



# Backwards & Forwards: A Technical Manual for Reading Plays

By David Ball

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This guide to playreading for students and practitioners of both theater and literature complements, rather than contradicts or repeats, traditional methods of literary analysis of scripts.

Ball developed his method during his work as Literary Director at the Guthrie Theater, building his guide on the crafts playwrights of every period and style use to make their plays stageworthy. The text is full of tools for students and practitioners to use as they investigate plot, character, theme, exposition, imagery, motivation/obstacle/conflict, theatricality, and the other crucial parts of the superstructure of a play. He includes guides for discovering what the playwright considers the play's most important elements, thus permitting interpretation based on the foundation of the play rather than its details.

Using *Hamlet* as illustration, Ball assures a familiar base for illustrating script-reading techniques as well as examples of the kinds of misinterpretation readers can fall prey to by ignoring the craft of the playwright. Of immense utility to those who want to put plays on the stage (actors, directors, designers, production specialists) *Backwards and Forwards* is also a fine playwriting manual because the structures it describes are the primary tools of the playwright.

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## Backwards & Forwards: A Technical Manual for Reading Plays By David Ball Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #37249 in Books
- Published on: 1983-07-07
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.50" h x .40" w x 5.50" l, .30 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 104 pages

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

“In fewer than 100 pages, this marvelously instructive book shows how to unlock the secrets of plot, character, theme, exposition, imagery, motivation, conflict, theatricality and pacing... Our editor says he learned more about dramatic structure in the few hours he spent with this 96-page book than he has in his 20-years of theater experience.”—*Stage Directions*

“Ball wrote [*Backwards and Forwards*] to help people who put on plays understand how a play works... He argues that scripts represent a special kind of writing—because it is writing meant to be staged, not read—and thus requires special reading techniques; these techniques are what he offers.”—*Dramatics*

#### About the Author

**David Ball** wrote *Backwards and Forwards* when he was Professor of playwriting, acting, theater history, and literature at Carnegie-Mellon University. He had earlier been on the senior directing and literary staffs at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, and more recently was Head of Drama at Duke University during that department's "Golden Years." His students have gone on to win Emmies, Oscars, Obies, and Tony awards in every area of theater, TV, and film. *Backwards and Forwards* has been the field's standard text for a quarter century, making Dr. Ball one of the most influential and respected of theater and film theorists, educators, and trainers of his generation. His own professional directing, producing, and writing credits encompass Broadway, off-Broadway, regional theater, and film; and his landmark adaptation of Moliere's *The Miser* was staged in major regional theaters from coast to coast as one of Theatre de la Jeune Lune's Tony-award-winning productions.

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