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Play, photoplay, and screenplay structure : dramatic principles from theater to cinema

Barnaby Colonel Dallas
San Jose State University

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**PLAY, PHOTOPLAY, AND SCREENPLAY STRUCTURE:
DRAMATIC PRINCIPLES FROM THEATER TO CINEMA**

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Theater Arts

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Barnaby Colonel Dallas

May 2000

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APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF THEATER ARTS

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "David Kahn".

Dr. David Kahn

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Samuel Maio".

Dr. Samuel Maio

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Scott Sublett".

Professor Scott Sublett

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "William Fish".

ABSTRACT

PLAY, PHOToplay, AND SCREENPLAY STRUCTURE: DRAMATICS PRINCIPLES FROM THEATER TO CINEMA

by Baranby Dallas

This thesis explores dramatic principles as first identified in Aristotle's Poetics and traces their migration from the theater to cinema. The focus is on professional instructional manuals and connections and parallels are drawn between Gustav Freytag's nineteenth century playwriting manual Technique of Drama, photoplay manuals from the silent film era, and contemporary screenplay manuals.

This research shows that codified instruction manuals are a valuable resource to tracing dramatic principles. By focusing the analysis primarily on the dramatic principles of Freytag and the previously unexamined photoplay manuals, this research identified direct and indirect connections to contemporary screenplay theory and its reliance on these core principles.

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Chapter 1

Aristotle and the Screenplay: Are There Universal Dramatic Principles?

Contemporary screenplay theorists such as Syd Field, Lew Hunter, and Richard Walter have written books that give detailed description and instruction on the principles and structure of the modern screenplay to prospective screenwriters. Hunter and Walter teach screenwriting at UCLA film school and Field travels the country giving seminars on screenwriting. Walk into any bookstore and you will find their works in the “how to write” section. These screenwriting theorists stress a dramatic unified structure with a distinct beginning, middle and end. They all cite Aristotle’s Poetics as their source for the dramatic principles essential to script development, but fail to credit any other theorists for establishing any rules for dramatic writing over the last 2500 years. These screenwriting theorists suggest that they have merely taken Aristotle’s fundamental principles and adapted and expanded on them for the cinema.

These contemporary screenplay theorists implore their students to read Aristotle’s Poetics along with their “how to” manuals. Hunter refers to Aristotle throughout his book Lew Hunter’s Screenwriting 434. Hunter feels the Poetics should be on every screenwriter’s shelf; “buy that slim volume, read it twice, then pick it up every three or four years and read it during your screenwriting career. Those are the few rules we have and need” (Hunter 20). Hunter’s UCLA colleague, Richard Walter, also emphasizes the importance of reading the Poetics. He writes in his book Screenwriting, “Aristotle’s Poetics, if you take the time to read it (as I vigorously recommend), ought to be embraced

as the classical equivalent of *How to Clean the Carburetor of Your Honda Civic*.

Consider it history's first self-help, how-to, career-change, bootstrap mass text . . . it needs simply to be followed" (39). Thomas Pope, a working screenwriter who lectures at the University of Minnesota, echoes this advice when he states, "dramatic theory begins with Aristotle. His Poetics was the first attempt to make sense of why one play succeeds while another fails" (xv).

Contemporary screenwriting theorists imply that through their own experience reading and developing scripts they have adapted Aristotle's dramatic principles to cinema. Richard Walter says in his book Screenwriting: "As evidence of Aristotle's wisdom through the centuries, no one has truly improved upon his model" (Walter 38). Are the dramatic principles first outlined by Aristotle universal? What other connections are there to contemporary screenplay theory? Has anyone improved upon Aristotle's model? It is true that for centuries Aristotle's Poetics was merely reinterpreted by classic dramatic theorists, but in the late nineteenth century Gustav Freytag wrote, Technique of the Drama, a practical playwriting manual that attempted to codify dramatic principles in the same structured manner as the contemporary screenplay theorists. Also, during the advent of film, many photoplay manuals, written during the silent film period, appeared and were used by the early screenwriters, or photoplaywrights. These photoplay manuals were used in the same manner as the contemporary screenplay manuals: to assist professionals in the production of scripts.

The goal of this paper is not to produce yet another "how to" manual, but to codify the theorists who have. The analysis will identify the common dramaturgical principles

while illustrating how dramaturgical principles evolved and were adapted into contemporary cinema. It will be a valuable tool for scholars, critics, and writers, providing a historical look at dramatic writing, while offering insight into the development and discovery of dramatic principles which are taught in most script writing classes. The unique aspect of this project will focus on an area that has not been closely looked at: the photoplay manuals. These manuals are the first attempt to define how to write a script for film, and a detailed look at them and their significance is beneficial to all parties interested in dramatic writing.

Defining Principles of Dramatic Structure

Defining dramatic structure is one of the primary goals of the Poetics. Aristotle's Poetics only offers an examination of tragedy, so when Aristotle refers to tragedy the rules are applied to all dramatic construction. "So, the events and the plot-structure are the goal of tragedy, and the goal is what matters most of all" (Halliwell 37). Aristotle makes it a point to emphasize that the plot-structure is the most important element of drama. "Much more effective will be a play with a plot and structure of events, even if it is deficient in style and thought" (Halliwell 38). He goes on to say, "the plot-structure is the first principle and, so to speak, the soul of tragedy, while characterization is the element of second importance" (Halliwell 38).

Contemporary screenwriting theorists agree that structure is the foundation of screenwriting. Richard Walter states, "The three most important facets of story craft are: (1) structure; (2) structure; (3) structure" (37). Hunter states, "In life, things happen one

after the other. In structure one thing happens because of the other. Structure is that simple and that hard” (Hunter 89). Syd Field concurs in The Screenwriter’s Workbook: “Structure is the most important element in the screenplay. It is the force that holds everything together; it is the skeleton, the spine, the foundation. Without structure, you have no story; without story you have no screenplay” (17). Field goes on to quote William Goldman, a prominent Hollywood screenwriter (Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, All the President’s Men, Marathon Man) to reinforce the importance of structure.

It is the spine you hang your story on. When you sit down to write a screenplay, you must approach your story as a whole. A story is composed of parts--characters, plot, action, dialogue, scenes, sequences, incidents, events--and you as writer, must fashion these “parts” into a “whole,” a definite shape and form, complete with beginning, middle, and end. (20)

Clara Beranger concurs, “Every form of literature has its own characteristics which determine its structure; and structure can be taught. Whether his medium be the printed page, the stage or the screen, a potential fiction-writer needs to understand technique, the process of arranging and coordinating his material to the best advantage” (vii).

What are the principles that make up this structure? Narrative elements such as: dramatic action, unity of action, probability of action and the three act (beginning, middle, end) unified dramatic structure, are principles that were first identified by Aristotle and later used by the contemporary screenplay theorists. This thesis will use Aristotle’s

definition of each principle, as stated in the Poetics, and then show how contemporary theorists employ these principles.

Dramatic Action

The essential building block for Aristotelian structure is dramatic action. A play starts with a protagonist with a goal, or a dramatic need, and the script serves as the vehicle to answer whether the protagonist's dramatic need will be met. Pope says, "there's much to be gained from his [Aristotle's] belief that a drama begins when a problem begins and ends when the problem is resolved" (xv). This answer is achieved by a series of individual conflicts or dramatic actions. Each individual conflict or dramatic action together creates the overall dramatic action of the script. Dramatic action therefore is the fundamental and most essential dramatic principle. Aristotle defined dramatic action in his discussion of tragedy in Chapter Six of the Poetics: "without action you would not have a tragedy" (Halliwell 38). It is not the character, but the action of the character that is the essence of drama: "tragedy is a representation not of people as such but of actions of life, and both happiness and unhappiness rest on action" (Halliwell 37). This action needs to be "in the mode of dramatic enactment, not narrative" (Halliwell 37). A.O. Rorty writes in "The Psychology of Aristotelian Tragedy," that drama is "the enactment of a story that represents actions by actions and in actions" (4). Lane Cooper in The Poetics of Aristotle: Its Meaning and Influence says "that the incidents of the action, and the structural ordering of these incidents, are the end and the aim of tragedy" (37).

Syd Field concurs with the Aristotelian need for dramatic action. He states in Four Screenplays, “All drama is conflict. Without conflict there is no action; without action there is no character; without character there is no story. And without story there is no screenplay” (xvii). He reiterates this in The Screenwriters Workbook when he states, “A good screenplay has a strong line of dramatic action; it goes somewhere, moves forward, step by step, towards resolution” (18). Agreeing with Field, Hunter states, “The idea must promise CONFLICT. That’s the heart and soul of screenwriting” (19). He gives a simplified yet applicable definition of the need for action and conflict when he quotes Richard Walter. “My fellow UCLA screenwriting professor Richard Walter, on the same subject, proclaims, “Nobody wants to see a story about the Village of the Happy People” (19). So dramatic action is the conflict that propels the drama towards its resolution. A series of dramatic actions combine to create the spine or overall dramatic action of the script.

Unity of Action

All action must be not only be dramatic, but unified. One action should lead to the next and continue to build throughout the play. Aristotle explains unity of action in Chapter 8 of the Poetics, “the plot-structure . . . should be a representation of a unitary and complete action; and its parts, consisting of the events, should be so constructed that the displacement or removal of any one of them will disturb and disjoint the work’s wholeness” (Halliwell 40).

Aristotle's principle of unity of action is constantly referred to in contemporary "how to write" a screenplay manuals. Hunter echoes Aristotle when he states, "At all steps along the story way, make sure the scene you're in was caused by the scene that went before. And the following scene is there because of the one you're in. Keep that rhythm going and you'll have a damned good story" (89). Field also emphasizes unity of action in The Screenwriter's Workbook, "A screenplay always move forward, with direction, toward the resolution. You've got to be on track every step of the way; every scene, every fragment, must be taking you somewhere, moving you forward in terms of story development" (12). Michael Hauge, in Writing Screenplays that Sell, states, "good plot structure means that the right thing is happening at the right time. If the events of your story lack interest, excitement, humor, logic, or relevance, or if they occur in an order that fails to create suspense, surprise, anticipation, curiosity, or a clear resolution, then the structure is weak" (85). And Jurgen Wolf and Kerry Cox, in Successful Scriptwriting, state, "It is important that you orchestrate these obstacles so that they grow as the movie proceeds, and so that each one in some way derives for the ones before it" (26).

Probability of Action

Action should not only be unified, but probable. Aristotle states, "It is a further clear implication of what has been said that the poet's task is to speak not of events which have occurred, but of the kind of events which could occur, and are possible by the standards of probability or necessity" (Halliwell 40). Hunter states this principle in simpler

terms: “There’s a thin, invisible strand between the audience and the screen. It’s called believability. That strand gets stronger and stronger as the picture progresses. It can be easily snapped if you start out being too crazy or unbelievable” (49). Hauge gives his readers questions to ask themselves to make sure they are following this principle: “When developing your story, ask yourself repeatedly, ‘Does this situation clearly fit the limits of the universe I have created?’ and, ‘Given my characters’ backgrounds and situations, is it logical and believable that they would behave this way?’” (100).

Each script creates its own world with its own set of rules and any action needs to be probable in that world. David Kahn and Donna Breed in Scriptwork clarify probability of action with their discussion of the world of a play. “Each play creates its own specific rules that govern its people and events, establishing the logic against which the plausibility of everything in the script is tested” (36). Internal logic defines the world created by the writer. “The internal logic is defined by the fictive or make-believe world being represented . . . This fictive world of the play may bear little or no resemblance to the world as we know it in our lives or have seen in other plays” (37). Everything in the script must follow the rules of the writer’s world “and anything may happen and be accepted by an audience within the framework of the plays internal logic” (37).

The Three Act Unified Dramatic Structure

Dramatic action, unity of action, and probability of action combine to create the three act unified dramatic structure. All the dramatic action must be probable and move in unified progression that has a distinct beginning, middle, and end. Aristotle says in

Chapter Seven that “tragedy is a representation of an action which is complete and whole . . . By ‘whole’ I mean possessing a beginning, middle and end” (Halliwell 39). Each section of the structure must follow the dramatic principles and continue to build until the play has reached its logical conclusion answering the question posed at the beginning of the drama. The whole process results in a release of tension creating a “catharsis.” Aristotle clearly states that dramatic work needs to follow this model.

Aristotle indicates that there is a definite starting point or beginning to a drama, “By ‘beginning’ I mean that which does not have a necessary connection with a preceding event, but which can itself rise naturally to some further fact or occurrence” (Halliwell 39). So the beginning is the point where the dramatic action needs to begin. There is no “connection with a preceding event” and now the action can “rise naturally” from this point. The second act, or middle is connected to the beginning through dramatic action; “The ‘middle’ involves causal connections with both what precedes and what ensues.” Finally the action leads to the final act which, unlike the beginning has a definite end. “And ‘end’ by contrast, is something which naturally occurs after a preceding event, whether by necessity or as a general rule, but need not be followed by anything else.” So all the principles outlined above fit into this structure. Aristotle concludes: “Consequently, well designed plot-structure ought not to begin or finish at arbitrary points, but to follow the principles indicated” (Halliwell 39).

The contemporary screenwriting theorists follow suit with Aristotle’s three act unified structure. Richard Walter writes in Screenwriting “This notion, the three-part model of story structure, was first articulated nearly twenty-five hundred years ago by

Aristotle” (38). Lew Hunter states, “Now is the time to begin talking about Aristotle’s two thousand-year-old ‘beginning-middle-end’ structure” (19-20). He then goes on to say, “Oral or written stories are also told in three parts. More commonly called ‘Three acts.’ Or, to be Aristotelian, beginning, middle, and end” (Hunter 45). He gives a more detailed explanation which is similar to Aristotle’s.

Get caught up in the reality that the contemporary Act One, the beginning, is *the situation*. The idea. Why you call people to their neighborhood multiplex. Act Two, the middle is the complications. The plot must thicken. Cause and effect. Push and shove. The third act, the end is the conclusion. The climax. The catharsis. The wrap up. (Hunter 20)

Syd Field gives the most detailed account of the three act structure and adds in elements that he thinks are original to the screenplay, which will be explored later with other classic theater theorists and silent film instruction manuals. Field states:

Act I, the beginning, is a unit, or block, of dramatic (or comedic) action, that is 30 pages long. It begins on page one and continues on to the plot point at the end of Act I. It is held together by the dramatic context known as the set up. Act II is a unit, or block, of dramatic (or comedic) action, that goes from page 30 to page 90, from the plot point at the end of Act I to the plot point at the end of Act II. It is 60 pages long, and held together with the dramatic context known as confrontation. Act III is also a unit of dramatic or comedic action; it goes from page 90 to page 120, or from the plot point at the end of Act II to the end of your script. It is a unit that is

30 pages long, and held together with the dramatic context know as the resolution. (Field Workbook 28)

Pope gives a simplified version of the three act structure, but makes the point as well as Field or Hunter. “The old saying goes that in the first act you get your hero up a tree (that is, you create an initial problem), in the second act you throw rocks at him (you complicate the initial problem), and in the third act you get him out of the tree (you resolve the initial problem)” (xvii).

Aristotle’s principles clearly surface and are recognized by the contemporary screenplay theorists. An historical examination of these principles will provide insight to the re-emergence and development of these principles. Are these dramatic principles universal and how have they changed and developed from classical dramatic theorists to the early photoplay theorists and finally to the contemporary screenplay theorists? This leads to the methodology used for this paper.

Method

The dramaturgical principles outlined above will be used as the method, or means to explore and evaluate the relationships between Freytag’s nineteenth century playwriting manual, the photoplay manuals of the early twentieth century, and the contemporary screenwriting manuals. This paper will note how theorists in each period applied and adapted these principles to script development. This method will allow a uniform and systematic evaluation of each historical period’s contribution to script development theory. This thesis will not only explore relationships between the different historical

periods, but will also be careful to note the relationships within each period. The goal is to trace the principles from the theater to the cinema primarily focusing on works by theorists that have not been previously examined.

Chapter Two will analyze works of classic dramatic theorists from Aristotle to the nineteenth century, examining how the dramatic principles were interpreted until Gustav Freytag's Technique of Drama was written. According to Marvin Carlson in Theories of Theatre, Freytag's Technique of the Drama became the manual for young playwrights in the twentieth century, "Freytag's book, translated to English in 1894, served well into the twentieth century as the standard manual for young playwrights" (Carlson 258-9).

Dukore concurs with the significance and importance of Freytag's work. "A study of dramatic structure, Freytag's playwriting manual Technique of the Drama was long considered one of the more important works of its type" (Dukore 773). Freytag's influence was at its peak as the cinema began to establish its dramatic principles.

Examining Freytag's structure and dramatic principles will provide insight how dramatic principles migrated from the theater to the cinema. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the transition between theater and cinema, using William Archer's twentieth century playwriting manual, Playmaking, as an example of how the theater began to deviate from classic dramatic principles as they re-surfaced in the photoplay manuals.

Chapter Three will focus on the photoplay manuals from the silent film era that were used by the early screenwriters. These include: Technique of the Photoplay, by Epes Winthrop Sargent, written in 1913; Writing the Photoplay by J. Berg Esenwein and Arthur Leeds, also written in 1913; Photoplay Scenarios by Eustace Hale Ball, written in 1915;

The Photoplay by Hugo Munsterberg, written in 1916; The Art of Photoplay Making by Victor Oscar Freeburg, written in 1918; and The Feature Photoplay by Henry Albert Phillips, written in 1921. This is the period when the dramatic principles moved from drama to cinema. This paper will explore how the principles changed for the new medium, as well as note how image and lack of audio may have affected the dramatic principles.

Chapter Four will analyze the dramatic principles of contemporary screenplay theorists focusing on connections and disparities to the dramatic principles examined in Chapters Two and Three. The analysis will focus how the contemporary screenwriting theorists developed a structure similar to Freytag's pyramidal structure. Then the focus will shift to connections and differences to the dramatic principles identified by the photoplay theorists with an emphasis on the advent of sound and its effect on the dramatic principles.

Finally, in Chapter Five, conclusions will be drawn. The belief is this research will illustrate that there are indeed universal dramatic principles that continue to resurface throughout time. The research will also establish that codified instruction manuals are a valuable resource to tracing dramatic principles.

Chapter 2

Aristotle to Freytag: Evolution of the Dramatic Principles up to Cinema

In this chapter the dramatic principles outlined in Chapter One (dramatic action, unity of action, probability of action, and the three act structure) will be analyzed from Aristotle to classic dramatic theorists from ancient Rome, the Italian Renaissance, and Western Europe. After illustrating how the dramatic principles were interpreted and preserved in essays and criticism, the chapter will focus on the dramatic principles defined in the playwriting manuals of Gustav Freytag and William Archer. This analysis will set up the discussion of the photoplay manuals and establish a connection between the dramatic principles of theater and film.

Until the late nineteenth century “how to” manuals like Freytag’s Technique of Drama, were not compiled, instead classic dramatic theorists debated the relevance of the principles first outlined in Aristotle’s Poetics. Before examining the classic theorists’ interpretations of the Poetics and its dramatic principles, some discussion on the origin of the Poetics is necessary. Although Aristotle’s Poetics was frequently used as guide to writing, much like the contemporary screenplay theorists’ manuals, it is not clear that this was Aristotle’s intention. Bernard F. Dukore in Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski states:

Aristotle proposes a definition of tragedy that for centuries has been explicated by theorists, imitated by playwrights, and argued about by both.

One reason for the many conflicting interpretations of the *Poetics* is that the work is sketchy and elliptical. It has even been suggested that the *Poetics* is but the outline of a book and perhaps notes for a lecture. (1)

Carlson also questions the authorship of the Poetics, suggesting that others may have contributed to the Poetics; “In recent years there has been speculation that some of the Poetics may come not from Aristotle at all but from subsequent commentators” (16).

Carlson further complicates the origin of the Poetics when he states: “modern versions are based primarily on an eleventh century manuscript, supplemented by material from an inferior thirteenth- or fourteenth-century version and a tenth century Arabic translation” (16).

An example of the incomplete nature of the Poetics is its failure to discuss comedy; “This is at least one unexpected gap in our Poetics. The treatise does not fulfill its own promise regarding a discussion of comedy” (Cooper 5). However, a fragment that appeared shortly after the Poetics, The Tractus Coislinaious, applies Aristotle’s principles to comedy. “Its [The Tractus Coislinaious] definition of comedy is clearly influenced by Aristotle’s definition of tragedy: ‘Comedy is an imitation of an action that is ludicrous and imperfect . . . not through’ ” (Cooper 23). Cooper suggests that the unknown author of The Tractus Coislinaious could have been a student of Aristotle’s which only further complicates the origin of the Poetics.

The uncertainty of the Poetics and its origin and intention are important to keep in mind when examining works that claim to have been influenced by it. The incomplete nature of the Poetics may have allowed dramatic theorists from all ages to adapt its

principles to the particular mediums of their respective ages. Carlson states: “Despite all these problems, the main body of the text is accessible, and its general line of argument and structure are clear” (16). Perhaps the simplicity and clarity of the Poetics and its principles are what allowed it to be examined and re-examined over the past 2500 years.

The first significant surfacing of the dramatic principles first identified in the Poetics happened in ancient Rome with the poet, Horace. Dukore says of Horace: “Second in influence only to Aristotle’s Poetics, Horace’s Art of Poetry -- the only complete treatise on dramatic theory to have survived from ancient Rome -- was greatly admired by Renaissance critics and playwrights” (Dukore 2).

However, Horace was not writing a Hunter-like “how to manual” with the intention of teaching dramatic principles. His Art of Poetry is a poem “addressed to a friend and his two sons” making it not as accessible as the Poetics. (Cooper 88). Because of its poetic nature “attempts to read the text as a statement of literary theory, which in part it certainly is, have been beclouded by the fact that it is at the same time a work of poetry, with a structure and reference determined more often by esthetic than by discursive consideration” (Carlson 23- 4). Horace’s attention to the “esthetics” of the work makes his musings on dramatic writing harder to decipher. Cooper further illuminates the difficulty of using the Art of Poetry as a guide to dramatic writing: “With the air of unstudied chat, the substance has a fairly settled order -- and yet no organized plan, like Aristotle’s, with subordination of the less important matters. There is no deep perspective; ideas of unequal weight follow one another in an easy association on a bright flat surface” (88-89).

However, the Aristotelian principles outlined in Chapter One of this paper surface despite Horace's "subornation of the less important matters." In the poem, Horace suggests that a writer "ever hurries to the crisis and carries the listener into the midst of the story as though it were already known; what he despairs of illuminating with his touch he omits, and so employs fiction, so blends false with true, that beginning, middle, and end all strike the same note" (Horace 71). Here Horace clearly emphasizes the necessity of a Aristotle's unified three act play full of action. Horace gives a nice example of what an unified story is when he states, "He who is bent on lending variety to a theme that is by nature uniform, so as to produce an unnatural effect, is like a man who paints a dolphin in a forest or a wild boar in the waves" (Horace 68). Finally, Horace implores his fellow writers to review the works that Aristotle based his Poetics. "Do you, my friends, study the Greek masterpieces: thumb them day and night" (Horace 73).

After Horace, Aristotle's Poetics resurfaced and was debated by the most influential theorists of each age. As stated above, translations of the Poetics did appear in the tenth, eleventh and thirteen centuries, but the Poetics and its principles regained prominence during the Italian Renaissance; "The story of Dramatic Criticism during the Italian Renaissance is essentially the story of the rediscovery of Aristotle, of the establishment of his Poetics as a central reference point in dramatic theory" (Carlson 37). Renaissance theorists would use translations and interpretations of the Poetics, but not write new works like Horace or the contemporary screenplay theorists. "Alessandro Pazzi published a good Latin translation and Bernadino Daniello published his own Poetics, strongly influenced by Aristotle (and Horace too)" (Dukore 119). Dukore says: "One of the most

influential scholars of the Renaissance, Julius Caesar Scaliger regards Aristotle as a virtual dictator of poetry” (Dukore 119). Although Scalinger agrees with Aristotle and uses his principles he feels that character plays a more important role than suggested in the Poetics. Carlson states: “he considered character more central because, like most of his contemporaries, he saw moral improvement as the true end of drama” (46).

Critics like Scalinger gave their interpretations of the Poetics, but they were not primarily concerned with dramatic writing and certainly were not writing “how to” manuals like contemporary screenplay theorists of today. Often they would discuss how the principles of the Poetics could be applied to areas like comedy which Aristotle neglected. For instance, Franciscus Robortellus in On Comedy written in 1548 states, “All the parts of the plot, indeed, ought to be so joined together that no part can be taken away or transplanted without ruining or disjoining the whole plot”(126). Robortellus gives advice on comedy and merely applies Aristotle’s unity of action to comedy. He does not try to create a new system, just an elaboration on Aristotle’s Poetics.

Carlson calls Lodovico Castleveto’s Poetica d’Aristotle vulgarizzata e sposta an “event of major importance in Renaissance poetics” (47). Castleveto offers variations to the dramatic principles in the Poetics. He suggests that dramatic action is not always possible in the theater if it shatters the probability of the action. “Although Castleveto generally preferred action to narration on stage he suggested that deeds of ‘cruelty and horror’ be narrated not on grounds of decorum but because they could not be expected to be done with verisimilitude” (Carlson 50). This lends insight to what the audience would accept as probable at the time and suggests that audiences expected realistic situations.

Another departure from Aristotle is when Castlevorto states that a single unified action may not be the best thing for drama and the theater.

Castlevorto thought the restricted scope of the drama, compared with the epic, worked against multiple actions, but the goal of pleasing the audience encouraged them: "There is no doubt that it is more pleasurable to listen to a plot containing many and diverse actions than one which contains but a single one." Thus if the dramatists can achieve this delight within his narrow compass, he gives his audience even greater pleasure because of the difficulty he has overcome. (Carlson 49)

As stated by Scalinger, the goal of drama in the Italian Renaissance was to please the audience and Castlevorto suggests that the audience will derive even "greater pleasure" from multiple actions than a unified one.

Aristotle's principles spread from the Italian Renaissance to other parts of Europe. "Through Sidney's rigidly classical Apology, which mentions the unities for the first time in English criticism, Aristotle -- as filtered through neoclassical principles -- began to be influential in England" (Dukore 158). In Spain, Lope de Vega in The New Art of Writing Plays, written in 1609, restates Aristotle's principal of unity of action. "Bear in mind that this subject should contain one action only, seeing to it that the story in no manner be episodic: I mean the introduction of other things which are beside the main purpose, nor that any member be omitted which might ruin the whole of the context" (201). In France, Pierre Corneille in his Discourses, written in 1660, discusses the three act structure. "What the poet chooses for a subject must have a beginning, a middle, and end; and these

three parts are not only so many actions coming to a head in the main action, but, further, each of these actions can consist of several actions similarly subordinate” (235).

Francois Hedelin in The Whole Art of Stage, written in 1657 states, “Tis one of Aristotle’s rules, and without doubt a very rational one, that a dramatic poem ought to comprehend but one action” (241).

In Restoration and Eighteenth Century England, Aristotle continued to influence dramatic theory. John Dryden in An Essay of Dramatic Poesy, written in 1668, states, “I must remember you, that all the rules by which we practice the drama at this day . . . were delivered to us from the observations which Aristotle made of those poets, who either lived before him, or were his contemporaries” (318). Other evidence of Aristotle’s influence is given by Samuel Johnson in his Preface to the Plays of Shakespeare written in 1765. “As nothing is essential to the fable but unity of action, and as the unities of time and place arise evidently from false assumptions” (415).

Aristotle’s influence spread to Germany as well in the nineteenth century. August Wilhelm von Schlegel illustrates how Aristotle’s principles were often rehashed and debated in his lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature.

It is amusing to see Aristotle driven perforce to lend his name to these three Unites, whereas the only one of which he speaks with any degree of fullness, in the first, the Unity of Action. With respect to the Unity of Time he merely throws out a vague hint; while of the Unity of Place he says not a syllable. (505)

Unity of Time and Place had been attributed to Aristotle, but like Johnson, Schlegel argues that Aristotle only stressed the importance of the unity of action.

In 1863, Gustav Freytag, a German playwright and theorist, departed from the classic dramatic theorists with his playwriting manual Technique of the Drama in which he attempted “to write down the basic rules of drama” (Carlson 257). Technique of Drama cannot be mistaken for an outline, lecture notes, a poem, or a critical essay. Like the contemporary screenplay manuals, it was an instructive manual intended for the professional creation and production of scripts. The principles and structure of Technique of Drama were most influential as dramatic principles were being established in cinema. Carlson says it “served well into the twentieth century as the standard manual for young playwrights” (259). Since this paper is an historical examination of dramatic principles focusing on the transition from theater to cinema, Technique of Drama’s similarity to the contemporary screenplay manuals and its time of influence makes it an essential part of the analysis.

Aristotle examined plays of his time to come up with the principles outlined in his Poetics. Instead of expanding on Aristotle’s Poetics like most classic dramatic theorists, Freytag examined plays in the same manner Aristotle did, but with a twist: Freytag examined the great works from plays from different historical periods. “He analyzes the dramatic work of five acknowledged masters -- Sophocles, Shakespeare, Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller -- to find ‘the fundamental laws of dramatic construction’ common to all” (Carlson 257). In the introduction to Technique of the Drama, Freytag cites his sources for his principles of dramatic structure “Indeed, the best source of technical rules is the

plays of great poets, which still today exercise their charm alike on reader and spectator, especially the Greek tragedies” (Freytag 7). Freytag used the past to develop principles applicable to his time and stresses the importance of each generation to define its own set of rules. “That the technique of the drama is nothing absolute and unchangeable scarcely need be stated. Since Aristotle established a few of the highest laws of dramatic effect, the culture of the human race has grown more than two thousand years older” (Freytag 1). Freytag felt that dramatic laws do not restrict creativity, but instead can be an aide to the writer. “Even an elaborate system of specific rules, a certain limitation founded in popular custom, as to choice of material and structure of the piece, have been at different periods the best aid to creative power” (Freytag 2). As a result, Freytag’s Technique of the Drama not only reinterprets the dramatic principles first identified by Aristotle but also expands upon the three act structure with his detailed pyramid structure; “the best known part of Freytag’s book is the section that he calls the ‘pyramidal structure’ of the most effective drama” (Carlson 258).

First Freytag’s interpretation of dramatic action, unity of action, and probability will be examined before moving on to his pyramidal structure.

Dramatic Action

Freytag’s definition of dramatic action is consistent with Aristotle’s. Dramatic action is what propels the character and drives the story. It is the conflict that produces the action in the play. In 1950, Clara Beranger cites Freytag in Writing for the Screen to stress that conflict is the essential part of drama.

When the will of the protagonist is opposed we get a conflict of forces. In **TECHNIQUE OF THE DRAMA**, Gustave Freitag [sic] said: "The essential nature of the drama is conflict and suspense." Until the intention of the hero meets opposition the drama does not start. Thus, conflict between opposing forces is the foundation upon which a play is built. (Beranger 105)

This conflict is referred to by Freytag as passionate action which is the fundamental building block of drama. "An action, in itself, is not dramatic. Passionate feeling, in itself, is not dramatic. Not the presence of a passion for itself, but of a passion which leads to action is the business of dramatic art" (Freytag 19). Freytag also suggests that dramatic action should progress through the play. "The dramatic action must represent all that is important to the understanding of the play, in the strong excitement of the characters, and in a continuously progressive increase of effects" (Freytag 66).

Unity of Action

If action is conflict, then according to Freytag "the action must move forward with uniform consistency" (Freytag 29). All of the action must be consistent, each piece of the of the dramatic action must relate to one directly before it and after it.

It is the business of the action to represent to us the inner consistency of the event, as it corresponds to the demands of the intellect and the heart. Whatever, in the crude material, does not serve this purpose, the poet is in duty bound to throw away. And it is desirable that he adhere strictly to this

principle, to give only what is indispensable to unity. (Freytag 46)

Freytag's insistence that the writer discard any "crude material" that does not represent "the inner consistency of the event" resembles Aristotle's rule that drama should be "constructed that the displacement or removal of any one of them will disturb and disjoint the work's wholeness" (40). So a unified dramatic action is the building block of drama.

Probability of Action

Freytag then states that the action must not only be dramatic and unified but it also must be probable. Freytag suggests that the spectator brings a set of expectations with him to the work and the author must be aware and conscious of this.

. . . he [The audience] is not able entirely to forget the reality; he holds close to this poetic picture, which rises full of charm before him, the picture of the real world in which he breathes . . . To a certain extent, it is impossible for him to renounce this purport of his own life; and sometimes he feels it very strongly when the poetic picture contradicts it. (Freytag 50)

The audience having a "picture of the real world" echoes Castlevorto's suggestion that "'cruelty and horror' be narrated not on grounds of decorum but because they could not be expected to be done with verisimilitude" (Carlson 50). Freytag's rule of probability is dependent on the context of his times. Reality to his audience would be radically different to Aristotle's or Castlevorto's. Freytag states that dramatic rules should serve "the needs

of the time” and like his predecessors Freytag urges the writer to know what audiences would accept as probable. (50)

Three Act Structure

The most significant and influential part of the Technique of the Drama is Freytag’s pyramidal structure. Dukore states: “His notions of the dramatic, of play and counterplay, and his famous ‘Freytag pyramid’ were very influential” (773). Freytag expands the traditional three act model, presenting the writer with a specific detailed structure to better utilize the dramatic principles. Carlson gives an overview of the Freytag pyramid that allows the story to move from the beginning to its conclusion.

This [Freytag’s pyramid] consists of five parts and three crisis. The first part is the introduction of characters and situations. This first crisis brings the dramatic forces into play and initiates the rising movement, leading to the climax, the peak of the pyramid and emotional mid-point of the drama. The second crisis, or tragic moment, ends the climax and introduces the falling movement, or return. Between this and the final part the catastrophe, may come a third crisis, the moment of final tension.

(Carlson 258)

Each of Freytag’s five parts will be examined in detail as well as his crisis which will show how his pyramid structure expands Aristotle’s three act unified dramatic structure.

(See figure 1.1)

1.1 Freytag's Pyramid:

Beginning

Freytag first defines the introduction. It should “explain the place and time of the action, the nationality and life relations of the hero, it must at once briefly characterize the environment.” And, “in a short overture, to indicate the peculiar mood of the piece” (Freytag 118). He gives several examples from Shakespeare. In Hamlet, “night, the startling call of the watch, the mounting of the guard, the appearance of the ghost, restless, gloomy, desperate excitement” (Freytag 118). Here the mood and tone of the piece is immediately set.

Unlike previous classic theorists, Freytag gives instruction on how to specifically construct parts of the drama. He tells the writer: “the construction of a regular introduction is as follows: a clearly defining keynote, a finished scene, a short transition into the first moment of the excited action” (Freytag 121). Freytag’s introduction concludes with what he calls the “exciting force.” He positions it between the

introduction and rise. It is the first of Freytag's crisis or scenic effects and the only one that he says is absolutely required. "The operation of the first [exciting force] is necessary to every play; the second and third are good but not indispensable accessories" (Freytag 115). This "indispensable accessory" of Freytag's is another element that surfaces in every modern screenwriting manual. Freytag's exciting force is "where the counter-play resolves to use its lever to set the hero in motion" (Freytag 121). By "counter-play" Freytag means the characters or forces that will oppose the hero. This specific action that launches the hero into his or her quest was first illustrated by Freytag and surfaces today in modern screenplay theory.

Middle

Freytag breaks the traditional act two into three separate parts which consist of the rise, the climax, and the return. At first this may seem like major difference, but these specific parts allow the writer to break down act two and clearly move the hero along.

Freytag's "rise" is the section following the exciting force, where the hero has officially begun his or her quest. "The action has been started; the chief persons have shown what they are; the interest has been awakened" (Freytag 125). All the key players and obstacles are introduced here and all forces that oppose the hero must surface. Freytag's says, "the most important persons in the counter play, or to the chief groups, a place must be made for them now, and opportunity must be given for an activity full of meaning" (Freytag 125).

Freytag identifies the midpoint of his structure as the “climax.” As Carlson states the climax is “the peak of the pyramid and emotional mid-point of the drama” (258). Freytag says, “the climax naturally forms the middle point of a group of forces, which, darting in either direction, course upward and downward” (Freytag 130).

Freytag’s next crisis “or tragic moment, ends the climax and introduces the falling movement, or return” (Carlson 258). Freytag stresses that only the first crisis is required and this and the next crisis device may or not be employed by the writer.

Freytag’s “return” takes the hero to the moment of truth, where he or she will be forced to make a stand and either accomplish or fail. The hero’s choices are running out and he or she is coming face to face with the final confrontation. Freytag states, “the first law for the construction of this part [the return] is that the number of persons be limited as much as possible, and that the effects be comprised in great scenes” (Freytag 133-4). The drama now focuses on the hero and Freytag identifies this as the most difficult part of the drama to write. “The most difficult part of the drama is the sequence of scenes in the downward movement, or as it may well be called, the return” (Freytag 133).

Freytag’s return takes us to another crisis, or the moment of truth. Freytag identifies this crisis as “the force of the final suspense,” which is the last rise before his catastrophe or conclusion. He says, “it is necessary, in good time to prepare the mind of the audience for the catastrophe” (Freytag 135). Freytag gives examples from Shakespeare to illustrate his final crisis: “Caesar’s ghost appears to Brutus, Edmund tells the soldier he must slay Lear and Cordelia” (Freytag 135). Again, Freytag says this force is optional and concludes the elements of act two.

End

The conclusion Freytag labels “the catastrophe.” “The catastrophe of the drama is the closing action” (Freytag 137). Freytag says, “the whole construction points towards the end,” and the author must be careful to adhere to the dramatic principles or, “the ending may come into contradiction with the fine graduations which the previous parts have received during the elaboration” (Freytag 139). Freytag gives an example of this when he warns playwrights not to spare the hero. “And the warning must be given here, that the poet should not allow himself to be misled by modern tender-heartedness, to spare the life of his hero on the stage” (Freytag 137). So the conclusion must be the logical result of unified dramatic action of the play and the more conflict the better the play. “The more profound the strife which has gone forward in the hero’s soul, the more noble its purpose has been, so much more logical will the destruction of the succumbing of the hero be” (Freytag 137).

Freytag’s detailed pyramid structure not only influenced playwrights through the twentieth century, but as will be illustrated in Chapter Four, found its way into contemporary screenplay theory.

Freytag’s pyramidal structure was criticized by Wilhelm Dilthey, a nineteenth German philosopher, as being too rigid. Carlson states, “this sort of mechanistic and scientific procedure seems to Dilthey to ignore what is the essence of art and, worse, to misdirect future artists by codified rules” (259). Theater’s negative attitude towards Freytag-like “codified rules” began to surface in playwriting manuals.

William Archer's Playmaking, provides an excellent example of theater's move away from codified rules and instead pursue "essence of art." Playmaking proved to be a major influence on playwrights of the early twentieth century. "He wrote what was for many years a standard playwriting manual, Play-Making" (Dukore 579). However, Archer was a scholar and his goal was not to write a simple "how to write" manual. "His Play-making (1912), essentially a manual of instruction for the well-made play seeks to discover the 'essence of drama'" (Carlson 309). Archer felt that the "essence of drama" could not be codified and emphasized the importance of art and the artist over structure.

Archer acknowledges the importance dramatic principles, but feels that true talent cannot be taught. He warns that not everyone should try to be a playwright. Archer makes the case that some people should not bother with dramatic writing, implying that they may lack the necessary dramatic imagination. He states, "Some people are born with such an instinct for this art, that a very little practice renders them masters of it. Some people are born with a hollow in their cranium where the bump of drama ought to be" (Archer 10).

Archer also feels that structure is irrelevant without character. "The story which is independent of character -- which can be carried through by a given number of ready-made puppets -- is essentially a trivial thing. Unless, at an early stage of the organizing process, character begins to take the upper hand" (Archer 22). Without rich character, no plot, no matter how well thought out, or logical will spring to life. He compares the plot to a skeleton then says, "It is by his blood and nerve that he lives, not his bones; and it is

because his bones are, comparatively speaking, dead matter that they continue to exist when the flesh has fallen away from them” (Archer 23).

Archer cites his own attempt at playwriting to show how logical well reasoned formulaic structures like Freytag’s will not produce a play. “My situations worked out like the Q.E.D.’s of Euclid. My characters obstinately refused to come to life, or to take the bit between their teeth. They were simply cog-wheels in a pre arranged mechanism” (Archer 59-60).

Archer spends much of the time in Playmaking discussing theater’s move away from the three act structure first articulated by Aristotle. He comments on the tendencies for playwrights to resist the Aristotelian model:

It was one of Aristotle’s requirements that a play should have a beginning, middle and end; and though it may seem that it scarcely needed an Aristotle to lay down so self-evident a proposition, the fact is that playwrights are more than sufficiently apt to ignore or despise the rule. Especially there is a tendency to rebel against the requirement that a play should have an end. (55)

Archer’s suggestion that playwrights “despise” the classic Aristotelian three act structure illustrates that the twentieth century theater developed a hostile attitude towards the Freytag codified structure that surfaced in the photoplay manuals.

Archer does a Freytag-like breakdown of the first act of the play: “let your first ten minutes by all means be crisp, arresting, stimulating, but do not let them embody any absolutely vital matter, ignorance of which would leave the spectator in the dark as to the

general design of the play” (84). However, Archer attacks Freytag’s pyramid, suggesting that Freytag’s detailed break down of act two is unnecessary.

In the days of the five-act dogma, each act was supposed to have its special and pre-ordained function. Freytag assigns to the second act, as a rule, the *Steigerung* or heightening -- the working up, one might call it -- of the interest. But the second act, in modern plays, has often to do all the work of the three middle acts under the older dispensation; . . . For our present purposes, we may treat the Interior section of the play as a unit, whether it consist of one, two, or three acts. (123)

For Archer, character is the flesh of drama and the “five act dogma” of Freytag’s pyramidal structure is the skeleton of drama and “it is because his bones are, comparatively speaking, dead matter that they continue to exist when the flesh has fallen away from them” (Archer 23). To Archer, Freytag’s bones are useless without the flesh that is created by playwrights with an “instinct for this art, that a very little practice renders them masters of it” (10).

Archer then attempts to explain why so many plays have trouble coming to satisfactory conclusion:

But how few crisis come to a definite or dramatic conclusion! Nine times out of ten they end in some petty compromise, or do not end at all, but simply subside, like the waves of the sea when the storm has blown itself out. It is the playwright’s chief difficulty to find a crisis with an ending

which satisfies at once his artistic conscience and the requirements of dramatic effect. (211)

Archer urges critics and writers to carefully choose themes that allow for the departure of the classic three act structure. He states: “But authors and critics alike should learn to distinguish the themes which do, from the themes which do not, call for a definite, trenchant solution, and should handle them, and judge them, in accordance with their inherent quality” (213). Finally, Archer suggests that this desire to break Aristotle’s traditional three act structure represents a higher understanding of dramatic principles. “I suggest, then, that the modern tendency to take lightly Aristotle’s demand that the drama should have a ‘beginning, a middle, and an end,’ arises from the nature of things and implies, not necessarily, nor even probably, a decline in craftsmanship, but a new intimacy of relation to life, and a new sincerity of artistic conscience” (211).

The contrast between Freytag’s pyramidal structure and Archer’s focus on a higher “artistic conscience” is important to note as the discussion moves towards the cinema. As the cinema began telling stories it needed a model for dramatic construction. “In the early years of the first decade, the rudiments of narrative construction gradually evolved and movie makers began to discover that films could tell a story” (Bohn and Stromgren 12). Any movie maker who wished to tell a story would have access to Freytag’s model and also be familiar with the theater’s move away from the classic Aristotelian model. At this time, photoplay manuals began to appear and offer writers advice on how to write specifically for the cinema. These photoplay manuals offer insight as to what model the silent filmmakers chooses. How did these manuals define dramatic principles and

structure for early film? Were there any similarities to Freytag, or Aristotle? Did the theater's rejection of the classic Aristotelian model have influence of early cinema? This will be the focus of Chapter Three.

Chapter 3

Scripting for the New Medium: Dramatic Principles from Photoplay Manuals

Cinema officially was born in the United States in 1895 with the first public showing of a motion picture. At first audiences were satisfied just to view simple images or actualities. Bordwell states, “attractions predominated until around 1903, after which there was a transitional phase lasting until around 1908. By 1910 the cinema of narrative integration prevailed” (127). After the first decade, due to technical innovations, short narratives began to give way to features. “The challenge was now to refine visual storytelling by tailoring screenplays and that went beyond the bare bones of narrative and provided some sense of mood, emotional tone, and characterization” (Bohn and Stromgren 52). As a result, film makers needed a model to construct narratives. “The longer the film grew, the more the producers had to struggle with the complexities of the narrative. Feature films brought many of them back to the legitimate theater as a model. At the same time, feature films began to attract theatrical producers to the medium” (Bowser 204). Freytag’s pyramidal structure was well known at the time and William Archer wrote his influential Playmaking as cinema was evolving and incorporating narrative principles and starting to be taken serious as a new form of artistic expression. “The formative years had passed, and the years between 1913 and 1919 were to become the years of refinement in which the term art could be legitimately associated with the new medium” (Bohn and Stromgren 52).

During this period photoplay manuals began to appear. They were instruction manuals for silent film and are the first attempts to define the rules and principles for screenwriting. These photoplay manuals should be the equivalent of Aristotle's Poetics, since like the Poetics, they were also the first attempt explain a new medium. However, photoplay manuals are not mentioned by any contemporary screenplay theorist. These photoplay manuals reflect principles first identified by Aristotle, but make no mention of Freytag or Archer, who wrote the most influential playwrighting manuals of the time.

The photoplay manuals try to distance themselves from academic works and suggest that the photoplay writer need not be versed in literary discourse and such training could be a detriment to learning how to write the photoplay. J. Berg Esenwein and Arthur Leeds in Writing the Photoplay state: "there is a real sense in which the statement that no literary training is required by the student of photoplay writing is true . . . But he must be a person of ideas" (11). They stress the necessity of simplicity when they state: "the best paid writers today are for the most part the ones who are giving attention to clearness and precision of detail and description . . . description does not mean hifaluting word painting - it means clear, concise, setting forth of exactly what a thing is" (200).

The photoplay manuals tried to establish and teach the principles and dramatic structure for the new medium; "even the professional writer must learn the technique of photoplay construction before he can hope to produce a script that will not only be accepted by a film manufacturing company for production, but will be produced exactly as he has written it, without the need of drastic revision or rewriting. This however, is very rare today" (Esenwein and Leeds 8). The call for learning the rules has been well noted by

Aristotle and Freytag. Eustace Hale Ball in Photoplay Scenarios: How to Write and Sell Them written in 1915, unlike Archer's warning to those attempting to write plays, claims that the photoplaywright can learn dramatic principles. "What can be learned can be taught! Many successful dramatists have derided the idea of a practical application of systematized technique to the writing of plays . . . it can be seen that there are certain definite laws upon which the permanence of their excellence is based" (Ball 28-29). Winthrop Epes Sargent in Technique of the Photoplay written in 1913 concurs, "The successful writer of the moment is well equipped technically as the novelist or the dramatist. He writes in strict accordance with the rules of construction and he observes with care the hundred and one details to make the perfect script" (9).

The primary goal of this chapter will be to examine the photoplay manuals using the dramatic principles and three act structure outlined in chapter one. This chapter will note changes in the medium which include: increased emphasis on image, lack of sound, and increased economic pressure.

Many of the photoplay manuals suggest that cinema's foundation is with the drama. Albert Phillips in The Feature Photoplay writes, "The presentation of a Photoplay, through the medium of actors, on a screen-stage, before an audience, and in a theater, is almost identical with that of the Stage Play. Both are Drama, hence both are dependent on the same larger laws for their larger effects" (19). However most of the early photoplay theorists stressed that it was too early to determine drama's influence. Hugo Munsterburg in The Photoplay A Psychological Study agrees that cinema is tied to drama, but that it was too new to determine exactly what the specific laws of the photoplay would be.

The drama and the photoplay are two coordinated arts, each perfectly valuable in itself. The one cannot replace the other; and the shortcomings of the one against the other reflect only the fact that the one has a history of fifteen years while the other has a one of five thousand. (141)

He warns that “we falsify the meaning of the photoplay if we simply subordinate it to the esthetic conditions of the drama. It is different from mere pictures and it is different from the drama, too, however, much relation it has to both” (168). Freeburg echoes this when he writes, “It is common error to judge the photoplay by the standards of the stage drama, and to condemn it because it cannot do exactly what the stage drama can do” (1).

Munsterburg emphasizes that the photoplaywright “must be wide awake to the uniqueness of his task, he must feel at every moment that he is writing for the screen and for the stage or for a book” (194). Freeburg distinguishes between literary works and the cinema’s reliance on images over words. “In the novel or the stage play the treatment is literary and the writer must attend carefully to his words and sentences. In the photoplay the treatment is pictorial and the cinema composer must attend carefully to his pictures and picture sequences, his pictorial moments and movements” (26). Freeburg here suggests why extensive literary training is not enough. The writer must use more than words to write for cinema.

Another major difference is that the film was silent and the dialogue could only be inserted between scenes to be read by the audience. Sargent contrasts the fiction writer with the photoplaywright. “What the fiction writer must do in words, the photoplay writer must do with business and situation” (10). The medium was visual with an

emphasis on image. This lead the photoplay theorists to manuals to suggest that the writer develop a “picture eye.” The photoplay theorists urge the writer to not only make action, but to see the action. Esenwein and Leeds state, “you will fail in producing the right kind of scenario to accompany them until you acquire or cultivate the picturing eye. To possess it is simply to be able to visualize your story as you write it -- yes, even before you write it” (131). Sargent also says the “picture eye” is absolutely necessary. “This is what has been called the ‘picture eye’ the ability to visualize words or thoughts into actions. Unless you can see the action with your mental vision you cannot write it and your picture will be flat and unconvincing” (81). This “picture eye” seems like a radical development in dramatic writing and is not mentioned by Freytag. However Aristotle wrote, “A poet ought to imagine his material to the fullest possible extent while composing his plot structures and elaborating them in language. By seeing them as vividly as possible in this way -- as if present at the overt occurrence of the events -- he is likely to discover what is appropriate, and least likely to miss contradictions” (Halliwell 50). Aristotle could not have possibly meant his words for the cinema, yet his statement could have been made by a photoplay theorist.

The “picture eye” stresses the writer need to pay attention to the image. The photoplaywright is the first writer whose vision actually can be literally played out in front an audience. Phillips writes, “we find something in this newest of the Arts that none other of the Fine Arts has, that is, the animated deed -- the verisimilitude of Life itself” (Phillips Photoplay xii). The ability to recreate life gives the writer another vehicle that had never been available to writers: the possibility of using real and unlimited number of locations.

Freeburg states: "A TREMENDOUS resource which distinguishes the photoplay from all other narrative and dramatic arts is the possibility of representing an action in its natural setting. For the very first time in history of the arts which mimic human happenings it has become possible for the spectator to go to the very spot where the action takes place" (137). However, Ball provides an economic producer's perspective of unlimited locations: "Unity of place possesses unusual advantages in pictureplay production. The number of sets and outdoor scenes should be held down as much as possible" (Ball 49). Economic factors certainly come into play, however the possibility of going anywhere to tell a story is a unique characteristic of the new medium and one the writer should be aware of.

This turns the discussion to economic factors in the new medium. Cinema was less than twenty years old when many of these photoplay theorists predicted it would become the dominant art form. Phillips points to popularity of the photoplay as his reasoning for its rise. "Let him who doubts the birth of a new Art, stand outside the cinema theaters of the world, at noon, at dusk, or at night, and try to count -- if he can during the years of his life -- the millions that enter in the span of a single day" (Photoplay xiii).

A result of the "millions" who turned out to see this new medium was that this art form was driven by economics. To be successful, the writer now needed to appeal to wider and broader audience. Freeburg writes, "the photoplaywright must make his cinema composition a commercial commodity before it can exist as an art" (264). The photoplay theorists warn the writer that the producer wields much more power in this new medium. Munsterburg states, "If there is anything which introduces a characteristic element into the

creating of the photoplay as against all other arts, it may be found in the undeniable fact that the photoplay always demands the cooperation of two inventive personalities, the scenario writer and the producer" (192). Munsterburg even suggests that the writer becomes dependent on the producer: "the work which the scenario writer creates in itself still entirely imperfect and becomes a complete work of art only through the action of the producer" (193). Therefore the writer must be entertaining above all else. Esenwein and Arthur Leeds in Writing the Photoplay, write, "entertaining first, instructive second; to try to be instructive is to cease to be entertaining" (304). As a result of economic pressures and the need to entertain, many photoplays became jumbled messes. "With the long-existing lack of unity in purpose, technique, and final expression, between author, rewriter, and producer, it is not to be wondered at that photoplays have been garbled somewhere along the line between conception and production" (Phillips Photoplay 56).

Now dramatic principles outlined in Chapter One will be used to see how the early photoplay theorists employed them, noting similarities to past classic theorists interpretations and the changes that are specific and unique to the new medium.

Dramatic Action

The photoplay theorists all concur that dramatic action is the fundamental building block of drama and they all emphasize the need for conflict that builds throughout the photoplay. Ball writes, "The moving spirit of drama is STRUGGLE. Without this there is no dramatic action, no justification" (10). Ball ties the dramatic action to the need of a hero, or protagonist in conflict in the same manner as Freytag. "Some one or some

several want something: they try to get it. Some others or something resists the efforts to obtain it. The continuation of those efforts, now succeeding temporarily, now failing, here changing in plan, there surprising the antagonist, is the action of the drama" (33).

Freeburg echoes this: "The dramatists, therefore, after focalizing his interest on some one character in the play, places that character in conflict with some one else, a revengeful enemy, an unscrupulous rival, a narrow-minded parent, a scornful lady, or any one of the thousand antagonists that may cross our pursuit of happiness of life" (229). Phillips suggests that "dramatists sense is the faculty of discerning the paradoxes and antitheses of human experience and translating them into units of conflict . . . the more intense the conflict the greater credit earned by the dramatists" (Phillips Photoplay 110).

However due to the lack of sound the photoplaywright had to create the dramatic action or conflict visually. Sargent warns the writer that is difficult. "Told in action instead of words -- a distinct literary form -- requisites of a writer -- not all may achieve success" (7). The emphasis of action is reiterated by Esenwien and Leeds, "you are not an accomplished photoplaywright until you can produce a story that is thoroughly understandable all the way through by action and insert" (226). They emphasize the fact that dialogue is no longer at the disposal of the writer. "On the regular stage, the 'business' of the actors -- important as it is -- is nevertheless of secondary consideration; dialogue comes first. On the photoplay stage it is just the reverse -- at all times it is action that is of primary importance. It is what your character does that counts" (131). This obstacle is one Aristotle, Freytag and Archer never imagined and changed the way the writer must reveal his story. Freeburg states:

without dialog, it takes longer for the character to reveal enough of his nature to give the spectator sufficient basis for judging the subsequent action, this of course, providing the character has any nature to reveal. And while the spectator is becoming acquainted with the characters he must be clearly informed as to their dramatic relations to each other.

(246)

The writer cannot fall back on dialogue, now he or she must reveal “dramatic action” visually through action. While dramatic action is identified by all photoplay theorists, the medium caused them to radically alter the manner in which the conflict could occur.

Unity of Action

Unity of action is called essential by the all the photoplay theorists. Eisenstein and Leeds echo Aristotle: “one scene should lead to the next scene, and each scene should appear to be the only one possible” (136). Phillips writes: “we must have a single action by knitting and wielding together . . . everything must agree with our purpose and be essential to its being, or be eliminated” (*Photoplay* 112). Munsterburg also stressed the need that action be linked together. “It is certainly true for the photoplay, as for every work of art, that nothing has the right to existence in its midst which is not internally needed for the unfolding of the action” (187). Sargent concurs with his statement: “Not only must each scene be played in chronological order, but each scene should aid in advancing the plot” (38).

Although the photoplay manuals stress the importance of unified action, they offer a possible alternative for the first time. Up to this time unity action progressed in a linear fashion, but with cinema and its ability to easily use flashback and non linear editing the photoplay theorists suggest that the chronological order could be rearranged. Phillips writes: “we are primarily concerned with the principle of dramatic suspense. If dramatic suspense can be heightened in the photoplay by a disarrangement of chronological order, well and good; if suspense cannot be heightened by such means, the chronological order should be adhered to because it guarantees clearness and smoothness in the story” (Photoplay 215). Phillips does not say that the photoplaywright needs to use non linear story telling but keeps it as one option. He goes on to define three types of sequences. “The commonest form is the Chronological Sequence. This is the simple arrangement of events in the order in which they happen” (Photoplay 123). This is unified action as defined by Aristotle, Freytag and Archer. Phillips then defines non linear sequences, “Next we have the Logical Sequence. Herein we narrow down the common happenings of life through the process of selection, choosing related events and applying the law of syllogism to them. Because this has happened, it follows logically, that that must happen! It is not essential that these events happen chronologically at all. We again use the domain of Cause-and-Effect” (Photoplay 123). So the idea that everything must be essential still applies, the writer simply has the choice of chronological arrangement. Phillips give the writer a third choice, which is a blend of the two previous types. “Dramatic Sequence draws the limits many times closer. Dramatic Sequence may employ chronological order in point of time only, and it must always be in Logical Sequence. In Dramatic Sequence,

we select a single great event and then exclude all other incidents and happenings in the whirl of the world that can possibly be spared in its culmination” (*Photoplay* 124). This statement suggests the writer ignore the trivial event regardless of what order they may have happened and instead focus on the most dramatic action. Phillips’ suggestion that the writer can use non linear chronological order echoes the “epic” structure of non-Aristotelian dramatists like Shakespeare.

The photoplay theorists warn that with the access to spectacular visual effects unity of action is often compromised. Phillips states: “Pictures are a conventional necessity, just like other props. But they should never be employed for pictorial effects alone, and should always be consistent in spirit with theme” (*Photoplay* 35). Phillips warns that writers should not let an image or scenery dominate the drama and implies that this may be a problem with the medium. “Thus we do witness many a fine dramatic idea that has been garbled to afford a vehicle of the scenery and settings at hand” (*Photoplay* xv). Phillips cites economics as the reason “we find producers who are subordinating the principle of Drama to the practice of employing fine pictures. The idea seems to be that an unbroken series of pleasing Pictures are more essential than a chain of gripping situations that may have nothing scenically pleasing about them. Scenes are only the means to our dramatic ends” (*Photoplay* xiv). So although unity of action is called essential to the photoplay theorist, they warn of factors such as economics and the ability to show the spectacular as factors that the writer needs to be aware of when constructing the script.

Probability of Action

Probability of action is also a standard principle referred to in the photoplay manuals. Esenwein and Leeds write: "Is the plot not only possible, but probable?" (202). Freeburg gives two rules to probability of action when he states: "Dramatic convincingness [sic] involves the question of probability. The probability of dramatic premise has two phases; first, the probability that such initial conditions exists, and second, the probability that such initial conditions will lead to dramatic complication" (243). Freeburg places the law of probability on each individual writer. "The question of just how much improbability the audience will accept at the beginning must be answered by the writer himself" (Freeburg 244). With the possibility of multiple locations and the choice of just about any image, probability of action was truly a principle that new medium would test. Sargent warns that this new freedom could be disruptive. "Keep the action well proportioned. Do not have people appear in houses other than their own without apparent reason. Do not drag characters around from place to place just to have them handy" (83).

The Three Act Structure

All the photoplay manuals suggest that the writer take the essential dramatic principles and apply them to Aristotle's three act structure. Freeburg, one of the few photoplay theorists who specifically refers to Aristotle says: "It must start somewhere, try to get somewhere, and get there; or as Aristotle said more than two thousand years ago, it must have a beginning, a middle, and an end" (233-234). Sargent who does not cite any of the classic theorists writes: "You can write forty scenes or sixty or six hundred and still arrive at no definite ending, and a story must have a beginning, a middle and end. That's been the standard definition of a play for centuries and it holds as good today as the day it

was written” (67). Phillips does not refer to Aristotle but connects the three act structure to terms defined by theorists of stage drama. He writes, “the Act principle will always be the same. There must be a Beginning, the Middle, and the End; the Introduction, the Crisis, and Denouement. These requisites are met in the three Acts of the Stage Play” (Photoplay 20).

Although none of the photoplay theorists break down the three act structure in the detailed manner as Freytag, they give specific instructions on how to move through each act.

Beginning

Phillips says of act one “wherein, in the Beginning, protagonist and antagonist seek out determinedly to follow up their avowed purposes” (Photoplay 99). Sargent commenting on act one warns the writer not to start the scene too soon. “Start with the first scene that really starts to tell the story you want to tell. There may be a lot of interesting things that happened before that, but you have not the time in which to tell them. Jump right into your story” (39). Freeburg also defines act one and issues a warning similar to the one given by Archer. “The beginning of a play should grip the attention, the mental interest, of the spectator, but it should not be allowed to appeal too strongly to his emotions . . . He does not want to feel utter contempt and hatred for Shylock from the very beginning, for the remainder of the play will lack emotional progress and will seem weak and anticlimactic by contrast with the beginning” (241). Freeburg’s warning of a play losing its “emotional progress” due to an over dramatic act

one sounds like Archer's advice that the introduction should not be "so intense in its interest as to outshine all subsequent scenes" (97).

After act one, Freeburg suggests that there is a definite point where the act ends. He does not call this point a crisis like Freytag, but does hint that there are indeed points in the photoplay where the action takes a specific turn.

When does the first section of the play, the premise, end? It ends when the main suspense of the play has been aroused in the minds of the audience. It ends when the spectators begin to wonder whether Romeo and Juliet can ever be happily married under the circumstances; whether Shylock will ever have occasion to get that pound of flesh; whether Macbeth will kill the king who is to be his guest. (247)

Middle

The second act, middle of complication, then is the longest part of the drama. Phillips says, "in the Middle of the play, the protagonist carries forward an offensive warfare against his antagonist with his victory hope for but ever in doubt" (Photoplay 99). Freeburg uses much of same terminology as Freytag to define act two: "the complication, as we use the term in this chapter, comprises the main development of the plot from the premise to the point where the solution begins. It includes the crises and the climax of the plot. Progressing through the crises to the climax it raises suspense to its highest pitch and stirs the emotions of their profoundest depths" (249). Here, Freeburg lumps Freytag's rising action, climax, and return into his complication. Ball also employs

Freytag's terminology when describing act two; "The movement of the drama after the introduction is called the classic technique 'the rising action.' It is as essential that good methods be applied to the photodrama as to the play for the stage, and the writer should bear in mind the importance of the leading action to a climax, shortly before the end of the story" (46).

Freeburg also identifies a point which launches the action from the second act to the third. "The action reaches a point, even though the spectator may not be aware of it, where the beginning ends, and another point where the end begins; between these two points extends what Aristotle calls the middle. Instead of terms beginning, middle, and end we prefer to substitute the terms premise, complication, and solution" (238).

End

Finally we move on to act three. Phillips says it is the solution, "wherein, in Climax and Conclusion, the protagonist emerges the conqueror" (Photoplay 99). Ball writes: "This climax is followed by the 'catastrophe,' which is the great moment of the drama. The 'falling action' show the results of the episode, running out into the denouement" (46-47). Again, parts of the drama identified by Freytag are referred to by these manuals, but his name is never mentioned. Freeburg writes, "The main suspense in the form of a definite questions in the spectator's mind has now been relieved by a definite answer. He did not ask in vain. His attention has marched up hill through the length of the play, but it has arrived somewhere, and the spectator has reached a higher lever of experience" (261).

Freeburg also ties the concept of the picture eye to dramatic structure when he states: “the main problem of photoplay maker is to appeal simultaneously to the eye through the eye. He must learn the art of producing pictures that are in themselves beautiful as pictures and that the same time in themselves significant and impressive elements of drama” (26). Freeburg expands this concept of tying the picture eye to dramatic principles when he suggests that the most beautiful pictures be tied to the most important elements of drama. Freeburg takes Fretytag’s parts of the drama, including his scenic effects and ties imagery to them.

The accelerating progression of suspense and emotion should be emphasized if possible by an accelerating progression of the pictorial values in the play. That is, towards the climax of the play. This should be so because the sequence of pictures in the language in which the photoplay expresses in which stage drama expresses itself. (256)

Freeburg strings his dramatic action together on what calls “loosely hung cable” and places “dramatic pictures” in the appropriated part of the cable:

Let us symbolize the progression of dramatic attention by a loosely hung cable which ascends a hillside rhythmically over a row of posts. The angles, or apexes, of the cable would each represent a crisis, except the highest, which would represent the climactic point to the plot. The most dramatic pictures would, of course, coincide with these apexes of the cable. (258)

He does not break down his dramatic structure in the detail that Freytag does with his pyramid, but offers a unique variation to the dramatic model by ranking images and placing them in their appropriate order.

Those pictures which narrate incidents or situations would be on the up curves, since they create suspense. Still lower down on each curve would be the descriptive pictures, pictures which describe environment and character, and thereby lead to the succeeding rise of plot interest. And decorative pictures, pictures with no story interest at all, would be on the lowest points of each curve, or might even come immediately after a crisis.

(258-259)

The ranking of the pictures and placement of them along the dramatic action is a unique insight and Freeburg is the only photoplay theorist who expands the concept of the picture eye to dramatic structure.

These photoplay manuals offer insight to where dramatic principles came from and how they adapted to the new medium. While they are not as “academic” as the classic dramatic theorists, they seem to use many similar terms and definitions when discussing dramatic principles and structure. Clearly there is strong connection to the dramatic principles outlined by Aristotle and set down in Freytag’s Technique of the Drama. Every photoplay manual identifies the need for dramatic action, unity of action, the necessity that the action be probable and that the photoplay should have a beginning, middle, and end.

The emphasis on image distinguished cinema as a unique and revolutionary medium. Aristotle’s mimesis could literary happen with realistic and multiple locations. Due to the

lack of sound, emphasis had to be placed on action and image. Conflict had to be shown and not spoken. Freeburg's linking of images to their appropriate place in the three act structure is a unique concept that clearly offers a new way to utilize complex dramatic structures .

In a short time the cinema grew and soon challenged all art and other forms of popular entertainment. Phillips makes a case that this new art form was not going away. "It is no less idle to contend that the Photoplay will usurp the sphere of the other mediums of artistic expression, than it is to insist that the Photodrama is ephemeral and but the whim of the public" (Photoplay xii). Also, this art form would be driven by economics as illustrated by a 1915 Supreme Court decision. "The exhibition of motion pictures is a business pure and simple, originated and conducted for profit" (Bohn and Stromgren 47). The photoplaywright manuals readily acknowledge that they are commercial. Their emphasis on plot over character implies that plot sells. Archer, on the other hand, emphasizes character over plot and warns over reliance on a Freytag-like structured plot could be inartistic.

In 1927, with the advent of sound the cinema now could offer a complete visual and audio experience to its audience. The contemporary screenplay theorists constructed their principles for this cinema. The next chapter will evaluate the dramatic principles of the contemporary screenplay theorist and relate them to dramatic principles from Freytag and the photoplay theorists.

Chapter 4

Dramatic Principles of the Contemporary Screenplay Models:

Connections to Aristotle, Freytag, and the Photoplay Theorists

The connection between the dramatic principles first identified by Aristotle and the contemporary screenwriting theorists in Chapter One served as the method for the historical examination of dramatic principles in Chapters Two and Three. The contemporary screenplay theorists expand upon the dramatic principles and adapt them for the cinema today. This analysis will focus on how the contemporary screenwriting theorists developed a structure similar to Freytag's pyramidal structure, ignoring theater's departure from Aristotelian principles. Then the focus will shift to connections and differences to the dramatic principles identified by the photoplay theorists with an emphasis on advent of sound and its effect on the dramatic principles.

Freytag's detailed description of dramatic principles and structure surfaces in the contemporary screenwriting manuals by Field, Walter, Hunter and numerous other contemporary screenplay theorists. However, the only contemporary book on screenwriting that refers to Freytag, Writing For the Screen, by Clara Beranger was published in 1950. Her comments on dramatic action and structure (cited in Chapter Two of this paper) appear to be the only literal connection between Freytag and the modern screenwriting theorists. After Beranger, Freytag seems to have disappeared altogether. An analysis of the dramatic principles and structure of Freytag's Technique of Drama and

the contemporary screenwriting manuals will illustrate the connections and influences of Freytag on contemporary screenplay theory.

Dramatic Unified Action

Freytag and contemporary screenplay theorists agree that dramatic action and unified action are the essential building blocks of drama. Freytag said that unified dramatic action must build throughout the story, “The dramatic action must represent all that is important to the understanding of the play, in the strong excitement of the characters, and in a continuously progressive increase of effects” (Freytag 66). Field echoes Freytag when he writes, “You’ve got to be on track every step of the way; every scene, every fragment, must be taking you somewhere, moving you forward in terms of story development” (Field Workbook 12). Wolf and Cox add, “It is important that you orchestrate these obstacles so that they grow as the movie proceeds, and so that each one in some way derives for the ones before it” (Wolf and Cox 26).

Freytag states that the action must not only be dramatic and unified but it must be probable. He says the audience does not forget the “purport of his own life; and sometimes he feels it very strongly when the poetic picture contradicts it” (Freytag 50). The contemporary screenwriting theorists employ the law of probability, but reflect Kahn and Breed’s definition of the “world of the play” and that each script must have an internal logic. Hauge states, “In order to maintain maximum emotional involvement by your reader, your story must be logical and believable *with its own set of rules*” (Hauge 99). Hunter gives a good example of the screenwriter having to create situations where the

audience's real world does not collide with the writer's fictional world when he discusses George Lucas' Howard the Duck.

Lucas could not get an audience to suspend their belief that Howard was a little person in a duck suit. It was a good duck suit but that's all it was and because of that, the thin strand of credibility that exists between seat and screen was irreparably snapped. On the other hand, we truly don't know what an alien creature looks like. This lack of knowledge allowed us to suspend our disbelief with E.T. (Hunter 21)

The Three Act Structure

Both Freytag and the contemporary screenwriting theorists recognize and utilize Aristotle's beginning, middle and end structure. Hunter, Walter, Field, and the other screenplay theorists claim that by reading numerous screenplays they were able to expand the three part structure for the needs of cinema. They use different names for their parts of the dramatic structure, but their similarities to Freytag's pyramid structure are remarkable. Freytag's pyramid structure, with its five distinct parts and crisis that propel the action forward, can be substituted for the screenplay structure and models developed by the screenplay theorists as the following analysis will illustrate. (See figures 2.1, 2.2, 2.3)

Fig. 2.1 Contemporary Screenplay Dramatic Model

Act I>>>(plot point 1) Act II>>>(midpoint)>>>(plot point 2) Act III>>>

Source: Syd Field, The Screenwriter's Workbook. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1984.

2.2 Freytag's Pyramid:

2.3 Similarities between Freytags Pyramid and Contemporary Screenplay Model:

Freytag's Pyramidal Structure		Contemporary Screenplay Elements	
1	Freytag's introduction	=	Act I
1A	crisis 1: exciting force	=	plot point 1
2	rising action	=	Act II (first half)
3&3A	climax & crisis 2: tragic moment	=	midpoint
4	return	=	Act II (second half)
4A	crisis 3: force of final suspense	=	plot point 2
5	catastrophe	=	Act III

Beginning

In screenplay format, the introduction is often referred to as act one, but in all the screenwriting manuals, act one is really Freytag's introduction. This can be verified by taking a look at several of the contemporary screenplay theorists' definition of act one. Field, who has the most elaborate model writes, "Everything in Act I sets up your story. You don't have time for cheap tricks and cute and clever scenes and dialogue; you've got to set up your story immediately, from page one" (Field Workbook 28). Lew Hunter's "contemporary act one" is really Freytag's introduction. "Get caught up in the reality that the contemporary Act One, the beginning, is *the situation*. The idea. Why you call people to their neighborhood multiplex" (Hunter 20). Later, when he discusses act one again he throws in Freytag's idea of setting the tone in the introduction. "The first few scenes are the frame for your movie. Like an oil painting frame. These scenes give the audience your story's parameter and tone" (Hunter 132). Hauge practically regurgitates Hunter and Field when he writes, "the goal of Act I is to *establish* the setting, the characters, situation and outer motivation for the hero" (Hauge 86), and later when he says, "In addition to grabbing your reader, your opening must also establish the mood and tone of your screenplay" (Hauge 102).

Freytag gives his definition of how to construct the introduction: "the construction of a regular introduction is as follows: a clearly defining keynote, a finished scene, a short transition into the first moment of the excited action" (Freytag 121). Freytag's introduction takes us to the moment where something happens to launch into his question.

Pope reiterates this in Good Scripts Bad Scripts. “Typically the first act is the shortest, beginning with the introduction of the initial problem and major characters and ending with the protagonist’s decisions to grapple with the initial problem” (Pope xvii). In Film Scriptwriting, Swain says, “The beginning establishes you character within the framework of his predicament, nails down his objective, and carries the story forward to that point where the character commits himself to fight to the bitter end to attain his desire” (Swain 89).

So Freytag’s introduction concludes with his first crisis or “the exciting force.” It is a specific action that launches the hero into his or her quest. Freytag positions it between the introduction and rise. It is Freytag’s first crisis and the only one that he says is absolutely required. This “indispensable accessory” of Freytag’s is another element that surfaces in every modern screenwriting manual.

Hunter says that this moment occurs at a “floating page 17” and gives examples from well known movies to illustrate his point: “Remember the first-act end as ‘the situation.’ This is when E.T. meets Eliot. When Rick gets the transit letters that can get two people out of Casablanca. When the reporter’s ‘Rosebud’ obsession flashes us back to Charles Foster Kane’s separation from his Colorado parents” (Hunter 94). Thomas Pope uses the movie High Noon to define his idea of Freytag’s “exciting force.”

It [the first act] often ends at point of moral conflict for the protagonist, or hero. In High Noon it ends when the sheriff decides to return to town to fight the bad guys. If he had decided to run--that is, if he’d decided to morally abdicate the challenge placed before him--there’d be no further

story. The bad guys would have had no good guy to fight, and the hero would have ethically damned himself. End of first act and end of story.
(Pope xvii-xviii)

Syd Field identifies this moment as a plot point I. Syd Field's plot points are another name for Freytag's crisis. (Field's term plot point was used in figure 2.1 and 2.3) Hauge uses Field as his example when he says, "These events, which turn the story in a new direction and signal a new act are what author Syd Field terms 'plot points'" (Hauge 89). Field, like Hunter, picks a place in the screenplay where his plot point occurs. "About page 25, a plot point occurs; a plot point is an incident, episode, or event that 'hooks' into the action and spins it around into another direction, 'direction' being a 'line of development'" (Field Workbook 30). Walter identifies this moment when he says, "At the very last moment, where it appears events will proceed smoothly, an event occurs that blows all complacency sky-high" (Walter 52). Although the contemporary screenplay theorists do not use the term "exciting force," they all use a force similar to Freytag's to move the dramatic action along in a unified and believable manner.

Middle

Freytag's "exciting force" moves the action into the next part of his structure. Most of the contemporary screenwriting theorists identify the next section of their dramatic structure as act two, while Freytag breaks this section into three parts: the rise, the climax, and the return. At first this may seem like a major difference, but when you analyze Freytag's rise, climax and return, and compare them to the structure of the

screenplay theorists second acts (see figure 2.3), it becomes clear that the rise, climax and return are all elements of the contemporary screenplay theorists act two.

The contemporary screenwriting theorists' comments on second acts are similar to Freytag's rise. All the forces and obstacles that oppose the hero must surface. Freytag says, "the most important persons in the counter play, or to the chief groups, a place must be made for them now, and opportunity must be given for an activity full of meaning" (Freytag 125). Hunter echoes Freytag on how to construct act two: "Your job in the second act is to unfold the complexity of reasons. Characters getting into trouble because of their own actions or the actions of others and the conflict exacerbated by the character's reactions and subsequent actions" (Hunter 162). Hauge in a similar statement says, "the goal of Act 2 is to build the hurdles, obstacles, conflicts, suspense, pace, humor, character development, and character revelations" (Hauge 86). Field, who provides the most elaborate model for act two, sums up the entire act before breaking it down. "Act II is the unit of action in which your character confronts and overcomes (or does not overcome) all obstacles to achieve his or her dramatic need" (Field, Workbook 31).

Like Freytag, Syd Field breaks down act two into smaller sections. In the middle of the second act Field identifies a mid-point that the first part of act two build towards. Field defines the mid-point in The Screenwriter's Workbook: "The midpoint is the link in the chain of dramatic action; it connects the first half of Act II with the second half" (139). He then illustrates how the mid-point holds act two together when he states: "The first half of Act II starts at Plot Point I and goes to the mid-point; the second half goes from mid-point to Plot Point II" (Field Workbook 148). To illustrate where the mid-point is,

Field breaks down three movies: An Unmarried Woman, Manhattan, and Body Heat. “In all three examples, something definitely happens on page 60 that helps design and structure the action of Act II. That ‘incident or episode or event’ that happens on page 60 I termed the *midpoint*, because it happens midway through the second act” (Field Workbook 128). It is the point where the hero begins to take action into his or her hands. Field gives an example of this when he discusses the change in the protagonist in the movie An Unmarried Woman. “The scene on page 60, with the therapist, bridges the action of the first half of Act II with the second half of Act II. From page 30 to 60 the main character is ‘antimen’; from page 60 to 90-- after ‘I would go out and get laid’--she explores her sexuality” (Field, Workbook 124).

Freytag identifies the midpoint of his structure as the “climax.” This is not the moment of truth that launches the story to its conclusion, but is more like Field’s midpoint where the hero takes or loses control of his or her quest. Freytag states: “These two chief parts of the drama are firmly united by a point of the action which lies directly in the middle. The middle, the climax of the play, is the most important place of the structure; the action rises to this; the action falls away from this” (Freytag 105). Carlson states Freytag’s climax is “the peak of the pyramid and emotional mid-point of the drama” (258). Clara Beranger, in Writing for the Screen, concurs that Freytag’s climax is a turning point similar to Field’s midpoint.

The Greeks, Shakespeare, and the French classicists followed a form which Freytag [sic] diagrammed as a pyramid, with action rising to a turning point or “crisis” at the top, and falling from the top down the other side for the

denouement or resolution of the conflict. This crisis did not mean the end of the protagonist's troubles, but a turning point which determined how they would be resolved. (Beranger 108)

Beranger wrote her book in 1950 and apparently Field did not read her book or Freytag's. Field says he found the midpoint on his own, by reading thousands of screenplays. It is possible that Field did discover the midpoint on his own, but he rediscovered what Freytag identified over a hundred years before Field's book was published.

Freytag next employs his second crisis "the tragic force" which he says is optional. This force is so close to the midpoint and since its function is to finish the action of the climax, it is actually the part of the contemporary screenplay theorists' midpoint. Carlson supports this argument when he states: "The second crisis, or tragic moment, ends the climax and introduces the ailing movement, or return" (258).

Freytag's "return" takes the hero to the moment of truth, where he or she will be forced to make a stand and either accomplish or fail. The hero's choices are running out and he or she will soon face the final confrontation. The drama now focuses on the hero and Freytag identifies this as the most difficult part of the drama to write. "The most difficult part of the drama is the sequence of scenes in the downward movement, or as it may well be called, the return" (Freytag 133).

The contemporary screenplay theorists concur with Freytag on the difficulty of finishing this part of the drama. Hunter warns, "Be forewarned. The second act is where many and even most movies get into their deepest trouble" (Hunter 20). Field suggests, "Act II is the most difficult act to write because it is the longest unit of dramatic action"

(Field, Workbook 32). And Walter adds, “Some theoreticians characterize endings as the hardest part of the three-component structure model. They are wrong. The hardest part is the middle” (Walter 51).

Freytag’s return takes us to another his third crisis. Freytag identifies this crisis as “the force of the final suspense,” which is the last rise before his catastrophe or conclusion. He says, “it is necessary, in good time to prepare the mind of the audience for the catastrophe” (Freytag 135). Freytag says this force is optional, but every contemporary screenplay theorists identifies a moment that launches the drama to its conclusion. “In the second act you are leading up to what has been called ‘the moment of truth.’ It is the point at which the character is about to embark upon his final and biggest battle to reach his goal” (Wolf and Cox 27). Field identifies this as plot point two. “The plot point at the end of Act II “spins the story around” into Act III” (Field Workbook 33). Walter has his own name for Freytag’s “force of the final suspense.” “The Big Gloom is that moment, occurring almost inevitably just before the beginning of the end, approximately eighty minutes into the film, where the protagonist is furthest from achieving his goal” (Walter 57). Hunter says this occurs “around page 85,” but, “you can be much more flexible with that number than the floating page 17 Act One end” (Hunter 262). He gives several good examples of this in film. “And so the decision is made. Butch and Sundance actually go to Bolivia. Eliot chooses to rescue E.T. Rick will use his visas to get Ilsa to safety. Kane begins his move to Florida” (Hunter 262).

End

Now is the time for the conclusion, or what Freytag labels “the catastrophe.” “The catastrophe of the drama is the closing action” (Freytag 137). Freytag says, “the whole construction points towards the end,” and the author must be careful to adhere to the dramatic principles or, “the ending may come into contradiction with the fine graduations which the previous parts have received during the elaboration” (Freytag 139). Freytag gives the author a warning. “And the warning must be given here, that the poet should not allow himself to be misled by modern tender-heartedness, to spare the life of his hero on the stage” (Freytag 137).

The contemporary screenwriting theorists’ act three is Freytag’s catastrophe. Field says, “What happens to your main character? Does he live or die? Succeed or fail? Marry or divorce? Blow up the Death Star or not? . . . What is the resolution of your story?” (Field Workbook 177). Hauge states, “the goal of Act 3 is to resolve everything, particularly the outer motivation and conflict for the hero” (Hauge 86). Hunter adds, “The third act, the end is the conclusion. The climax. The catharsis. The wrap up” (Hunter 20). Straczynski echoes Freytag’s idea on making sure the conclusion grows out of the rest of the drama when he says, “when it comes time to resolve your story, be sure the resolution comes naturally. It should be organic, growing out of what went before” (Straczynski 163). Finally, Swain echoes Freytag’s warning of being clear and true to the hero’s end. “The end sees Character win or lose his battle. Remember, in this regard, the story doesn’t truly end until the struggle between desire and danger is resolved, with some kind of clear-cut triumph of desire over danger, or visa versa” (Swain 89).

The contemporary screenplay theorists, even though they do not cite Freytag in their manuals, clearly use a model that resembles his pyramidal structure. (fig. 2.3) This connection and reliance on structure illustrates that contemporary cinema adapted “the five-act dogma” Archer criticized. However, Freytag and the contemporary screenplay theorists do not advocate merely cranking out “soulless” pieces of drama. Freytag’s principles are intended to be utilized by the writer to create a detailed structure, yet in a way that the audience would not detect how the writer accomplished this. According to Freytag the writer “with apparent carelessness, the great artist adorns all parts of his piece with golden ornaments; but he who unclasp them, finds them fastened as if with steel, grown inseparably into what they adorn” (Freytag 48). The screenplay theorists goals are the same. Field says:

Good structure in a screenplay is like an ice cube and water. An ice cube has a definite crystalline structure, separate and different from water. But when an ice cube melts, it becomes indistinguishable from whence it came. It is the same, but different. It should be so integral to your story, so closely connected, you can’t see it. All good films have a strong and solid structural foundation. (Field Workbook 17)

And Hunter echoes this when he writes: “The audience subconsciously knows what it wants. Your job is to give it to them. Without the seams showing. Your step outlines, act ends, and analytical thinking should all be completely disguised” (Hunter 95). So structure to Freytag and the contemporary screenplay theorists should be

“indistinguishable from whence it came,” allowing the writer to use the dramatic principles to create a dramatic script ripe with “golden ornaments.”

Having establish connections between Freytag and the contemporary screenplay theorists, now the focus will shift to the photoplay manuals connections and impact on the contemporary screenplay theory. Not one of the contemporary screenplay manuals refers to a photoplay manual. Like in Technique of the Drama, the dramatic principles and structure from the contemporary screenplay manuals surface in the photoplay manuals. However, the photoplay manuals illustrate how the dramatic principles first adapted to film. This analysis will reveal that these adaptations have surfaced the contemporary screenplay models and that the role of the contemporary screenwriter has become more specific than that of the photoplaywright.

All photoplay manuals agree with the contemporary screenplay theorists that a unified dramatic three act structure is essential to screenwriting. Esenwein and Leeds’ following statement could have been written by Hunter, Walter, or Field. They state:

much will be gained if these few words are taken seriously, and no stories are submitted except those revolving about ORIGINAL, CLEAR-CUT, PLAUSIBLE SITUATIONS SHOWING THE LIVES OF HUMAN BEINGS IN THEIR HOUR OF CRISIS, AND WORKING OUT THE AFTER-RESULTS OF THAT CRISIS WITH LIVELY, DRAMATIC HUMAN INTEREST. (Esenwein and Leeds 92)

Phillips’ statement also has a contemporary ring:

The hero sets out to reach his goal, but pressure from the side lines hampers his progress at every step. The pressure increases as he nears the apex, near where it is so great that something must break in order that he may reach his goal. As the moment of the inevitable Big Collision approaches, our suspense increases. We call the Collision the Climax. . . . The Hero is satisfied, and the audience must feel gratified. That is the whole of Drama. (Phillips Photoplay 115)

The photoplay theorists do not specify the specific length of films or acts like Hunter and Field, but they agree on the basic structure. Sargent writes in 1913, “You can write forty scenes or sixty or six hundred and still arrive at no definite ending, and a story must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. That’s been the standard definition of a play for centuries and it holds as good today as the day it was written” (67).

Dramatic Action

What effect did sound have on the dramatic principles? The advent of sound could lead one to the conclusion that screenwriting had moved back towards the drama. “When sound arrived, Seldes joined his contemporaries in denouncing it as a reversion to theater. Speech, he argued, halted the movies’ visual momentum; now things were told instead of being shown” (Bowser 37). The photoplay theorists had no choice but encourage aspiring writers to show actions. The cinema was solely a visual medium where dramatic action could only be shown. However, the contemporary screenplay manuals still urge writers to use action over words whenever possible. Hunter says, “Set up your characters in

conflict, not conversation. When you're tempted to write a 'conversation,' or 'talk,' or 'visit,' or anything similar, don't" (Hunter 79). Field gives similar advice when he states: "Action is character -- what a person does is what he is, not what he says" (Workbook 55). Walter actually refers to silent films when he talks of actions.

Silent film writers required no extraordinary insight to appreciate that audiences were not in the theater to read endless series of projected cards smeared with speeches, no matter how elegant the calligraphy. Like today's audiences, they demanded physical, visual, dramatic action.

(Walter 83)

Walter does not quote or mention any of the photoplay theorists, but he essentially gives the same advice on dramatic action given to writers of the silent film era in the photoplay manual.

Unity of Action

The screenwriting theorists and the photoplay theorists concur that unity of action is essential to the drama. However, Albert Phillips' notion that changing the chronological sequence is not supported or encouraged by the screenplay theorists. "The most effective movies, in acceptance and quality terms, are those with a simple A-to-Z story line" (Hunter 66). Field echoes this: "And dramatic structure is defined as "a linear arrangement of related incidents, episodes, and events leading to a dramatic resolution" (Field Workbook 23). Phillips simply offers writers more options and warns writer's not to break the linear: "if suspense cannot be heightened by such means, the chronological

order should be adhered to because it guarantees clearness and smoothness in the story” (Photoplay 215).

Probability of Action

What the audience accepts as probable is again determined by the principle of probability of action and this is often left up to the discretion of the writer. Freeburg writes, “The question of just how much improbability the audience will accept at the beginning must be answered by the writer himself” (244). Hauge gives the writer questions to decide what the audience will accept: “When developing your story, ask yourself repeatedly, ‘Does this situation clearly fit the limits of the universe I have created?’ and, ‘Given my characters’ backgrounds and situations, is it logical and believable that they would behave this way?’” (100).

Three Act Structure

Like the contemporary screenplay manuals, the photoplay manuals do not reference Freytag, but use his terminology to define the three act structure. Phillips illustrates this when he states: “There must be a Beginning, the Middle, and the End; the Introduction, the Crisis, and Denouement” (Photoplay 20). However, the photoplay manuals do not break down the three act structure in the same detailed manner as the contemporary screenplay theorists. They do not label specific plot points, or mid-points which launch the action from one act to the next. However, Freeburg does echo the contemporary screenplay theorists when he states: “The action reaches a point, even though the

spectator may not be aware of it, where the beginning ends, and another point where the end begins; between these two points extends what Aristotle calls the middle” (Freeburg 238).

While the contemporary screenplay manuals offer a more detailed structure than the photoplay manuals, Freeburg’s concept that “the pictures should gradually become more beautiful, more impressive as they progress towards the climax of the play” is never mentioned by the contemporary screenplay theorists. (256) With the specific detailed structure of the contemporary screenplay manuals it would be easy for the writer to tie the most dramatic images to the most important elements of the script. For example, plot point one, the mid-point, and plot point two would each call for an image that would have more of a dramatic impact than an image from the introduction, or the first half of act two.

The absence of Freeburg’s accelerating progression of pictures is not surprising since the contemporary screenplay manuals warn the screenwriter that image and developing a “picture eye” is not the job of the screenwriter. The screenwriter is encouraged to worry about structure and leave specific images to the director. “There’s little directors hate more than to read a script that tells them how to shoot a movie. That’s their job. They just don’t want or need a writer to tell them when to use a closeup and when to use a long shot. What you do as a writer is suggest images they might react to inside the description” (Hunter 123). The screenwriter is instructed to “suggest images” to the director. The director’s responsibility is to make sure that the images follow Freeburg’s accelerating progression and writers are encouraged to concentrate on dramatic principles that help in the construction of a linear unified dramatic story with a

beginning, middle and end. Walter says that the screenwriter must also beware of the editor and avoid putting too many colors and detailed shots in the script.

These glances provide much color and realism to a movie, but the screenwriter who indicates everyone of the shots certainly commits a serious error . . . breaking up a scene, and indeed an entire script into all the various shots, is actually the editor's task. And the editor enjoys having the writer do his work for him about as much as the writer enjoys the producer's manicurist's cousin's mailman's dentist "touching up" his dialogue. (120)

The photoplay manuals' emphasis on image and the contemporary screenplay manuals' shift away from image suggest that the role of the screenwriter and director have been clearly defined since the first photoplay manuals appear. Contemporary screenplay manuals urge writers to follow a Freytag-like pyramidal structure so the director and editor can "with apparent carelessness, the great artist adorns all parts of his piece with golden ornaments" (Freytag 48).

Chapter 5

Conclusions

Freytag, Freeburg and Field: Putting It All Together

This historical examination of dramatic principles and dramatic structure proves there are indeed universal dramatic principles that resurface throughout time. Aristotle's Poetics, whether it was an outline, lecture notes, or was confused through translations, identified universal dramatic principles that have been adapted to the needs of each historical period, but at their core remain intact. This research shows that codified instruction manuals are a valuable resource for tracing dramatic principles. By focusing my analysis primarily on the dramatic principles of Freytag and the previously unexamined photoplay manuals, this paper identified direct and indirect connections to contemporary screenplay theory and its reliance on these core principles.

In 1921, Phillips suggested “that a School of Photoplay Writing be founded. . . . near Los Angeles or New York where students could work in practical conjunction with the studios” (Photoplay 31). We need only to take a look at UCLA, USC, and other film schools scattered across the nation to see that Phillip’s advice was taken. All the contemporary screenplay theorists teach at universities or travel the country giving seminars to help promote their books and teach the principles of screenwriting. Field, Walter, Hunter and the other contemporary screenplay theorists fail to mention Freytag, or

the photoplay manuals, but their connection to contemporary script writing theory cannot be denied.

Dramatic action is the first and most essential dramatic principle of the cinema and has been a constant throughout history. Clara Beranger provides a connection between the contemporary screenwriting theorists and classic dramatic theorists. She sums up Aristotle, Freytag, the photoplay theorists, and the contemporary screenplay theorists' definition of dramatic action with her statement: "Thus, conflict between opposing forces is the foundation upon which a dramatic play is built" (105). While the concept of dramatic action has been constant throughout history, it has transformed to adapt to the specifics of the cinema. The photoplay theorists took the principle of dramatic action and made it visual to adapt to the new medium. Because of the lack of sound, writers had no choice but to show action. Eisenstein and Leeds defined the distinctness of the new medium: "at all times it is action that is of primary importance. It is what your character does that counts" (131). However, with the addition of sound many critics believed cinema would revert back to theater. David Bordwell in On the History of Film Style reflects this when he comments on the views of two French film critics in 1934:

According to Bardeche and Brasillach, a lucky accident made the earliest cinema silent. Lacking spoken language, film was forced to become a visual spectacle, and this impelled artists to explore the design and ordering of images. But the arrival of sound created a regressive dependence of the theater. (39)

However, this “regressive dependence of theater” does not apply to the contemporary screenplay theorists’ definition of dramatic action. Like the photoplay theorists, they stress the importance of action over words. They all echo Hunter’s advice: “Set up your characters in conflict, not conversation” (79). Walter cites the silent film as the best example of the visual nature of dramatic action. So as far as dramatic action is concerned, a “lucky accident made the earliest cinema silent,” and may have allowed the emphasis of action over words to remain constant and become a part of the contemporary screenplay theorists’ principle of dramatic action.

That dramatic action be unified is another constant in script writing theory. Phillips expanded this principle to say that unified action does not have to be linear, but must be logical. Phillips sums up the goal of unified action: “This finished product must run as smoothly as a stream of water made up of countless drops and numerous tributaries now flowing as a single powerful body toward a common goal” (Phillips Photoplay 177). While the contemporary screenplay theorists prefer the linear approach to constructing a narrative, they all concur with Phillips that the action must be unified “as single powerful body towards a common goal” (Photoplay 177).

Probability of action is the dramatic principle that transforms to the expectations of each historical period. Theorists such as Castleveto and Freytag suggested that an audience brings its perceptions of reality to the performance and the writer must consider these expectations. The contemporary screenplay theorists also warn the writer to consider the audience, but also they incorporate Kahn and Breed’s internal logic of the world of the play. Hauge sums up this view: “In order to maintain maximum emotional

involvement by your reader, your story must be logical and believable *with its own set of rules*" (Hauge 99). Cinema provided artists with the ability to truly reflect the world of the audience. Phillips states: "we find something in this newest of the Arts that none other of the Fine Arts has, that is, the animated deed -- the verisimilitude of Life itself" (Phillips Photoplay xii). Therefore, many realities and "worlds" can be visually constructed and have been accepted by audiences. Hunter's example of the failure of Lucas' Howard the Duck shows that audiences still bring their perceptions of reality with them to theater and this must be considered by the writer even while constructing the rules of the specific world of the play.

The three act unified structure has been universally been adopted by the screenplay theorists. Although they fail to mention Freytag, the connection cannot be denied. But if Freytag's Technique of the Drama is so similar to modern theories on screenplay construction why is he only mentioned in Clara Beranger's Writing for the Screen, written in 1950? Syd Field, Richard Walter, and Lew Hunter do not urge the their readers to read Freytag's book along with Aristotle's Poetics. One reason may be that contemporary screenplay theorists' "how to" manuals are commodities sold to the ever growing number of aspiring screenwriters, and making their books the Poetics of screenwriting is a nice selling point. However, the photoplay manuals do not mention Freytag, or Archer, and seldom reference Aristotle. The fact that the photoplay theorists moved away from academic sources and even suggested that academic training was not required to write the photoplay could be why scholars like Archer and Freytag disappeared from the discussion and debate of dramatic principles. Regardless of whether

the contemporary screenplay theorists really did come up with “plot points” and “midpoints” by writing and reading thousands of screenplays, they may have discovered universal truths about dramatic construction that Freytag had outlined over a hundred years ago.

The contemporary screenplay theorists emphasis on structure over image shows how the role of the screenwriter has evolved and changed since the time of the photoplay manual. Hunter, Field, and Walter’s books are aimed at aspiring Hollywood screenwriters and they take their models from Hollywood screenwriting. The role of the Hollywood screenwriter is to create an undetectable structure that directors and editors can hang “golden ornaments.” As indicated by Hunter and Walter, directors and editors do not want writers doing their jobs and as a result screenwriters are urged to focus on structure, not image.

However, modern screenwriters would benefit if they utilized Freeburg’s concept of the “picture eye” and its relation to the elements drama. He suggests the “picture eye” should be developed and used for “producing pictures that are in themselves beautiful as pictures and that the same time in themselves significant and impressive elements of drama” (26). The screenwriter who masters the Freytag and Field detailed dramatic unified structure and then applies Freeburg’s advice that the “accelerating progression of suspense and emotion should be emphasized if possible by and accelerating progression of the pictorial values in the play” would enhance the overall quality of his or her script (256). The ability to visualize and then place the appropriate image on the correct part of

the dramatic structure is an concept that not only should be revisited, but should be included in contemporary screenplay manuals.

What conclusions can be drawn from the influence of economics on cinema? Has money caused writers to adhere to the three act structure? Esenwein and Leeds' statement that the writer must be "entertaining first, instructive second; to try to be instructive is to cease to be entertaining," certainly has proven to be true. (304) Clara Beranger writing forty years later, correctly defined the nature of cinema and the importance of financial success of a film.

It was born and developed as entertainment for the masses. . . . From its inception, the motion picture has had a wider audience than any form of story-telling ever had before. Its success depends on the approval of millions instead of the thousands who pass judgment on other forms of narrative or dramatic literature. If fifty thousand people read a novel it is a success. If half a million people see a stage play it is a success. But a motion picture to be a success must be approved by millions of people of different classes, tastes, tastes, nationalities, view points and ideals.

(Beranger 12)

As a result of economic pressures and the need to entertain, many movies today face the same consequences Phillips warned would ruin the photoplay "With the long-existing lack of unity in purpose, technique, and final expression, between author, rewriter, and producer, it is not to be wondered at that photoplays have been garbled somewhere along the line between conception and production" (Phillips Photoplay 56). Critics suggested

that producers would turn to simple formulas in order to control film; “the rise of a storytelling cinema owed a good deal to the producers’ need to regularize production in predictable ways” (Bordwell 121). When sound came, film critics suggested that the “intensified commercial pressure will make the creation of truly artistic work highly unlikely” (Bordwell 39).

Are we left with the soulless structure that Archer predicted the emphasis of a Freytag-like structure would create? Has the simple three act structure allowed producers to crank out safe and predictable money making vehicles, not artistic film? Richardson claims that even the independent filmmakers eventually become unoriginal and succumb to the Hollywood formula. “It’s almost a given that the only interesting movies today are coming out of the fringes, from first-time and independent directors enjoying a brief flurry of creative independence before the studios put them to work making Cheez Whiz” (Richardson 21).

Richardson even suggests creative stagnation with foreign films:

Foreign filmmakers seem almost as hobbled by the celluloid past as Americans: Shallow Grave is fun film making, but, like Pulp Fiction and Reservoir Dogs, it’s just a splashy version of a very familiar tale. This isn’t just my opinion. Even in Hollywood, it is the consensus. A screenwriter friend told me it was the times: “Music is over, art is over, movies are over.” (21)

“Cheez Whiz” certainly applies to a large number of films today, but that doesn’t mean that the dramatic principles or the “Freytag-Field” structure is responsible.

Producers and “formula writers” may know the principles, but they merely employ them like an assembly line in an automobile factory. The structure needs to be undetectable. Perhaps writers do not follow Freytag’s advice to cloak the structure: “the great artist adorns all parts of his piece with golden ornaments; but he who unclasp them, finds them fastened as if with steel, grown inseparably into what they adorn” (Freytag 48). The screenplay theorists urge the writer to do the same. Field offers an equally appropriate analogy: “Good structure in a screenplay is like an ice cube and water. An ice cube has a definite crystalline structure, separate and different from water. But when an ice cube melts, it becomes indistinguishable from whence it came.” (Field Workbook 17). And Hunter advises writers to give provide a structure “Without the seams showing” (95). When the structure becomes apparent and effort is not made to make it “indistinguishable from whence it came” then screenwriters create the soulless art Archer warned structure would produce.

So what larger implications can be made for further research? Why have audiences responded to the dramatic unified three act structure for 2500 years? Aristotle was more than a dramatic theorist, and according to Cooper, Aristotle’s “medical training” made him “interested in life and the principles of life.” Cooper says that Aristotle applied this interest to all aspect of life, including drama. “He considers its structure and its function. Above all he is concerned with the function and ultimate purpose of it” (11). Could there be a tie, or an “ultimate purpose” to the dramatic principles first identified by Aristotle? Why has generation after generation responded to them? Our lives have a beginning and an end, but everything in between does not necessarily proceed in a unified logical way.

There is no answer to our question at the end of our story. So perhaps we turn to these principles and structure because it gives us a place where a hero's life, who we all hopefully identify with, progresses and gives us a clear cut answer. Pope says, "No one has a second act, or a first, or a third; life doesn't have acts because life has no structure; life just is . . . Popular dramatic entertainment gives us a place to go where that order exists" (xix). Perhaps it is also no coincidence that this structure surfaces in the most popular form of dramatic entertainment, the place we all go for escape. Freeburg said over eighty years ago that the cinema viewer "has for an hour or so escaped from himself, has been diverted from the prosaic commonplaces of his own life; and the diversion has been edifying as well as entertaining" (261).

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