Constructive Criticism: "The Vampire Chronicles"
by Melanie Anne Phillips & Chris Huntley

Fried Rice:
The Tale of "The Vampire Chronicles"

I am the critic, LessTact. I feed upon the creative efforts of others. Unlike many of my kind, I never prey upon the naive or creatively challenged, but only on the mistakes made by great talents who should know better. A case in point is the tale of the Vampire Chronicles by Anne Rice.

Be forewarned: if you have not yet read the Vampire Chronicles, what follows will almost certainly ruin the experience. But no matter. The fourth book in the series, The Tale of the Body Thief ruins the experience anyway. How can I say this? How can I be so callous? I am the critic, LessTact!

What is it that makes my blood boil about the Vampire Chronicles? Simply this: all four books in the series have the potential to work together as a single Grand Argument Story. Each volume develops another side of a larger vision dealing with the struggle of that self-serving blood sucker of a Main Character, Lestat, to find inner peace. And he finds it. BUT, we aren't told how!

Can you imagine that??? Two thousand pages of reading, all leading up to a final conclusion that ties four perspectives together, all dramatic forces converging on the Main Character finding a way to resolve his angst that has hounded him since the first book, and he just resolves it!

I mean, I'm sitting here in real life. I've got as much angst as anybody. Suddenly, here's this character who suffers even more than I do, but he won't give up. I perk up. I read on. In fact, this undead tragic figure is on a quest to find a way to put his angst behind him. Along the way he gets into the most amazing scrapes and I tag right along with the

Inside this Issue:

The XX and XY Files

What is it about The X Files that has attracted such a following? Is it the blend of New Age philosophy and hard science fiction? Could it be the taboo subjects or government conspiracies? How about the flashy production values and high-tech special effects?

Naturally, all of these contribute to the phenomenal success of the show, but they don't fully explain the unusual "feel" of the program. Anyone who has seen the series knows what we mean. There is a strange emotional aura experienced by the viewing

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XX & XY Files *(page 1)*

audience that is almost metaphysical itself. In fact, tracking down the source of this strange atmosphere could be a case right out of The X Files themselves. Fortunately, as the opening credits assert: "The truth is out there." In this case, Dramatica can help illuminate it.

To begin our investigation, let's look to our intrepid agents, Mulder and Scully. Who are they? FBI agents, of course. But we asked who they *were*, not *what*. For our inquiry, we are more interested in their natures than their functions. It is not that they unravel the tangled, clarify the obscure, and defeat the random. Oh, they do all of that all right, but that's just plot. We are more interested in *how* they accomplish these ultra-human feats, not their methodology but their mentality.

Who are they *inside*? What makes them tick? What do Mulder and Scully have in common that makes them uncommon? The answer lies in the Dramatica concept called *Mental Sex*.

Mental Sex has two options: male or female. It has nothing to do with anatomical sex, gender identity, or sexual preference. Mental Sex refers to the mind of a character as being either spatially (space) or temporally (time) biased. Space is where our

sense of logistics comes from. Time is where our intuition comes from. Male Mental Sex sees logistics clearly, but is a little fuzzy on the intuition. Female Mental Sex is intuitive, but not as clear on the logistics.

Of course, males can be intuitive and females logical, but it requires a little extra work. Also, intuition is not inexact. It seems so to men, because it is a fuzzy logic to them. But to women, intuition is perfectly clear: a form of *holistic* logic of its own that deals with problems by the "inter-influences" of the many parts, rather than trying to find a direct path from problem to solution.

For the most part, authors create characters who have the same Mental Sex as their anatomical sex. Occasionally, through intent or feel, these two get mixed up. For example, Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) in the original <u>Alien</u> was a male mental sex character. The part was actually written for a man; all they changed were the gender references. Her manner of approaching a problem was male right down the line. In contrast, Tom Wingo (Nick Nolte) in <u>The Prince of Tides</u> is a female mental sex character who tries to bring his life into balance: a holistic technique.

Just because a physically male character has a female mental sex does not mean they will be feminine. An example is Jack Ryan (Alec Baldwin) in <u>The Hunt For Red October</u>. Notice how his problem solving technique is quite different than that of all the generals and soldiers he is competing against, yet he is unquestionably masculine.

The difference in Jack Ryan's manner is easily recognized in his meeting with the chiefs of staff near the beginning of the story. While they are concentrating on how to respond to the threat, Ryan is feeling the influence of many bits of information. Though this data seems unrelated, its overall impact on his mind allows him to surmise that the wayward Russian captain is not attacking but defecting. Only a female mental sex character would arrive at that kind of solution from that kind of data.

So…what is the strange attraction of Mulder and Scully in <u>The X Files</u>? Mulder is a man with a female mental sex; Scully is a woman with a male mental sex. While Mulder is getting a feeling or being intuitive, Scully demands facts, measurements, and a linear theory without gaps. In most episodes, *both methods* are required to uncover the mystery. Though this is not uncommon in real life, switching mental sexes is atypical of most television fare.

The charm of the show is partly because the kinds of problems that occur could not be solved by either one of them alone, but truly needs both views to triangulate. Mulder gets a sense of what's going on; Scully describes it. Scully projects where things are leading, Mulder determines what it means. Since we are talking about a series rather than one specific story, things do change.

In some episodes, Scully is also made female mental sex. In these programs, Scully becomes a simple skeptic instead of an alternate problem solving perspective. This weakens Scully and Mulder's relationship. Mulder is still female mental sex, but he cannot explore that perspective since he has to spend all his time trying to overcome Scully's skepticism. Scully keeps demanding proof instead of working out a theory. Under these conditions the show still has its conspiracies, new-age sci-fi, and special effects, but the heart stops beating. That special something is clearly missing, but in episodes where Scully returns to male mental sex, the charm is back.

It is unlikely that the creators of the series were aware of this phenomenon. Still, they engendered it by feel and were inspired to do so. Each of us, male and female, sees the world from a mental sex direction. This gives us a clear perspective on some things and a fuzzy perspective on others. By working together, we can solve problems neither of us could handle alone. That is the real attraction of <u>The X Files</u>, made all the more apparent (yet obscured) by clothing each mental sex in the unexpected body. ❖

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The concept of Mental Sex is dealt with in much greater depth in Volume 1, Number 1 of this Newsletter. You can also get more information in the revised edition of the Dramatica Theory book, articles posted on our First Class BBS, and in logs of our on-line Dramatica Class available on America On-line.

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fellow, sticking right by his side so no matter when it happens, I'll be there to see just how he does it. Why? So I can do it too.

I was waiting to see *how* he did it even more than *if* he did it. That's what I wanted to know. And then, at the end of the fourth book in the series, suddenly all his angst is gone and I wasn't told *how*! Doesn't that just burn you? Well it burns me.

Of course, most of my fellow critics are bleeding-neck cry-babies who whine and complain when they read something they don't like. But I am the critic, LessTact, and believe one should never complain unless they have a better idea. Naturally, I have one. Follow me and learn, if you dare.

To make my point, I must invoke Dramatica, that weird science whose presence can be felt at work in all solid stories. Dramatica sees every complete story as providing four points of view to an audience: *Me*, *You*, *We*, and *They*. Let us examine each of these in a theoretical sense and then apply them to the volumes of the Vampire Chronicles.

The "Me" perspective is the view through the eyes of the *Main Character*. This is where an audience feels as if the story is happening to them. It is the most personal of perspectives on the issues of the story.

The "You" perspective is the view afforded of the *Obstacle Character*. If the Main Character is seen as a soldier in a battle, the Obstacle Character is the soldier coming toward them through the smoke of the battle. The Main Character cannot tell if this figure is friend or foe, only that the Obstacle Character is blocking his path. From this perspective, the audience, looking through the eyes of the Main Character, sees the Obstacle Character as "you."

Some Obstacles, such as Girard in The Fugitive are foes, and must be overcome. Others, such as Obi Wan Kenobi (Luke's Obstacle in Star Wars) or Hannibal Lecter (Clarise Starling's Obstacle in The Silence of the Lambs) are trying to tell the Main Character that he or she is on the wrong path and

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will not find satisfaction until he or she changes course.

The argument over this "change" issue takes place in the third perspective of "We," the realm of the *Subjective Story*. Here the Main and Obstacle Characters have it out, each arguing their point of view on the issue, impacting the other with a force that just might make them change. In fact, you can often identify the Main and Obstacle Characters in a story by phrases such as, "We are really both alike, you and I," and, "We're just two sides of the same coin," or, "We are *nothing* alike!"

Finally, the audience is afforded a fourth point of view: a view of the story more like that of a general on a hilltop watching a battle unfold below. This is the "They" perspective. It is the most *objective* of the four throughlines and is called the *Objective Story*. From this point of view, the characters are not identified by their feelings but by their function.

In most stories, these four throughlines are woven together so that they develop concurrently and simultaneously reach a conclusion. In some cases the throughlines are played one after another such as in Kurosawa's Roshomon. This does not mean the throughlines *have* to cover the same period of history. All that is important is that each follows the quest for a solution from the beginning of the same *kind* of problem to the outcome of that quest.

What does all this have to do with the Vampire Chronicles? I'll tell you, because I am the critic, LessTact! Each of the four books in the series explores one of these four perspectives. So, like Roshomon, they are taken one at a time.

The first book, Interview with the Vampire, documents the Obstacle Character's throughline. Louis is the Obstacle Character to Lestat's Main Character. To be fair, this does not seem to be the case when one has read only this initial volume. As a stand-alone story, all indications are that Louis is Main Character, Claudia is Obstacle Character, and Lestat is simply an Objective character, perhaps the Contagonist. Once one has devoured the sequels, however, the meaning of Interview with the Vam-

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pire is tempered by what follows. Taken in context of the series as a whole, the story of Louis and Claudia becomes a major sub-story and Lestat emerges as Main Character.

For all his suffering, poor Louis is the one having an impact on Lestat, rather than the other way around. Louis is stuck in his deplorable condition - a condition he did not truly want, but he deals with it. In contrast, Lestat, for all his bravado and flash is constantly forced to reconsider his outlook as a result of Louis' constancy.

What an inspired and unusual technique - to begin with the Obstacle Character's tale rather than that of the Main Character. It is all the more inspired that the decision to focus on Lestat was almost certainly made after the first story had been written. Recasting the dramatic relationship of a work by placing it in a larger structure is no mean feat.

Lestat clearly emerges as Main Character of the *series* in book two, The Vampire, Lestat. This is Lestat's history, documenting how he came to be living his problem, and how far he could get without changing his outlook. Of note, Lestat often refers to Louis' "Interview" as containing gross exaggerations

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and downright lies. Clearly, we are now to look AT Louis, rather than through his eyes.

In Queen of the Damned, we are shown the *big picture*, the objective story of the *series*. This is the tale that describes the nature and history of all vampires - how they came to be, how they ultimately fare, and where they are headed once the smoke has cleared. It is here we can determine *success* or *failure* as the outcome of the quest for the objective goal.

This leaves the fourth installment, The Tale of the Body Thief, as the Subjective story between the Main and Obstacle Characters. And, boy, is it ever! This whole volume concentrates on the personal relationship between Lestat and his mortal friend, David Talbot. Clearly, David Talbot has taken over the role of Obstacle from Louis. Just like Louis, he does not wish to be a vampire. In his heart of hearts, Talbot *does* wish to be a vampire, which makes him the dramatic opposite of Louis. This is part of what

lays the groundwork for failure of this fourth volume. For a "hand-off" of dramatic function from one character to another to work, it must be the exact same function. This, alas, was not the case.

It is no accident that Talbot and Louis do not appear in a scene together until the end. Each would be trying to provide the impact to try and change Lestat, but it would be a different kind of impact from each. The message of the story would clearly be out of sync. Keeping their characters apart simply puts off the inevitable, since Louis' impact started things off and now we aren't allowed to see whether his influence had any effect or not at the day of reckoning. Instead, we come to that moment of truth propelled by the exact opposite force, which obscures the meaning of the whole series beyond redemption.

In dealing with a story so large that it takes four books in which to tell it, we might allow our memory of Louis' discontent to fade, and pay more attention to Talbot who is much fresher in our considerations. That is what makes it feel doubly odd to have Louis in the story at all. What dramatic function does he serve?

Sure, there is some poetic justice in his denial of Lestat's request for the "dark blood," clearly a reverse parallel of Lestat's making of Louis. But that's just an interesting irony. It simply closes a door to Lestat, but does nothing to impact him to change. In fact, Lestat simply gets mad and then sloughs it off. Louis is not acting as an Obstacle Character in this story, but because he had done so for the whole first book, he should not have been included here in a different role.

But that is not the worst of it. By the end of the book, we see how Talbot resolves his problem, but not how Lestat resolves his. Talbot is shown to have a moral view that he will be held guiltless if he wants something evil and is forced into it. This plays well against Lestat's view that one is accountable for one's nature, even if one cannot change it.

Talbot clearly explains that once he was transformed into a vampire against his will, it was his moral obligation to live that life according to its own

nature. This is exactly what Lestat has never been able to do. Lestat would be left with a simple choice: leave Talbot and remain mired in his angst or take the same leap of faith and rid himself of his inner pain once and for all as he follows in Talbot's spiritual footsteps. In the first case, the whole series of four books ends as a tragedy: there is no hope for Lestat. In the second case, it is a triumph. Having remained steadfast in his view for hundreds of years, Lestat is finally convinced to change and adopt a new world view. Either way, it is this moment of truth where all four volumes converge: the moment for which we were all waiting.

That is what should have happened. What *did* happen is a tragedy all right, but not in the dramatic sense. Near the end of The Tale of the Body Thief, Lestat is confronted by Talbot's happiness and personal fulfillment and becomes happy himself. What?! Three hundred years of angst and he just shrugs his shoulders and says, "Oh, well, when in Rome..." (Not hardly!)

Still, by that time, there was not much else Lestat could do. You see, Lestat spends most of the book as a mortal himself. His vampire body is stolen by the body thief. The real question that Lestat should have been wrestling with is whether or not he wanted his vampire body back. There could have been a time limit after which the switch became permanent. Or, there could have been limited options where he required the assistance of at least one other *ancient* vampire to return to his body. One by one, he drops from their favor as he is tempted ever more strongly into the mortal ways. Finally there is only one who can help him, and Lestat must now choose a life or the choice will be made for him.

Wouldn't that have been nice? Alas, it was not to be. Within moments of becoming a mortal, even before he knows the thief has stolen his body, Lestat is sick and tired, in a very literal sense. He *hates* being mortal and wants his old body back without question. What a story it might have been if he started out hating it and learned to love it again. After all, mortality is an acquired taste.

> *He [Lestat] would be forced to address the seat of his angst and either accept a mortal life of normality, or a vampire's immortal life of spectacular evil.*

Then, he might have had a decision to make. By the time he got the opportunity to recover his body, he would no longer be sure he wanted it. His resolve would waver. He would be forced to address the seat of his angst and either accept a mortal life of normality, or a vampire's immortal life of spectacular evil.

We, the readers, make this decision every time we choose to do what we can or what we feel is right. To make such a choice and be satisfied with it is a consummation devoutly to be wished! Ah, what a moment that would be! And which way would he go? Any way Anne Rice wanted him to. Her message might have been that we can receive absolution for our sins and blend into to normal life, even after we have seen Gay Paree. Or, her message might equally have been that one must accept the fullness of one's being - that is it better to shine as a beacon of evil than be lost in a sea of good. Clearly, the later is more consistent with the thematic lean of the series.

But the intensity comes from the fact that it could go either way. As readers, we just don't know until we are shown. *That* is what we were waiting for, but it is not what we got. No moment of truth, no balanced pros and cons, no pressure to choose. Nope. Lestat makes Talbot. Talbot is happy. Lestat is happy. Big deal.

This type of story problem is not without precedent. I felt the same disappointment after reading Orlando by Virginia Woolf. Orlando (the Main Character) struggles throughout the book to find the path to a peaceful heart, and in the end she (he) does. Again, we are not shown how; she just ends up happy. I suspect that was not an oversight, but simply that Virginia didn't have an answer. In writing about Orlando, she described her own quest for an end to angst. In supplying one to Orlando, she vicariously provided one for herself.

Alas, because the method for achieving a quiet heart was lacking, Ms. Woolf could not duplicate her Main Character's accomplishment and sadly killed herself. Ms. Rice has also given us a happy ending

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Dramatica Genres

Genre sometimes refers to the setting of a story, as in *Westerns* and *Science Fictions*. Other times, it describes the relationships between characters such as *Love Stories* and *Buddy Pictures*. Genre might pertain to the feeling an audience gets from a story as in *Comedies* and *Horror Stories*. Even styles of storytelling can have their own genres like *Musicals* or *Character Studies*.

With all these different kinds of duties performed by the word, how can we hope to define it? A good attempt is made by video rental stores. All the old standards are there: *Action*, *Drama*, *Children's*. This is fine for picking out what you want to watch some evening, but not much help to authors trying to create stories of their own.

Producer: "Write me a war story!"
Writer: "M.A.S.H. or Platoon or The Great Escape?"

Traditional Genre categories are only useful for grouping finished works. This is because the overall feel of a story is created from a blending of many different components that have an impact on the audience. These range from the underlying dramatic structure (storyform) through the subject matter (encoding) and style (weaving) to audience expectations (reception).

Still, the concept of Genre can be useful to a writer by keeping them mindful of the "flavor" of their story, no matter if they are working on character, plot, or theme. Genre would be most useful if it could be more clearly defined. This is where Dramatica can help.

As described in earlier newsletters, the purpose of Dramatica is to help writers construct the deep structure that underlies their stories. This framework functions as a the dramatic skeleton upon which the specifics of a story are built. Story encoding then places muscle on the skeleton, weaving clothes the creation, and reception determines how the audience might react to such a thing.

As one might expect, although all four aspects are important, the skeleton or storyform is what holds it all together: it is the spine of the story. When considering Genre from an author's point of view, rather than the traditional audience point of view, our most important choices will be made in the process of storyforming. How to make those choices with an eye toward the audience is the subject of the remainder of this article. We'll show you some techniques that will allow you to zero in on the Genre feel of your story with greater precision and nuance than ever before. Best of all, you will be able to take what you have learned and actually write from it, rather than just using Genre to describe the overall nature of your story.

The first step is to look at the four structural Dramatica *classes*. These four classes indicate the nature of the subject matter that will be covered in a story. For those of you not already familiar with the classes, they are:

- Universe – an external state; commonly seen as a situation.

- Physics – an external process; commonly seen as an activity.

- Mind – an internal state; commonly seen as a fixed attitude or bias.

- Psychology – an internal process; commonly seen as a manner of thinking or manipulation.

Next, we want to consider four *modes of expression* through which the storyform's structure can be conveyed. Keep in mind that these modes of expression are dealing with the *impact* of the author on the *audience*'s point of view. The four modes of expression are:

- Information – audience focuses on knowledge.

- Drama – audience focuses on thought.

- Comedy – audience focuses on ability.

- Entertainment – audience focuses on desire.

The Dramatica classes describe what the audience will see. The modes describe in what light they will see them. When we put the two categories together, we can begin to control the feel our story will generate within the audience. The grid on the facing page called, "Grid of Dramatica Genres," shows the four Dramatica classes along one axis, and the four modes of expression along the other.

This type of grid shows how the mode of expression can change the impact a class will have on an audience. If the Physics class is expressed in terms of Information it would seem like a "How to" story. If Comedy is chosen as the mode of expression, however, the Physics class looks more like a story involving "slapstick."

The beauty of the grid is that it provides a "shopping list" of the kinds of impact we may wish to have upon our audience. We'll see how to "shop" from the list in a moment. First, reexamine the table on the facing page. Look at the brief explanation of each expression/class combination (with examples when available) so we have an idea what we're buying into.

So far we have seen how classes describe what the audience will see. Modes determine the light in which they will see it. Taken together, classes and modes determine the feel of the subject matter. Still, there is one aspect of genre remaining: positioning the audience in relationship to the subject matter. To do this, we can make use of the four Dramatica *domains*. The domains represent the different points of view (throughlines) through which an audience experiences a story. They are:

- Main Character Domain – the first person point of view (I), this domain provides the audience with a "down in the trenches," personal view of the story.

- Obstacle Character Domain – the second person point of view (you), this domain provides the audience with a "what's impacting me," impersonal view of the story.

- Subjective Story Domain – the first person plural point of view (we), this domain provides the audience with a "what's it like to be in this type of a relationship," passionate view of the story.

- Objective Story Domain – the third person point of view (they), this domain provides the audience with a "big picture," dispassionate view of the story.

By positioning the audience's four points of view on the class/mode grid, we can accurately predict the feel our story will have.

EXAMPLE #1:

	Universe	Physics	Mind	Psychology
Comedy	Situation Comedy	Physical Comedy	Comedy of Manners	Comedy of Errors
(Domains)	*Objective Story*	*Main Character*	*Subjective Story*	*Obstacle Character*

Suppose we wanted to write a Comedy. We could assign all of the domains to the grid in the Comedy mode of expression like above.

If we are good storytellers, the story would have a consistently humorous (comedic) feel to it . The objective story would be a situation comedy; the main character would be physically goofy or funny (e.g. Stanley Ipkiss in <u>The Mask</u>); the obstacle character might be someone who is constantly being mistaken for someone else or mistaking the main character for someone else; the subjective story relationship between the main and obstacle characters would be conflicting over silly differences of opinion.

Though a story like this covers all of the storyforming bases, its single mode of expression lacks depth. This monotone form of storytelling is fine (and often preferable) for some forms of stories. Many audiences, however, prefer to have greater variety. As indicated, the example lacks educational value (Information), any great sense of seriousness (Drama), and is not necessarily diverting (Entertainment). How does one overcome such lack of variety? Diversify. Here's how…

	Universe	Physics	Mind	Psychology
Information *(Education)*	Where/What it is	How it works	What it means	Why it's important
Drama *(Serious)*	Exploration Drama	Action Drama	Bias Drama	Growth Drama
Comedy *(Humor)*	Situation Comedy	Physical Comedy	Comedy of Manners	Comedy of Errors
Entertainment *(Diversion)*	Entertainment through Atmosphere	Entertainment through Thrills	Entertaining Concept	Entertainment through Twists

Grid of Dramatica Genres

- **Where/What it is** – (Information/Universe) – an examination of events and situations with an emphasis on the past, present, progress, and future "state of things" (e.g. Documentary, Historical and Period Pieces).

- **How it works** – (Information/Physics) – an examination of how specific processes work with an emphasis on instruction (e.g. Educational, Informational, Instructional).

- **What it means** – (Information/Mind) – an examination of opinions and points of view with an emphasis on the context in which they are made (e.g. Inspirational, Motivational).

- **Why it's important** – (Information/Psychology) – an examination of value systems with an emphasis on providing context relevant to the audience's personal life (e.g. Persuasion, Propaganda).

- **Exploration Drama** – (Drama/Universe) – a serious exploration of how the "state of things" is unbalanced (e.g. Courtroom, Crime, and Classroom dramas).

- **Action Drama** – (Drama/Physics) – a serious take on how problems are created by ongoing activities (e.g. Espionage and War dramas).

- **Bias Drama** – (Drama/Mind) – a serious take on what types of conflicts arise from incompatible attitudes (e.g. Obsession and Prejudice dramas).

- **Growth Drama** – (Drama/Psychology) – a serious take on the attempts to overcome difficulties resulting from manipulations and/or evolving identities (e.g. Coming of Age and Dysfunctional Family dramas).

- **Situation Comedy** – (Comedy/Universe) – humor derived from the difficulties created by placing characters in some sort of predicament (e.g. TV Sitcoms).

- **Physical Comedy** – (Comedy/Physics) – pratfalls, slapstick, and other forms of humor derived from physical activities gone awry (e.g. The Three Stooges and much of Charlie Chaplin's work)

- **Comedy of Manners** – (Comedy/Mind) – humor derived from divergent attitudes, biases, or fixations - frequently noted as drawing room comedies (e.g. Jack Benny or Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Ernest).

- **Comedy of Errors** – (Comedy/Psychology) – humor derived from misinterpretation or, in psychological terms, attribution error (e.g. Abbott and Costello's Who's on First and several Shakespeare comedies including Twelfth Night).

- **Entertainment through Atmosphere** – (Entertainment/Universe) – entertainment derived from new, unique, or interesting settings or backgrounds (e.g. Disaster, Fantasy, Horror, Musical, and Science Fiction)

- **Entertainment through Thrills** – (Entertainment/Physics) – entertainment derived from new, unique, or interesting activities/experiences — much like thrill rides at an amusement park (e.g. Action Adventure, Suspense)

- **Entertaining Concept** – (Entertainment/Mind) – entertainment derived from new, unique, or interesting ideas (e.g. High Concept piece)

- **Entertainment through Twists** – (Entertainment/Psychology) – entertainment derived from new, unique, or interesting forms of audience manipulation (e.g. Mysteries, Thrillers)

EXAMPLE #2: ●

Subjective Story Domain

	Universe	Physics	Mind	Psychology
Information *(Education)*	Where/What it is	How it works	What it means	Why it's important
Drama *(Serious)*	Exploration Drama	Action Drama	Bias Drama	Growth Drama
Comedy *(Humor)*	Situation Comedy	Physical Comedy	Comedy of Manners	Comedy of Errors
Entertainment *(Diversion)*	Entertainment through Atmosphere	Entertainment through Thrills	Entertaining Concept	Entertainment through Twists

Obstacle Character Domain

Objective Story Domain

Main Character Domain

Assign each domain to a class but approach each domain/class combination from a different mode of expression.

A story of this arrangement no longer has a single, overall feel to it. What it has lost in consistency it has gained in variety.

The objective story (Universe/Entertainment) would be set in some unique or otherwise interesting setting (perhaps a western, the distant future, or beautiful downtown Burbank) in which something is amiss (no, not "a Miss" like in *The Crying Game*). In this setting we find our main character (Physics/Comedy), perhaps clumsy (e.g. Inspector Clouseau from *The Pink Panther*), or awkward (*Big*), or just plain silly. Providing a nice contrast to the humorous nature of the main character is a serious look at

Twit's End
by Mark Hasslett

Author's Intent

the nature of the obstacle character's growth (Psychology/Drama). [*Can you feel it? It's already taking on an identifiable quality to it.*] Finally, we add the subjective story relationship (Mind/Information) as it describes how the main and obstacle characters conflict over "what it all means."

NOTE: Our one caution on "mixing and matching" modes of expression is to make sure to honor the Dramatica guidelines regarding assigning domains to classes (e.g. Main Character Domain and Obstacle Character Domain are always dynamic pairs). Though giving a full explanation of those guidelines is outside of the scope of this article, one hint is to assign only one domain to any vertical column on the Dramatica genre grid.

NOW we're at the heart of Dramatica's approach to genres. At its most basic level it is merely a choice between four modes of expression. At its most exciting and elegant, it concerns the sophisticated relationship and dynamics that are created when the four modes of expression, the four structural classes, and the four domains are aligned. Using the grid allows you to select the specific storyform domains using your feelings and intuition. By appropriately choosing these Dramatica relationships in your story, you can create a powerful genre experience for your audience with exactly the impact you intended. ❖
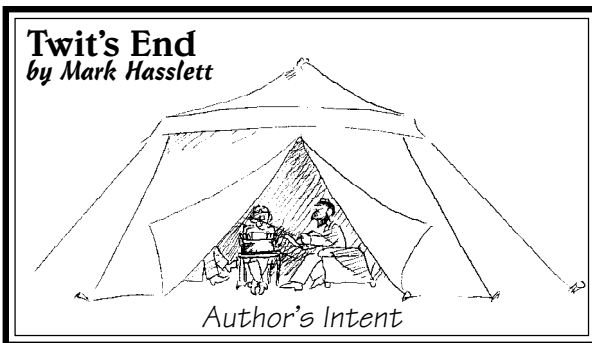
D–Mail:

We frequently receive Dramatica theory questions via electronic mail. When the questions and answers may be of interest to other writers we will include them in this D-Mail column. Questions may be sent to us via e-mail at our e-mail address:

DRAMATICA@SCREENPLAY.COM

D-Mail: LIMITS & LEAPS OF FAITH

I was going over the AOL logs and on January 6, you were discussing timelocks and you said:

Now some stories have a "leap of faith" where the M.C. must consciously choose to stick with their guns, or realize THEY might be the cause of the problems and CHANGE.

The part I'm curious about is the "some stories" having a leap of faith. Did you mean some MCs stick to their guns and some change? Or that not all stories have a leap of faith moment. I'm looking for examples of the latter if this is the point you were trying to make.

If anyone else out there who might be reading this can think of examples let me know.

Thanks.

David

PS: had fun at the deep theory class the other night. I like getting the occasional brain massage.

DEAR DAVID —

Not all stories have a "leap of faith." Those that DO require a conscious decision by the Main Character to change or remain steadfast. The MC may grieve over this decision or it may just flit by, set in its ways or determined to finally change. The audience, however, ALWAYS feels the dramatic tension of that moment, because the moment the "limit" (timelock or optionlock) is passed, there can be no going back -- no undoing the decision.

The other kind of story we are currently calling the *non-leap of faith* or *transitional* story. In this dramatic form, the issue is not whether or not the Main Character does a 180 degree change or stays right where they are, but whether or not a log jam in their nature has broken. This kind of story indicates if the attitude of the MC has begun to *loosen up* or *solidify*.

In the non-leap of faith story, the MC is not faced with a major decision due to the irrevocable nature of the limit. Rather, the limit functions as a force that brings the MC full-circle back to the same kind of situation in which their nature was defined near the beginning of the story. The question for the audience is: will they respond the same or differently.

A good example of how this technique is done POORLY is in Passenger 57. In flashbacks, we have seen how Snipes' character was in a hostage situation with his wife held by a crazed gunman. The gunman told Snipes to drop his weapon. For love of his wife, he did, and the gunman killed her anyway. Near the end of the story, he is in the exact same situation, this time on a plane and with his new love. He is told to drop the gun. Before we can see what he does, there is a jolt in the aircraft, and the woman is thrown free of the gunman. Snipes then jumps him and they fight to the death.

It's all exciting stuff, but the audience was robbed of the opportunity to see if Snipes was changed by his experiences in the story or not. And that is the most important issue in the non-leap of faith story.

Dipping into psychology for a moment, Freudian therapists believe that one must uncover the roots of their problem; only then can one begin to deal with it after that *catharsis*. This is the leap of faith story where an MC is confronted with the truth and must choose to address it or ignore it.

In contrast, Behavioral therapists believe the single cause (if there IS one) has nothing to do with the ability to change. Rather, one must simply practice being a different way (behavioral modification) until it sticks. This would be the non-leap of faith story where the character goes through "modification" by way of their experiences in the story. Based on this new part of their history, they respond differently when presented with the same stimulus.

11.

In a sense, Behaviorists are more *conditioning* oriented, and Freudians are more *free-will* oriented. Unfortunately, in general, these two schools discount each other. Fine if you are getting results in your therapies, but, alas, Dramatica has no such luxury.

In fact, some problems are caused by specific events or specific ongoing conditions which can be identified and dealt with. Others are caused by the synthesis of our life experience and have no real-world cause that can be identified. Therefore, stories (and Dramatica) must account for both kinds of problems and their appropriate solutions.

For now, Dramatica allows either school of thought to be represented in the choice of Change or Steadfast. The application of this choice as a leap of faith or non-leap of faith story is left to the author.

In the future, not only will this choice be separated, but the remaining combinations such as a specific problem that is best resolved by modification, or a synthesized problem that is best dealt with directly will be incorporated as well.

In this manner, more of the Dramatica theory will be implemented into the Dramatica Software. This will allow the story engine to become more and more refined and deal with greater levels of nuance.

D-Mail: ALL ABOUT NELL

(The following is a response to an e-mail message about having difficulty determining a storyform for the film Nell.)

It's interesting that you are trying to arrive at a storyform for Nell because there are some storyforming issues that it brings up. I might be able to help because it is one of the few recent films that I have had the chance to see.

The question of whether to storyform or storytell FIRST is purely a matter of individual preference. My preference is to TRY to get a handle on the storyform first, then support it with storytelling examples. I find that (in story analysis) storyforming comes from a gut feeling, whereas storytelling is more rational and logical. Both processes are clearly present, necessary, and intermingled when looking at someone else's story, but I generally go for the

meaning first and the expression of that meaning second. That way if I can't find any particular meaning (or a multitude of possible meanings), I need look no further for the storyform OR the storytelling.

With that said, Nell poses some interesting challenges and here's why:

One of the first things I do when determining a storyform is to determine who the main and obstacle characters are. In Nell, there are three probable candidates — Nell (Jodi Foster), "Jay" (or whatever Liam Neeson's character's name is), and Paula (Natasha Richardson). My guess is that Liam is supposed to be the main character since the story is about learning to understand who Nell is and why she is the way she is. The subjective, "mind's eye" glimpses of the past that we see through Nell are, in my opinion, visually interesting storytelling expressions of essentially objective story information — backstory if you will.

If Liam Neeson is the Main Character, who then is the Obstacle Character? I think the author(s) messed up the storyform here. The story starts out with Nell as Liam's obstacle, but about midway through the story, Nell moves it over to Paula (you can even see this is the previews).

This transference of subjective character duties is called a *hand-off* in Dramatica. Handing-off subjective characters can be done successfully (as in In The Line of Fire, for example), but it is very tricky and the new Obstacle Character MUST represent the same perspective (or alternative paradigm) as the old Obstacle Character. In Nell, unfortunately, it doesn't quite work for this very reason. Nell and Paula do NOT share the same perspective at all. Though each of their perspectives are shown as alternatives to Liam's, they are completely different comparisons and therefore suggest completely different stories/meanings.

In trying to determine what the storyform for Nell might be, try forming one with Nell as the Obstacle Character (the alluring wild child's impact on the lonely, rescuing doctor), and forming one with Paula as the Obstacle Character (the attractive, cold, clinician's impact on the emotional, horny physician). You may find the answers to the Quick

Story questions will vary significantly between the two scenarios.

Why can't these be two aspects/conflicts/comparisons of one Grand Argument Story? Because their dynamics are dissimilar and point to divergent paths to solve the problems. That is one of the reasons why the end of the film has two completely different *feels* to it. On one hand, the eventual treatment of the wild child situation and the bonding between the two doctors seems too easy and simplistic (though gratifying in many ways). This is quite different from how things resolve for Nell personally which hints at deep, sad longings unfulfilled paradoxically matched with joyous, hard won freedoms. Which is the message? If it is truly one complete storyform, how are these disparate feelings reconciled? Unfortunately, the story itself does not offer these answers, only posits their interesting questions.

I hope this helps your simple request for direction. I know it's a bit of an overkill, but I felt that Nell has complications that you might like to be made aware of BEFORE you get too frustrated trying to find the *right* storyform for it.

D-Mail: DRAMATICA'S ORIGINS

Hi there,

Congratulations on a great software! I've only studied Dramatica for three weeks now, but am fascinated by its comprehensiveness. I'm currently in the process of rewriting a script that I had nearly completed a month ago. Dramatica pointed out the weaknesses in my story structure in the first seven days after installation.

I hope I can bother you with a question that doesn't directly relate to the intricacies of the software, but rather it's background.

I'm curious whether you're prepared to reveal, at least in broad strokes, the origins of how the great Rubik's cube of the dramatica theory has come together. I'm sure you've fused a thousand things - from eastern mythology to modern psychology of storytelling - but there must be a basic source that has had the most influence on the outcome, right? Please don't tell me it comes from analyzing 123,456 movies, please (although I'm sure it's a part of it). In short, I'm lacking a feel for the background of this

product. Better knowledge of the source material/inspiration would carry me across a few stumbling blocks of (healthy) skepticism.

Congrats again. Appreciatively,
Jan

HI JAN!

The truth of the matter is, about 15 years ago, Chris and I had written a very bad script which we produced as a very bad movie, right after attending the USC Cinema department. We had just written another script and were sure it suffered from similar problems. So, we decided to look to other movies of the same genre (action/adventure) to see if there were any "universal truths" which we could employ to keep from stepping off the dramatic path.

The first thing we gravitated toward were characters. We began to identify and describe the archetypal characters that seemed to show up in most action/adventure stories. We got protagonist and antagonist right off the bat, of course! We then found five other characters: Sidekick and Skeptic, Reason and Emotion, Guardian and ?.

Seven is a fine number, mind you, but it seemed as if the first six all grouped in pairs, but that Guardian stood alone. Our first inspiration was to believe there must be an eighth archetype to balance things out. Now that alone was a pretty bold concept: that there was some kind of order to characters (and stories by inference). Why not seven? Because it didn't "feel" right. It seemed like things were unbalanced.

So, we looked closer and sure enough we found that eighth character. It turned out, however, that no one had really ever cataloged that character; there was no traditional name for it. So, we named that character ourselves, calling it the "contagonist."

For a while we played with the pairs and found that most (though not all) stories required a certain number of interactions to occur between paired characters. Since this wasn't true all the time, however, we lost interest and put the whole idea away.

Several months later, we hauled it out of mothballs and tried to expand our understanding of characters and interactions a bit further. We made a little ground, but the going was slow. This pattern of

putting it away for months or years and then dabbling with the concepts went on until about five years ago. By that time, Chris and his partner, Steve, had formed Screenplay Systems and built it up from a two man operation into the leader in software for the entertainment industry, with their company name on the building and everything. I had built a career in the movie biz as a writer/director/editor, and was just finishing up editing a feature.

It was at this time that Chris invited me to breakfast and suggested that we work on the story theory some more with an eye toward possibly releasing what we found through their company as software to assist writers in story creation. We began to work. Every morning before Chris went to Screenplay and before I went off to edit, we would spend an hour over coffee, trying to advance our story theory.

At first, the going was very slow. At that time, both Chris and I were independently going through some personal crises. We mixed chat about our personal problems with our work on the story theory. Then, a very unexpected thing happened: we found that the work we had done on the theory illuminated ways of dealing with our personal problems. How could this be? But it was! Next, we discovered that as we learned more about how we went about trying to solve our problems, the easier it was to see the patterns that were occurring in stories. Obviously, there was some connection here!

Our second inspiration was the realization that the mechanism of stories was to illustrate a path to solving a problem. We began to map out the path of each of the characters we had discovered and could easily see each as a different path toward solving the story's problem. Suddenly, some of the mechanism of story just opened right up to us. We looked at stories not as tales of entertainment, but as descriptions of how to and how NOT to go about solving problems.

As we progressed, we tried to find words to describe the patterns and processes we were seeing. We came up with words like "problem solving," "justification," "commitment," "obligation," "need,"

The conventions of story represented the universal truths of psychology.

"should," "can," and "want." It didn't take long to come to the third inspiration that stories had a psychology to them.

Looking at stories as not just tales about solving problems but as maps of psychology opened even MORE doors to understanding. We drew flow charts and diagrams. We questioned our characters and questioned ourselves. And then, after a couple of years of this, the fourth and most crucial inspiration struck: what if everything we saw in a given story was not just a collection of maps of the psychology of problem solving? What if the whole story was a map of just one mind's psychology of problem solving? What if every complete story was a model of a single mind's problem solving effort?

Well, that just about brought our house down! Using this new perspective as our model, the walls of the mystique of story just came tumbling down. Everywhere we looked we saw new meaning. We charted it all out and described what we saw. And that's when we began to realize that binary pairs were not really what was going on. In fact, everything could be broken down into relationships among FOUR items. Any group of four like items formed a family that we called a "quad."

As we mapped these out, we found that there were quads within quads within quads. The whole model started to take on a multidimensional nature. That is when we looked at the model and realized the thing was fractal! We were dealing with nonlinear relationships here, which explained why no single "formula" for a plot line or a character arc was ever able to explain ALL cases.

Well, we ordered our model in this fractal quad pattern and found that when we did, the "levels" in the model represented differing degrees of resolution in the problem solving process. We also found that moving around a quad, changed the nature of the problem in question.

But what was going on here? To zero in on the problem, we had to move around and look in different places, and then use our problem solving techniques to go deeper and deeper into the issue. What was driving us around the model? What force

propelled us through the structure? Was that part of the Story Mind as well? Part of our own minds?

It turned out that the Structure of the model was only half of what was going on. The other half were the Dynamics. Structure, by itself, forms that "Rubik's Cube"-like matrix. The Rubik's cube has rules, and so does dramatic structure. In a Rubik's cube, corners are always corners no matter how you turn it. You can create any pattern, but you can't get to any pattern directly. To get from one pattern to another requires a certain number of intermediate moves. Often, several paths may lead from pattern one to pattern two. What determines which will be taken? The person turning the cube. That "intent" is what was happening in the dynamic side of the model.

It turns out that when we look at ourselves, we stand in one part of our mind and view the rest of it. What we are viewing is our sense of self: the structure. Where we are viewing from is our self awareness itself: the dynamics. The structure can be altered by the observing dynamics. But the dynamics are altered by the very act of observing.

Well, suffice it to say that the dynamic side of the model turned out to be just as large and complex as the structure. The structure was spatial in nature, the dynamics, temporal. If structure was made up of particles, dynamics were made up of waves. The four items in a structural quad resemble Mass, Energy, Space, and Time. In the Dynamics, the four items are best seen as Knowledge, Thought, Ability, and Desire: the mental equivalents of Mass, Energy, Space, and Time.

Just as there is a relativity among these four items in the universe, there is a similar relativity among the four items in the mind. It goes beyond fractals which only deals with patterns in space, and deals instead with patterns in time. We called these iterative temporal patterns, "frictals" (for friction and fraction).

The model became complex, but also finite in scope. Once we added the dynamics, it turned out that if you went deep enough into the structure, you came out in the dynamics. And if you followed those dynamics as far as you could, you ended up back in structure. But you didn't come back to the same place. Rather than being a circle, it was more like following along a spring (or helix). When you made one compete circuit (one complete mulling over of an idea) you ended up looking at the same things, but changed by the experience.

Okay, so the model became recursive in one sense and open-ended in another. Suddenly, phrases like "the Tao that can be spoken is not the eternal Tao," and "all is nothing" began to take on real meaning. It was at this time that we noticed the reflections of what we had found in many other endeavors in philosophy, science, psychology, etc.

What we believe is that authors created this perfect model of psychology accidentally in the act of fully exploring a story's issue. The conventions of story represented the universal truths of psychology. Dramatica, then, is the story usage of this model which we call "Mental Relativity."

Mental Relativity was the perfect model of psychology we discovered at the heart of story. It is the elephant that philosophies, psychology, and science in general has been describing by the tail, the trunk, and the foot.

Our second inspiration was the realization that the mechanism of stories was to illustrate a path to solving a problem.

That pretty much sums up how it came about and why you can see its reflections everywhere. If you have any other questions or comments, please send them on over. As you have seen, I love to talk about this stuff! ❖

Fried Rice (page 6)

without the means to achieve it. In contrast, I, the critic LessTact, give you the means but will let you draw your own conclusions.

I propose that an author without a solution should not offer one. A story that ends in angst can be a masterwork, as well as a story that ends in angst resolved. A story that ends with angst resolved without resolving angst is nothing more than a merry chase that ends up at a wonderful destination from which its audience is unceremoniously barred. ❖

Dramatica Newsletter - Dated Material

Spring 1995 Dramatica Calendar

APRIL

Sat, Apr. 1 .... **Basics Workshop** (10 am - 3 pm)
Tue, Apr. 4 .... Focus on Plot (7-9:30 pm)
Tue, Apr. 11 .... Focus on Theme (7-9:30 pm)
Wed, Apr. 12 .... User's Group (7-9:30 pm)
Tue, Apr. 18 .... Focus on Storyweaving (7-9:30 pm)
Thr, Apr. 20 .... Deep Theory Group (7-9:30 pm)
Tue, Apr. 25 .... Focus on Genre (7-9:30 pm)

MAY

Every Friday .... Dramatica AOL (6-7:00 pm PST)
Tue, May 2 .... Focus on Reception (7-9:30 pm)
Wed, Feb. 10 .... User's Group (7-9:30 pm)
Thr, Feb. 17 .... Deep Theory Group (7-9:30 pm)

JUNE

Every Friday .... Dramatica AOL (6-7:00 pm PST)
Wed, Jun. 7 .... User's Group (7-9:30 pm)
Thr, Jun. 15 .... Deep Theory Group (7-9:30 pm)

JULY

Every Friday .... Dramatica AOL (6-7:00 pm PST)
Sat, July 8 .... **Intensive Weekend Workshop –
                Day 1** (9 am -6 pm)
Sun, July 9 .... **Workshop – Day 2** (9 am -5 pm)
Wed, July 12 .... User's Group (7-9:30 pm)
Thr, July 21 .... Deep Theory Group (7-9:30 pm)

- **Focus Workshops** are FREE through May 2, 1995.

- **User's Group** open to all and focuses on Dramatica software and story analysis.

- **Deep Theory Group** meetings are open to all familiar with the Dramatica Basics and interested in fun, esoteric discussions.

- **Dramatica AOL** is open to all on America OnLine -- see page 2 for more information.

- **Dramatica Theory Intensive Weekend Workshop** is a paid event. Call for more info or reservations.

For Workshop Reservations, call (818) 843-6557 ext. 532 • Space is Limited