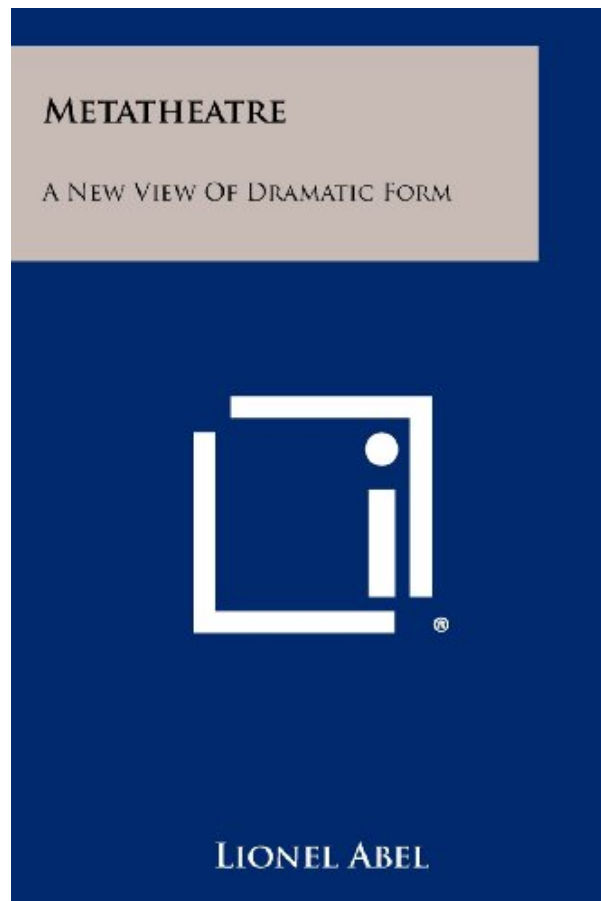


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Exactly what it promises: a new view.

By Robert Beveridge

According to Lionel Abel, classic tragedy died with Macbeth, and a new kind of pseudo-tragedy rose with Hamlet. Since "pseudo-tragedy" is a mouthful and Abel is a contemporary of those critics whose life's work, it would seem, was to add "meta-" to everything, Abel decided to call this new kind of drama "metatheatre." What is metatheatre? Simply put, it's the conversion of the tragic (anti-) hero's firm belief in forces outside his control-- the gods in Sophocles, or the Weird Sisters (Abel's take on them: a corruption of the Three Furies, a view I suspect myself) in Macbeth-- to the (anti-) hero's less firm belief in the motives of humanity, and more importantly, the (anti-) hero's ability to put on an act in order to deceive the other players. The layers of an onion-- the actor acting a part to the audience, and acting a different part to the other actors.

Hamlet, according to Abel, was the turning point. It not only contained this mechanism-- given free rein by letting the other actors in the play think Hamlet was mad, leaving Hamlet to essentially do what he liked-- but was also metaphorized by the play-within-a-play Hamlet stages to uncover the treachery of his stepfather. If you believe Abel, Hamlet is, simply, the finest drama in the history of the form, and I'm not inclined to disagree. After this explication (a lucid and interesting one-- unlike many) of Hamlet, Abel whirls us through the next three hundred odd years of playwrighting, giving us examples of metatheatrical works which have been mislabeled as tragedy down through the ages, both in drama and fiction (he specifically contrasts Don Quixote with El Cid in one essay), and makes a strong case for metatheatre as a valid genre on the stage.

Unlike most works of theatrical criticism-- I'm not a big stage fan, so I find most of it way above my head-- Abel's little work is readable, understandable, and finishable by the average joe on the street with more than an eighth-grade education. It may even lead more people to want to experience the theatre (at least, as long as it stays away from musicals). A fine little achievement that I hope is still in print.

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This Book Presents Challenging Ideas

By Senior Critic

The author presents an unusual and interesting point of view about tragedy, theater, and their relationships to both past life and modern life. The ideas are thoroughly analyzed and clearly presented. I recommend it to

readers who are deeply interested in both theater and philosophies of life.

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Metatheater

By Andrea

The book came in a timely manner and in the condition stated. I was very happy with the company. Would use again.

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