

dramatic interlude 6

Values

Featured plays:

He and She by Rachel Crothers (1910)

The Piano Lesson by August Wilson (1989)

(NOTE: The scripts for these plays, along with additional background information, are available in the companion anthology to this text, *Life Themes: An Anthology of Plays for the Theatre*)

Therapists constantly tell their patients that they must bring their actions into alignment with their values; otherwise, they have little hope for contentment. So, we can change our behavior to match our beliefs, change our beliefs to match our behavior, or modify both so they meet in accord. But they must be aligned. If our values are different from that of the culture around us, it presents a challenge. If they are different from our immediate family or lover, it presents

an even greater one because we are likely to confront this issue day after day in close proximity, butting heads and hearts over and over. Both of our featured plays involve families in which values are at odds. They are people who love each other but cannot agree on what is right.

He and She (1910)

Setting: New York City, a comfortable middle-class house

Major Characters:

Tom Herford, a sculptor

Ann Herford, Tom's wife, also a sculptor

Daisy Herford, Tom's sister and secretary

Millicent Herford, Tom and Ann's daughter

Dr. Remington, Ann's father

Keith McKenzie, Tom's assistant

Ruth Creel, Ann's close friend, engaged to Keith

Ellen, a maid

The play begins in the studio shared by Tom and Ann, where their efforts at entering a major competition are

considered. All the major ongoing issues faced by the women's movement are handled in this play in a way that, considering its date of origin, is strikingly contemporary. Consider the way this couple discuss the relative talents of Tom and Ann:

RUTH: I've heard you say she has genius—lots of times.

KEITH: So she has—in a way. She has more imagination than the Governor, but great Peter!—When it comes to execution and the real thing, she isn't in it with him. How could she be? She's a woman.

RUTH: Don't be any more anti-diluvian or prehistoric than you can help, Keith.

In his "prehistoric" way, Keith wants Ruth to give up her very successful publishing career to be a homemaker once they wed:

KEITH: I can't bear to see you so tired, dear.

RUTH: I'll be all right when I have some tea.

KEITH: This time next year, you could be in your own home—away from those damnable office hours and this drudgery—if you only would. If you only would.



Erik Odgaard and Slocum House Theatre

FIGURE D6.1 Tom and Ann Herford are a married couple up against each other in an art competition in Rachel Crothers's 1910 play *He and She*, in this undergraduate production staged at the Slocum House Theatre in Vancouver, Washington. The story frames the major issues facing the women's movement of the early twentieth century.