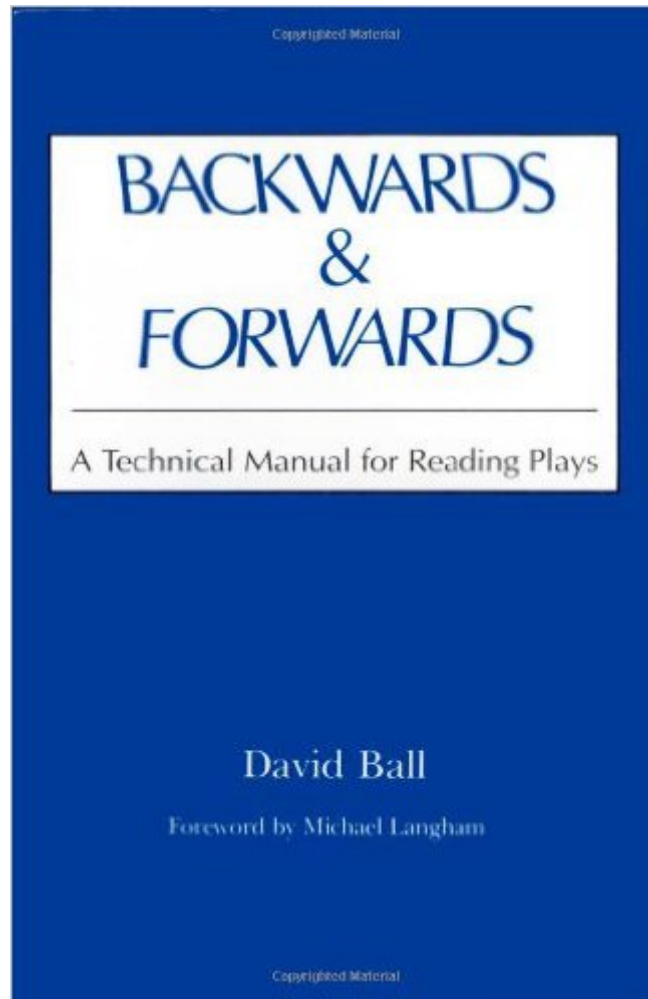# Backwards & Forwards: A Technical Manual For Reading Plays

## Synopsis

This guide to playreading for students and practitioners of both theater and literature complements, rather then 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 playâ ™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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

David Ball's book on script analysis should be read and understood by anyone who directs plays. He explains how to read a play through the very simple technique of reading it from start to finish--and then backwards, from finish to start. By doing so, he points out, the reader learns how one scene leads logically and progressively to the next. While the concept is simple and

straightforward, you have to read Ball's book to see how this process can be used to ferret out every important detail of plot and character development.

David Ball's book is a must-have for all students and professors of theatre. It demystifies the playwriting process and presents a simple, down-to-earth explanation of why a playscript works the way it does. In a word, it explains how scripts work. I find the deceptively simple explanations help the novices in my Introduction to Theatre classes understand how playscripts are put together and make a fun game of script analysis for these students--a concept that is often hard to communicate to Intro students. At the same time, it make so much sense that it becomes the cornerstone for Beginning Directing, Playwriting, and Script Analysis students. Students whom I teach using Ball's ideas always come through the semester with a lot of self-esteem because having such a solid cornerstone allows their creativity to take off in unexpected directions.

A friend who teachs drama and directing at a local college recommended this book to me after he'd read a script I'd written. Not only is it a fast and interesting read, it offers simple and sometimes brilliant techniques for understanding and evaluating plays, movies, and even books. Even if you never plan to act or write, this well-written little book will enhance your appreciation of good story-telling. And if you ever had to endure discussions of "Hamlet" in high-school or college, you'll likely be surprised by Ball's unique take on the character as an example of dramatic writing.

I have used this book as the basis of several theatre and playwriting classes that I have taught. Ball's language is simple, though the words he creates to explain his theories, such as "trigger" and "heap" (a trigger is the moment when people's motivations are exposed, while a heap is the result of that action) make it it easy for any non-theatre person to grasp the clever concepts.By having a person read a play backwards, Ball shows how to grasp the playwright's intentions, and the character's movements. It's a basic theatrical literary theatre that is surprisingly effective, especially in trying to teach young writers how to create a play.I highly recommend this book to the theatre neophyte as well as the theatre professional.

I had a conversation yesterday in which the other theatre artist asked what approach this book advocated to script analysis:"is it feminist theory? queer theory? Marxist?""No, it's the one where you read the script."Seriously, I don't know what I was doing in the theatre prior to reading this book, and I am so excited to begin my next project now because I feel that I have so much improved in my

grasp of how to read a play. Why I wasn't required to read this book in Intro to Theatre or one of my first design classes I don't know, but I am so happy that I did now.

The scope of BACKWARDS AND FORWARDS is narrow, but its ambition is important. This is a book about how to read a play. More specifically, it's about how to read a play whose production you are planning. There are 96 pages in this book and many of them are only partially filled. Some of them are blank. So in very few pages, author David Ball gives some valuable and (I would say, essential) advice. So many bad productions are bad simply because of a basic misreading of the script. Ball tells prospective directors what's important and how to recognize what's important. His advice is very straightforward and concise. He does not pad the book by going off on tangents or use long anecdotes to illustrate a point. He makes a point and then moves on to the next one. I think this book should be compulsory reading for the director, but it is also valuable to the playwright, the actor and the designer. This book is basic. There is a great need to get back to basics. David Ball has done the theatre a great service by writing this valuable book.

I have read a lot of books on the subjects of writing and acting. This book contains almost every important point in the tens of thousands of pages I have read when it comes to structure. If you are a writer you have to own this book! There is no wasted space in it. No actor or director on the planet should live without it either. You can read it in a day, but you'll read it again and again.

It seems like reading would require no specific techniques, that they would come naturally to one and go without saying, even when the task is more specified, as in the reading of plays. But Ball breaks down this seemingly natural sense into its component elements and explains them in easily digestible, well-paced segments, and to examine these elements does much in the way of re-learning and thus refining and fine-tuning one's seemingly natural reading skill. This skill can be taken and applied in various ways (as Ball describes in the introduction), some of which are immeasurably improved by the complex understanding that posessing these refined elements provides; the reading a play to produce it, for example, or the writing of one yourself can be tremendously improved if one is constantly aware of what they are doing, why they're doing it, and what about their actions are correct, lacking, unnecessary or obtrusive. Without having a defined sense of the tools contained within this book, these tasks would be much more difficult, complicated, vague and roundabout, thus slowing, weakening or perhaps ruining the final product. Pair this skill set with application to texts such as plays, which are made all the more difficult by the fact that the

playwright thinks in terms more of making their production work when produced for an audience and less of making their script read and be easily graspable completely on the page, and this manual becomes immeasurably more useful on a basic and elemental level.

Backwards & Forwards: A Technical Manual for Reading Plays Speed Reading: The Ultimate Speed Reading Course to Increase Your Reading Speed (speed reading techniques, speed reading for beginners, speed reading training) (Genius Guide: Step By Step Book 3) Technical Design Solutions for Theatre: The Technical Brief Collection Volume 2 (Technical Brief Collection S) When the Mississippi Ran Backwards: Empire, Intrigue, Murder, and the New Madrid Earthquakes Aging Backwards: Reverse the Aging Process and Look 10 Years Younger in 30 Minutes a Day Derivatives Demystified: A Step-by-Step Guide to Forwards, Futures, Swaps and Options Kevin Durant: The Inspiring Story of One of Basketball's Greatest Small Forwards (Basketball Biography Books) Derivatives Essentials: An Introduction to Forwards, Futures, Options and Swaps (Wiley Finance) The Stukeley Plays: 'The Battle of Alcazar' by George Peele and 'The Famous History of the Life and Death of Captain Tho (Revels Plays Companion Library MUP) Plays Children Love: Volume II: A Treasury of Contemporary and Classic Plays for Children Cinderella Outgrows the Glass Slipper and Other Zany Fractured Fairy Tale Plays: 5 Funny Plays with Related Writing Activities and Graphic Organizers ... Kids to Explore Plot, Characters, and Setting The Greek Plays: Sixteen Plays by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides (Modern Library Classics) Plays Pleasant: Arms And The Man Candida The Man Of Destiny You Never Can Tell (Penguin plays & screenplays) Shakespeare's Macbeth for Kids: 3 Short Melodramatic Plays for 3 Group Sizes (Playing with Plays) Technical Introduction to the Macintosh Family (Apple technical library) Service Learning in Technical and Professional Communication (Part of the Allyn & Bacon Series in Technical Communication) Technical Communication Today: Special Edition for Society for Technical Communication Foundation Certification, Books a la Carte Edition (5th Edition) The Technical Director's Toolkit: Process, Forms, and Philosophies for Successful Technical Direction (The Focal Press Toolkit Series) Technical Design Solutions for Theatre: The Technical Brief Collection Volume 1 Technical Sales Tips: Time Tested Advice for Sales Engineers, Technical Account Managers and Systems Consultants