than once, thus creating, in combination with standard scenes and lengthy narrations, a flow of time along the edge of a möbius band that moves the play back and forth between the active and the passive. Like the Norns in **Gotterdammerung**, various characters take up the narrative thread, which leads at last back to the scene of St. Claude's execution so that, as Eliot suggested, we return to our point of origin and "know the place for the first time."[32]

A similar progression, presented in a more optimistic vein, occurs in Max Frisch's self-styled farce, **The Chinese Wall**.[33] In this play, Frisch presents us with an expository Janus, The Contemporary, who, explaining that he plays "An Intellectual," mediates between the audience and the characters, explaining each to the other. The play constitutes an exercise in Einsteinian writing, for time becomes unglued and fluid. The present time of the audience stands simultaneous with the past times of the various characters. Each character, along with the audience, brings an historical time to an unspecified neutral point, where The Contemporary presides as a temporal major-domo, neither a modern man nor a man of the past but a contemporary, an ambiguous title that describes his chronological universality.

In his opening exposition, a totally undisguised lecture illustrated by a realistic depiction of the Great Wall of China, The Contemporary describes the Wall as "another of those constantly repeated attempts to hold back time, to dam up history;" but "it has not succeeded. Time will not be held back."[34] The Contemporary speaks like a newscaster, at once reminiscent of the "You Are There" type of reportage and of Steve Allen's comic pseudo-documentaries. The historical characters (some fictional, some historical, some fictional versions of historical figures), some introduced by The Contemporary, others introducing themselves, bring their own times to the general scene, itself of ambiguous time, along with their own linguistic and historical mileau. Thus, characters from verse dramas tend to speak in verse, while Pontius Pilate declaims in the rhetorical style of the Bible. With a single exception, The Contemporary introduces the audience's time to these characters in terms of atomic physics. As the play progresses, the various characters become more conversant with the audience's time, so that Brutus actually foments a modern revolution.

To one character, Mee Lan, The Contemporary introduces the modern world in terms of Newtonian rather than atomic physics. To others, he brings the threat of destruction, to her, the promise of eternity. Thus, an intentionally expository character becomes involved with the characters he presents to us and finds himself enmeshed in this world-of-all-times.

As in an ideal Brechtian production, the actors remain aware of themselves as actors and introduce themselves as such to the audience through expository devices. For example, Romeo complains to Juliet, "I shudder at these people here. It seems/They've all ransacked their closets. Their costumes/Smell of mothballs. . ."[35] And Mee Lan, in scene 6, says to the audience:

> You think I don't know I am disguised, in costume? . . .You think I don't know that everything here. . .is nothing but theatre? But you sit and look at one another. You, who are grown and wise, you sit and no one comes forward and says what it really is. . ."[36]

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Conversely, The Contemporary, moved by his love for Mee Lan and his sympathy for The Mute, declares himself a character in rather than an expositor of the action [37] The overall application of this character-actor pattern occurs in the visual exposition created by juxtaposing historically costumed figures against a non-historical, theatrical setting.

Frisch uses extremely visible layers of visual and verbal exposition toward an informative purpose over and above their individual ends, for with them he confuses and compresses time and space. Like the elements of one of M.C. Escher's periodic designs, the various times of the characters and the audience flow amongst one another and define one another.

An even more external application of exposition to control time and space occurs in Eugene Ionesco's **Exit the King**. Here, the characters employ a hortatory form of exoskeletal exposition, a game of verbal control in which all but the King achieve success. Marie, for instance, imposes physical infirmities upon the King through exposition:

> Marie: My dear king, you're limping!
> King: Limping? *I'm* not limping. I am limping a little.
> Marie: Your leg hurts. I'm going to help you along.
> King: It doesn't hurt. Why should it hurt? Why, yes, it *does* hurt just a little.[38]

Hortatory exposition effects changes in the characters' perceptions of the world as well as of themselves, so that the Doctor can make Marie experience an earthquake:

> Doctor: . . .the earth is quaking rather more than usual.
> Guard: The Royal Meteorological Institute calls attention to the bad weather conditions.
> Marie: I can feel the earth quaking. I can hear it. Yes, I'm afraid I really can.[39]

Only the King cannot make this conjuration work: "**King**: I order trees to sprout from the floor. (Pause.) I order the roof to disappear. (Pause.) What? Nothing? I order rain to fall. (Pause—still nothing happens.)"[40] Lest these requests seem too far beyond the grasp of the King, the Guard's long expository speech near the end of the play describes in detail former royal exploits and subsequent exposition by the other characters depicts the King as the absolute creator and coordinator of the universe, a universe that, all narrationally, collapses and disappears as the King dies. Through their expository statements, the characters manipulate time and space. Exposition literally creates and destroys the universe of this play and the audience must accept that universe or at least react to it in order to experience the drama.

The question becomes, for the plays discussed above and the many others that employ exoskeletal exposition, how should the audience experience such universes? Traditionally, playwrights have asked their audiences to deal with the action of a play emotionally and with the exposition intellectually in order to experience the action in its proper emotional context. But the traditional theatre measures the virtue of exposition in terms of its subtlety: direct appeals to the intellect have little worth in such a value system. The playwrights of that theatre have therefore tended to disguise exposition not only concretely, by dovetailing it into the dialogue whenever possible, but also abstractly, by dressing it in emotional values. Thus, as noted above, Miller gives the exposition in **All My Sons** a rememorative, nostalgic flavor that influences the overall mood of the play.

When playwrights brought exposition into an exoskeletal position, they also intellectualized it. Particularly in so far as it offers dialectical choices to the audience, exoskeletal exposition demands thought, not feeling. In **The Marriage of Mr. Mississippi**, Durrenmatt employs an expository style with a high degree of intellectual appeal. The longer expository passages approach a lecture format (and, indeed, might be treated as such in production), complete with visual aids that descend from the flies. By extension some of the action scenes become illustrative of these lectures, expositions of exposition. Moreover, the scenes in which actors describe activities as they perform them clearly demand an intellectual response from the audience.

As the earlier discussion of **Exit the King** indicates, exposition also operates in that play on the intellectual plane. A production that attempted to physicalize to any degree, even through narrative-style projections, the range of natural disasters from cracks in the wall to colliding planets described by the characters would quickly become ludicrous and destroy the play's worth as a mental game in which the universe becomes a metaphoric extension of the King's dying body.

Ionesco does not even call upon the audience to use its imagination to create the catastrophies described. Rather, he reduces them to their imagistic state by having the Guard condense them into press bulletins. Images of the King's control, or lack thereof, over the physical universe as an extension of himself expand like balloons until the Guard punctures them with a journalistically condensed phrase and reveals their intellectually comic and symbolic nature.

Max Frisch gives his chief expositor, The Contemporary, a role to play as the Intellectual. In this guise, The Contemporary lectures in a manner befitting his character's name to both the audience and his fellow cast members, attempting to alert all present to the dangers of an atomically armed world. Frisch ultimately treats The Contemporary's futile efforts to the bitter twist of humor they deserve, as, having delivered his ultimate antinuclear diatribe, the character receives the "Kung Fu Tse" award for empty intellectual effort and a kiss from Cleopatra. The one character who seemed to have grasp of both past and present ends in confused silence.

Rudolph Chelminski concluded his description of the Pompidou Center by calling the exoskeletal structure "surprising, baffling, exciting—but undeniably stylish."[41] These same adjectives seem well suited to exoskeletal exposition. Directed at the intellect, this new style of exposition may baffle and surprise audiences, but it should also excite them. Traditional exposition serves the forces of Naturalism; the exoskeletal form enhances the power of Theatricalism. Faced with the presence of motion pictures and television, the theatre fails in any attempt to operate on their emotional, naturalistic level. Exoskeletal exposition points away from efforts to transform cloth and paint into houses and mountains and encourages the stage to celebrate its intellectually illusionistic abilities. Playwrights like Frisch, Brecht, and Ionesco seem to have learned, with the Contemporary, that intellectual appeals, although they may not change the course of history, can have a greater ultimate impact than the clash of wooden swords on silastic armor.

Notes

[1]Rudolph Chelminski, "Exoskeletal Art Container Is the Rage, Literally, and the Delight of Paris," **Smithsonian, 8** (Aug., 1977), 20-29.

[2]Chelminski, 24.

[3]In his essay, "Problems of the Theatre," Friedrich Durrenmatt takes the opposite position, stating that, "the more invented a story is and the more unknown it is to the audience, the more careful must its exposition, the unfolding of its background, be." Rpt. in **Playwrights on Playwriting**, ed. Toby Cole (N.Y.: Hill and Wang, 1960), 134.

[4]Josephine Niggli, **New Pointers on Playwriting** (Boston: The Writer, 1967), 48; author's ital. deleted.

[5] Kenneth Macgowan, **A Primer of Playwriting** (New York: Random House, 1951), 31.

[6]Sam Smiley, **Playwriting: The Structure of the Action** (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 65.

[7]I refer to published scripts or unpublished manuscripts, not to the acting editions that frequently contain a potpourri of the playwright's intentions and a production promptbook.

[8]Macgowan, 146.

[9]In this sense, Greek drama existed primarily as a ritualistic story-telling enterprise that from time to time contained acted-out sequences.

[10]Macgowan, 146; He does not mention another expository character used in the latter period, the **raisoneur,** who usually brought the thoughts of the playwright directly onto the stage.

[11]Macgowan, 155.

[12]An intentionally blatant use of this type of exposition occurs in Thornton Wilder's **The Skin of Our Teeth**.

[13]Niggli, 53. Brecht deliberately uses obviously expository characters and blocks of exposition as Verfremdungseffekten.

[14]Toby Cole, ed., **Playwrights on Playwriting** (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), 261.

[15]A Photograph of this production appears in Theodore W. Hatlen's **Orientation to the Theatre**, 3d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1981), 9.

[16]Smiley, 66.

[17]Niggli, 55-56.

[18]Arthur Miller, **All My Sons**, in **Modern American Dramas**, ed. Harlan Thatcher (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1949), 284.

[19]Miller, 293.

[20]Miller, 315.

[21]Cole, 262.

[22]Kenneth Thorpe Rowe, **Write That Play** (New York: Funk & Wagnall, 1939), 59.

[23]Macgowan, 154.

[24]Smiley, 66.

[25]Quoted in Cole, 99.

[26]Fourteen of a total of eighty-nine pages in Bentley's translation, cited below.

[27]Bertolt Brecht, **The Caucasian Chalk Circle**, in **Seven Plays by Bertolt Brecht**, ed. and trans. Eric Bentley (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 505.

[28]Brecht, 531.

[29]Friedrich Durrenmatt, **Problems of the Theatre: An Essay and The Marriage of Mr. Mississippi: A Play** (New York: Grove Press, 1966), 45.

[30]An argument might be made for the "absurdist" nature of these windows, with their disparate geographical views, but I prefer to concentrate upon the function of the device and eschew easy labels, no matter how attractive.

[31]Durrenmatt, P. 81; these expositional devices also function, in Brechtian sense, as **Verfremdungseffekten**, and serve to remind the audience of the anachronistic nature of the play.

[32]T.S. Eliot, **Four Quartets** (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1943, 39: "We shall not cease from exploration/And the end of all our exploring/Will be to arrive where we started/And know the place for the first time."

[33]Trans. James L. Rosenberg (Hill and Wang, 1961); this translation first appeared in **Theatre Arts**, (Aug.-Sept., 1963), 32-60.

[34]Frisch, 19.

[35]Frisch, 25.

[36]Frisch, 44.

[37]Frisch, 104.

[38]Eugene Ionesco, **Exit the King** (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 21.

[39]Ionesco, 18.

[40]Ionesco, 33.

[41]Chelminski, 24.