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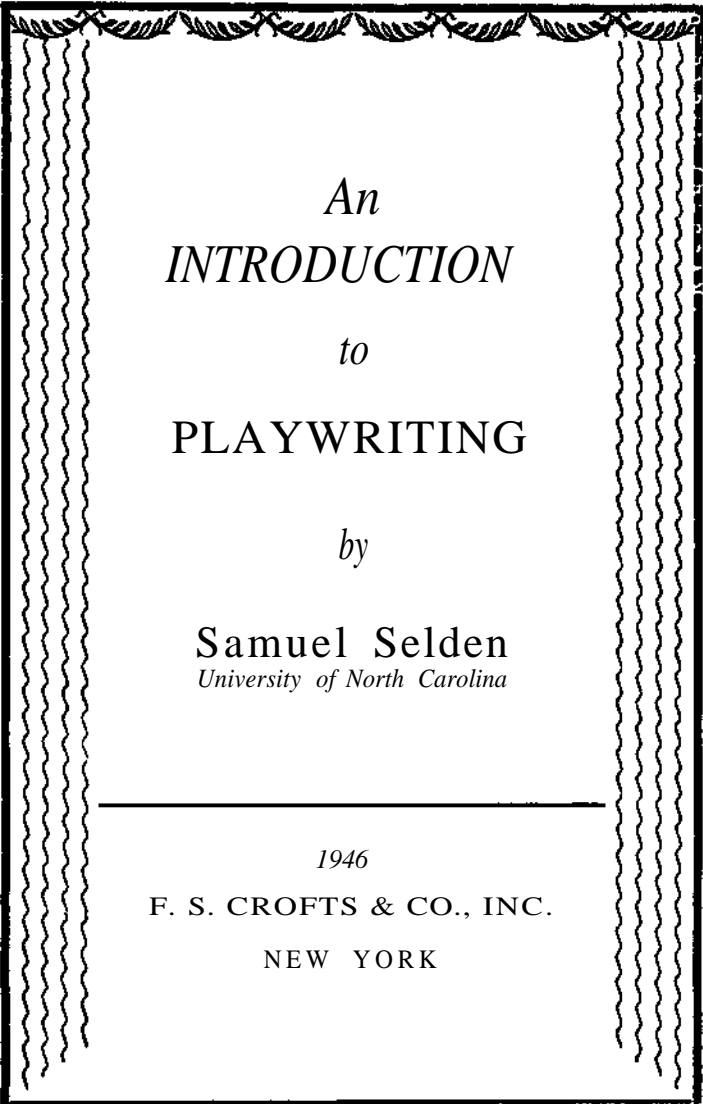
An
INTRODUCTION
to
PLAYWRITING

by

SAMUEL SELDEN

A brief but helpful manual for the playwright which will enlarge his understanding of the important factors involved in the construction of a well-rounded drama.

The author deals with the playwright's preparation of material, the process of writing, the testing of his script not only from the standpoint of its thought and form but, equally important, from that of the actor, the scenic artist, the stage manager, and the audience.



An
INTRODUCTION
to
PLAYWRITING

by
Samuel Selden
University of North Carolina

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Prologue

HOW TO USE A BOOK ON PLAYWRITING

THERE is a commonplace in the theatre that no man can learn to write a play by reading a guidebook. Playmaking is an intensely personal activity, and certainly no author may ever hope to find in the written directions of another any effective substitute for his own creative thinking.

However, to say that a manual will never write drama does not mean that it cannot render some service to the author by showing him how to look at a piece of writing after the first draft has been done. Those persons who declare most vehemently that a book acts more as a hindrance than as aid usually employ it the wrong way. They try to make it initiate their compositions instead of *illuminate* them. It seems to me that a writer's guide can fulfill a very real and proper function by helping the author see more clearly, by helping him to analyze and evaluate in terms of common thought and practice. But it can hardly do this until there is already something put on paper, something to compare.

A good manual sharpens the senses of the playwright. It is an implement for refinement. In that capacity it may offer considerable assistance in the rewriting of a play the first form of which has already been built freely out of the author's unfettered imagination. This is not creation, it is criticism; but criticism, provided it refrains from pointing its finger of reproof too constantly at the plodding efforts of area-

tion, may act as a trail-breaker, opening up fresh vistas for the mind of the writer.

The purpose of the present guidebook is to enlarge the new playwright's understanding of the several factors involved in the construction of a well-rounded drama. The first four chapters which describe the general approach to dramaturgy can be glanced at profitably in advance of writing, but the following chapters will have little to offer unless the study of them is accompanied by positive work. Let the person therefore who, never having made a play before, decides to read this book through before setting pencil to paper, take warning that he is rendering himself no service in the cause of writing. The chances are that if he tries to learn by heart a list of principles already codified he will inhibit his whole urge to create. Those principles can have value, but only if he looks at them at that point in his composition when he can say truthfully to himself: "Ah! That is right! I have sensed that already in my fumbling attempts to draw a character and design a plot. Now I see more clearly. The statement in the book has helped me clarify my thinking, but the basic discovery was my own."

If one would employ a book such as this most usefully, let him determine to begin writing immediately. Let him promise himself that come what may, "hell or high water," he will write *something* for every chapter he reads—one one-act play, one act of a longer play, or at least one scene of a play.

At the same time the playwright should be making a broad study of that whole complex organism called "the theatre." He should try to join a university or community theatre group where he can construct and paint scenery, design and make properties and costumes, hang lights, operate a switchboard, direct, and be a stagemanager. Above all things, he should acquire as much experience as he possibly can as an

actor. It may be that he is not fitted by appearance or training to take leading roles. In that case he should try to have himself cast in minor ones. Even such a part as that of a butler, a messenger, or just a member of a listening crowd will provide excellent experience; for any role, even the most insignificant, will give the playwright some practical feeling for the interactive teamwork of the stage, and it will also provide him an opportunity to watch and listen to a group of actors trying to turn another author's written symbols into living words and movements. There is no better way for making himself sensitive to the force of such symbols, and for learning which of them are effective and which ineffective, and why.

Finally, the playwright should read widely and extensively novels and short stories as well as plays, both full-length and one-act. He would be wise if he supplemented these with books on psychology, science, history, poetry, and philosophy, in fact, every kind of subject that will stretch the horizons of his mind and make him aware of, and responsive to, many sides of human life. This reading will fill him with ideas. If his imagination is basically sound, the playwright need have no fear that his mind through expansive reading will become a mirror for other people's thinking. Imagination grows with contacts. Inspiration never springs out of an intellectual vacuum, but rather from an infinite number of associations in many places. It was a wise man who declared: "The most original man in the world is the man with the best memory."

One last word to those who consult this book: this makes no pretense of being a complete guide. It is a primer. If the writer wishes to see a really thorough discussion of certain problems merely indicated here, he can find a number of excellent manuals in any library. The chief purpose of *An*

Introduction to Playwriting is to help clear ground, and then to provide a series of simple checks for the first efforts of the beginning playwright. Therefore, everything stated in these pages will be regarded as tentative. As soon as the writer devises his own methods, he will be expected to lay this book aside.

PREPARING THE MATERIAL



I

SELECTING THE MATERIAL

The Germinal Idea

A PLAY, like a tree, starts with a seed, a germ, an idea. The germinal idea may be almost anything, and it may come to the author almost anywhere: while he is reading, watching another person's play, listening to conversation, or just walking down the street. It almost never comes when he is seated quietly at his desk willing it to be there.

Ideas for plays are like wild game. Skittish, swift in their passing, not readily recognized except by experienced hunters, they must be captured skilfully. The wise author learns not to shout for them, but to place himself in their haunts and then, with an alert and nimble mind, to leap upon them when he sees them.

Among the more common of the originating ideas for a play are the following five:

A mood. The playwright gets a strong feeling about a stormy night in a mountain cabin, ghostly shadows in an old house, or the quality of moonlight in a certain garden; or he is hit forcibly by a brooding sense of solitude, or unseen danger, or loneliness. As his imagination floats about in this mood, the author begins to see figures, and these figures start to weave themselves into a form of action which is somehow connected with the original feeling.

A truth. The playwright is affected by some fact concerning human nature, something which strikes him and makes

him ponder. Maybe he suddenly realizes—or thinks he realizes—that women are the slaves of men, or that men are the slaves of women, or that children are wiser than their parents, or that gossips are victims of their own tongues, or that a really good liar can have a lot of fun. The fact may be frivolous or profound, it does not matter much; it simply sets off a train of thinking and this the writer feels an urge to dramatize. He wishes to prove, or demonstrate, his discovery in terms of living people.

A situation. The playwright contemplates some critical position in which he himself, or another person, has at one time been placed. Presumably, it is a situation which calls imperatively for a decision leading to an adjustment. The contemplation of that adjustment which must be made makes the figure involved in it seem tragic, or humorous. Maybe a man, just about to enter upon a piece of work for which he has been preparing himself for many years, learns from his doctor that he is about to go blind; or a girl about to be married, with all her friends around her, hears just before the wedding ceremony that the man has changed his mind. Or a person who has always made disparaging remarks about mothers-in-law returns from his honeymoon to find waiting for him, not one, but several such ladies.

The dramatic situation which leads to a play may be elaborate, but it need not be. It can be very simple. Perhaps a child with his heart long set on buying a certain toy finds that someone has emptied his savings banks, or the price of the top has been raised. In any case, the situation is one which implies an active search for adjustment, and that suggests a successive train of incidents.

A story. Occasionally, but only very occasionally, does the playwright come into the lucky possession of a full story. Maybe he hears of some series of happenings in the com-

munity which strike him as having formal completeness just as they are, or he reads a story in the newspaper, or a friend tells him one. Usually, however, the story ideas taken from a written source or from someone else's mouth must be viewed with caution, because they are often associated directly or indirectly with some other person's written tale, material which may already be copyrighted and lead later to accusations of plagiarizing. But many bare bones of stories can be picked up here and there by the alert author, who then puts them together, covers them with flesh, and makes a living organism marked with his own originality.

A character. The playwright finds an interesting character. The person may be someone he has heard about; but more likely he is someone he knows personally: his grandfather, his aunt, the milkman, the mailman, the man next door, the little old woman who lives in the shack at the foot of the hill. The more closely the writer views that character, the more he observes his physical actions, his manner of talking, his habits of responding to the people about him or his way of thinking and feeling, the more fascinated in him the writer becomes. The person observed may be young or old, complicated or simple. It may be that certain outward eccentricities, like a way of laughing or a manner of fluttering the hands, catch the attention of the writer. Or maybe something essentially inward impresses him, such as an unusual capacity for understanding people, or for misunderstanding them, or for fear, or anger, or suffering. When the playwright contemplates this character he begins to think of action initiated by that person, or affecting that person, and that leads on to ideas for a story.

Of the five germinal ideas suggested here, the last one is the most generally useful. At least nine out of every ten plays start with a character.

Where to Find Ideas

The author's mind is a garden in which are planted the thoughts which later, fertilized and cultivated, spring into flowers. Into that garden are never effectively transplanted half-grown shoots nurtured in other beds. Such borrowed growths tend merely to wither and die in the playwright's brain; or, if they do manage to reach a kind of ripening, they are apt to bloom without color. It is the simple seed-ideas that can put forth the most vigorous roots and give the best promise of a rich maturity. What the wise writer seeks then is not plants but fertile seeds.

Fortunately, good seeds for plays abound on every side. The author has merely to learn where to look for them. The most fruitful field for search lies in the people and incidents of everyday life, those which the playwright meets in his home or in the familiar rounds of his daily experience. The loneliness of his grandfather, the quiet bravery of his mother, the longing of a friend for something precious and not yet attained, this is the kind of territory which yields most abundantly the germinal thoughts for which the playwright hunts.

The smartness with which an old man solves a problem, the prank by which a small boy overcomes his enemy, the clever manner in which a young woman persuades her man, or a young man wins his girl—all such ways and actions are laden with seeds. But mostly where the author will look for his beginning thoughts is in the deep-lying hungers of people, in those crying desires for self-preservation, for love or security, for the fulfillment of ambition, for the possession of liberty, or for the expansion of significant knowledge—whether these have yet been expressed in incidents or not. None of the hungers mentioned is extraordinary, each is a normal part of every man, woman, and child who breathes,

fighting to maintain himself in a world which challenges his progress at every step. So the playwright does not have to search farther than a stone's throw from his desk to find whatever he needs, if his senses are alert and he knows how to look.

Another fruitful field is the newspaper. Every issue contains a score of human-interest items, any one of which might serve as a starting point for a dramatic concept. On one page of the paper may be found the notice of a marriage, and right below it, perhaps, the notice of a divorce. In the next column may be the story of a peculiar robbery, or the description of a backyard shooting. On another page will be the account of a miraculous operation performed by candlelight, or the heroic rescue of a mother and her children from a burning apartment house, or of the adroit way in which an old woman outwits an armed intruder. On still another page of the paper may be just a brief note concerning the death of a once-famous actress, or the bankruptcy of a well-known writer, or the sudden success of a poor artist. On yet another page may be the fight of two old women over a pig. Any kind of disagreement between personalities on the subject of a bet, the tobacco crop, the price of a car, the possession of a horse, the choice of a political candidate, is always provocative. The reports of trial scenes, full as they usually are of statements and testimony concerning incidents, and the human motives which lead up to them, are rich sources. Often suggestive also are the views, anecdotes, and plain bits of philosophy spoken by prominent individuals interviewed by reporters.

Probably none of the stuff indicated—character touches, situations, stories, and philosophical comments—will be useful to the playwright in just the form in which he finds it; but it will serve to start his imagination rolling. By taking

one germinal idea here, combining it with another one there, adapting them, intensifying them, and then developing them, he will finally achieve something out of which he can build his drama.

Besides the everyday life he finds around him, and the various kinds of accounts he reads in the newspapers, the author has several other territories he can explore for ideas. These include the biographies of active persons, the histories of local regions, folk legends and folk ways, and the colorful customs of simple peoples outside the common streams of civilization, ways and folk the writer knows personally and has found interesting. And, of course, there are plenty of other sources. In time, the playwright, having acquired the habit of alertness, spots ideas for dramas almost without effort. Then, the process of picking them up and storing them in his mind for future reference becomes a purely natural habit.

The one place where the beginning playwright will not look is in romantic far-off lands, and in distant ages: Spain during the bloody Inquisition, England at the time of the gay Lord Byron, Russia under the cruel Czars. There are several reasons why such promising material turns out to be rather barren when worked into a play. Most of the subjects in these obvious settings have been done so often by expert, professionally-romantic novelists that they have already become trite; consequently the young dramatist can seldom find any very new angle from which to attack them. Then, he usually finds before he goes very far that his knowledge of costumes, architecture, furniture, utensils, objects of decoration, and the thousand and one details of social custom indigenous to the spot with which the playwright wishes to deal are so sketchy as to make a convincing picture of the scene utterly impossible. Forty years ago that would not have

mattered very much. Comparatively speaking, people were not then so generally well-informed about foreign places as they are today, and the playwright could therefore count fairly safely on his audience's being as ignorant as he. But that is a chance he can no longer afford to take.

The most important reason for limiting one's search to wholly familiar scenes, however, is that there only can the playwright be sure that he will find richly all the vivid associations which make a dramatic character seem to live in a breathing environment and have a warm individuality wholly his own. Dramatic color depends on the use of detail, and if the author is going to use this detail freely, he must already be familiar with it. Bare characters never move an audience.

Dramatic and Undramatic

In order to search efficiently for the right ideas, the playwright must know just what he is looking for. Not every incident, not every personality—interesting though it may be to describe—is really suitable for a play. Associated with the subject contemplated must be certain minimum qualities. Without them, it is dramatically useless.

What the author looks for in the personality is an inherent restlessness. The individual tends to do more than sit around. He can be counted upon to want something, to want it actively, to want it badly enough to put up a struggle to attain it. The play will develop out of that inner restlessness, that urge to be doing, to change something, to get something. Maybe the individual's driving impulses have not yet crystallized themselves in a definite shape in the playwright's mind, but as he looks at that person he proposes to write about the author says to himself: "I feel he is a person who desires

something, and will fight for it." That is the kind of character the playwright needs.

What the dramatist seeks in an incident is the sense of an impending turn of conditions, or circumstances that have to be adjusted—a crisis. But more than this, the problem implied must be one which requires at least a little time to solve. Everyone knows the classical example of crisis in the case of the man who slips into his home in the dark and crawls silently into what he believes to be his bed, only to find that he has entered the wrong house. The adjustment he must make with the other astonished occupant of the bed is undoubtedly keenly dramatic. But it is not necessarily good enough for a play, because the settlement involved may be too swift, all completed perhaps in a period of five minutes.

This kind of situation *could* lead, of course, to other and more elaborate complications: those which would develop, for instance, if other people should enter the scene, if the intruder is held for the police, and then if the legitimate owner of the bed should decide to do something about the midnight visitor which would put him into an even worse predicament, one from which he would have to spend half an hour, or two whole hours, freeing himself. In that case, however, the pivotal crisis—the dramatic idea for this play—would be quite another one from the initial problem of squaring an intrusion.

All this suggests that the kind of seed-ideas the writer wants to look for have in them two elements: (a) a sense of restlessness, a desire for change, and (b) a promise of an extended struggle for adjustment. More will be said about these in the next chapter.



II

DETERMINING THE FORM

Why a Play?

PREPARATION for playwriting consists of two steps: first, selecting a suitable subject; and second, finding the right form in which to cast it. The second step is fully as important, and deserves just as much thoughtful consideration, as the first; but it frequently does not get it.

Soon after beginning his project, the author must ask himself if he thinks the material he has chosen to write about really should be fashioned into a play. A restless character caught in the midst of a critical problem may be expressed in dialogue and pantomime; but he need not be. Often, his personality and circumstances can be pictured in a novel or short story far more effectively than in a dramatic script.

The answer hinges then on what the writer himself wants to do with his subject matter. If he wishes to show the character he has picked for his central portraiture in a series of incidents reaching over a span of time; if he wishes to sketch in a leisurely way a considerable amount of background—a description of the man's family, his home, his neighbors, and the various colorful, but only loosely related, figures he meets in his several adventures; if the author wishes to look steadily into the mind of his man, and to comment freely as a psychologist and philosopher upon that mind, the author would probably be wiser to mold his material into a novel. If, on the other hand, he feels impelled to treat his subject in a

swift, incisive way, to forego leisurely analysis and comment in order to develop the more active elements of his story in unity of time and place, he may well decide to employ one of the more dynamic vehicles.

Now the author will have to choose between the forms of the short story and the play. Both stress brevity and compactness, and both usually exploit the dramatic crisis and the pointed ending. But there is still a marked difference between them. Confronted with the problem of picking one or the other, the writer can ask himself this question: which is he personally more interested in, description and comment, or action? If he finds himself more readily sketching environments and setting forth events directly in his own words as a writer, and if he likes to stick in from time to time certain personal observations expressed in his own words, let him take the form of the short story. But if the author prefers to work in terms of other people's speech and movement; if he feels as he writes as if he were walking, sitting, rising, carrying and making things with his hands, and talking in a continuous pattern of give and take; and finally if he is willing to work out whatever philosophical thoughts he wishes to develop about his material, *indirectly* through the words and behavior of his characters—then he should select the form of the play.

What Kind of Play?

When the author decides in favor of dialogue and pantomime, he has solved his question only half way. Still to be determined is the kind of play. Especially important is the decision as to length. From the beginning of his composition, the author should know very definitely whether he is going to do a one-act or a full-length script. The differences are

pronounced, and they involve more than just the extent of time.

The typical one-act play is focused on a single incident. The personalities involved are few, more than five or six being uncommon. The structural plan includes a brief passage of exposition, a swift development leading up to one well-marked crisis, and then a clean-cut ending. During the half-hour or forty-five minutes which usually covers the entire progress of action, there is seldom room for much character change. The chief emphasis throughout therefore tends to be on situation and action, all turning on that one point of the crisis.

The full-length play employs a sequence of incidents, which may, or may not, be concentrated in a single morning, afternoon, or evening. If they extend over a period of time, they are nevertheless so connected that they build in unity, one upon the other. Unlike the one-act play, the full-length piece almost always has several crises. But one of these, placed near the end, is viewed as the chief turning point of the story, and all the subsidiary crises move in a wavering line toward this main pivotal spot. Since the time allotted to the modern full-length play (including the intermissions) is two to two and one half hours, it has more space for details of characterization and personality development, which it usually tries to exploit. Although it often employs more people in its action than does the one-act play, it is still very different from the novel. At its freest, the long play is a very compact organism, deriving its power of motion from a maximum tension produced by a minimum number of elements.

The full-length drama is a far more difficult piece to design than the one-act piece. The beginning writer would be wise to cast his subject in the shorter form if he possibly can. Play-writing problems tend to increase with the length of the

script, not arithmetically, but geometrically. A three-act play is not just three times as hard to compose as the one-act; it is nine times as hard.

An Example

An illustration may help to clarify the problem of form and, at the same time, to show how a germinal idea may be developed into a workable plan for a play.

The starting idea is, let us say, a personality—perhaps the local doctor. Everyone knows Dr. Smith, yet no one heretofore perhaps has thought of writing a story about him. Maybe a chance remark made by him or about him, or the sight of him driving down the street in his old Chevrolet at six o'clock in the morning, makes one consider him. The more one contemplates Dr. Smith, the more one surmises that he is full of rich material to write about. A hundred anecdotes about him begin to come to mind: the gentle revenge he took on the person who called him at midnight to attend a sick dog, the shrewd way he bargained for his old car, what he said during his courtship of the shy widow, how a certain drunken man he was trying to cure with opiac turned tables on him by forcing him to drink his own medicine, what he said to the talkative old lady with the sore throat, or how in court he once stood up when he thought a case was being bungled and won an acquittal for the prisoner. Or perhaps one will think chiefly of serious things, such as the tragic death of the doctor's son, the sudden desertion by his wife, and the haunted look which creeps into his eyes on Christmas Eve.

If one knows such a personality, one could easily write a novel about him. If one wants to present the whole of him, this is exactly what one would do. But the author may choose to present just one phase of him. In that case, the author will

decide to cast his material in the form of a short story or a **play**.

Now he will look at his material more closely and decide which vehicle will serve best. Perhaps the dramatist wishes to deal especially with a psychological problem in the doctor's *Hie*. Or perhaps he wants to depict the doctor's feeling of utter loneliness on the night of his son's death, or the terror of Christmas. If the conflicts the author wishes to write about are chiefly inward, he may well decide to employ the medium of the short story.

If, on the other hand, the author sees his story in terms of action primarily, with the doctor walking, talking, and gesturing—doing things to, and because of, the environment and other people—he will probably pick a dramatic form. The story as finally designed may be centered around a short sequence of incidents turning on one major crisis—in the period of the doctor's courtship, perhaps—in which case the author will decide to use the full-length play. Or his interest now may be focused on a single episode, such as the one involving the car or the epicac, and the author will decide in favor of the shorter one-act.

In any case, whether the purpose of the dramatist is comic or serious, and whether he decides to deal with material he can present in a half hour or two hours, he will take for his literary adventure just a small section of the story of the doctor. Good plays are never complete biographies: they are selections only. The inexperienced playwright who is confused as to just where he should make his choice is advised to view the whole life of his subject as if it were spread out in a thin line on a long table, and then to find some most interesting portion of it where for a night or a day, or for just thirty minutes, the personality he is scrutinizing has experienced a surge of feeling exciting in its intensity. Usually this

is at a point where the personality was faced with a grave danger (which may, of course, be magnified by the author's imagination as much as he will) to his life, his dignity, or his sense of honor, and he recognized a crisis in his existence as a human being.

Here is where the playwright will take a slender slice of story material. Commonly, after he has examined this cutting carefully he will decide that he still has too much stuff for his present purpose and slice it even thinner, until he has remaining just one clear-cut crisis, with a swift development leading up to it and an even briefer resolution following it.

The Material in the Form

While the length of the projected play has much to do with the amount of material chosen for dramatization, it has little to do with the kind. The basic problem as outlined in the preceding chapter is the same for plays of every size and design: the writer must be able to see his principal character as a restless individual (during the period of the proposed story), dissatisfied with his present condition and wanting to change it; and the writer must see in the situation in which this character finds himself the promise of a struggle for adjustment.



III

CHARACTER AND PLOT

Characters Who Make Stories

THE greatest source material for drama is human character. But not every character is suitable for dramatic treatment. The kind that fits most readily into a play is, as already suggested, a restless one, one who is dissatisfied with present conditions and is ready to struggle for a change. A boy wants a girl, a woman longs for freedom, a man seeks to preserve his home or his honor.

The great driving factor in all effective theatre is a human desire, a desire to achieve something, or to control something, in order to secure and extend oneself or one's fellows, or to exercise one's senses more enjoyably. Frequently the goal of the desire is a combination of these. But in every case it is the "wanting" personality who moves the play.

The wish which is central in a play may be serious and weighty, such as man's search after God; or it may be quite trivial, such as a man's desire to win a bet from a friend, or to best his companion in a contest of wits. It is the playwright's treatment of the desire which makes it significant. Even the lightest, most transitory wish—if the playwright gives it emphasis and marshals behind it enough universal human nature—can be made to seem at the time very important, and therefore highly interesting.

A dramatic story is bound, of course, to include certain personalities which serve as passive agents for the more active

ones; but none of these can assume the roles of leading characters, for the leading ones must be dynamic. The one kind of human personality that is valueless as a principal figure in drama is the tranquil one, the one who lacks all incentive to strive because he is now so perfectly satisfied with his lot, or is so generally resigned with respect to it that he is disinclined to exert himself. All one expects of such a person is to "hang around" without doing anything. Because he is still, and promises no change from that condition, he is potentially undramatic.

The difference between the kind of character who makes a story and the kind who does not is illustrated in the following two sketches.

Orlando is an Italian factory worker. His movement is always characterized by lightness. He has a quick step and a gracefulness of gesture that have made his mother nickname him Gioconda. He is mentally as well as physically alert. Had he been able to spend time exercising his inquiring mind for its own sake he might have become a brilliant artist. As it is, his comments touch with remarkable keenness the core of whatever matter is being discussed, though the humorous way in which he makes them hides their aptness. He calls himself a Catholic, but if he has any central belief it is in laughter. He combats the deadening effect of work for himself and others by constant flashes of delicate humor. Consequently he is more loved than laughed at, and more laughed at than listened to.

Orlando's is a colorful personality, one that might very well be used in a play. He would be an excellent supporting figure, exerting an influence on the central character or serving as his foil. But he himself could not be central; he would *contribute* to drama, but he would never *make* it. The reason Orlando cannot make drama is that he is essentially peaceful. He is comfortable, he does not want anything. Compare him with the following figure.

Mrs. Pettibone moves noiselessly about her husband's drug-store putting bottles of medicine, cosmetics, and toilet articles each in its well-ordered place, and waits quietly on the many customers who come and go. She is a gentle, almost shy, little woman, usually dressed in a slim gray suit, without a touch of color about her anywhere except in the two spots of bright rouge on her cheeks. People who look at those spots often wonder whether she affects the rouge because she really likes it, or because she has read somewhere that a public woman must make herself attractive and is trying by rather violent means to compensate for her own natural dullness.

Mrs. Pettibone's husband is a big man and a very lazy one. Long ago he realized that his wife was far more gifted than he to run a store, so now he spends little time in it, except in the late afternoons and evenings when he likes to come in and joke with the boys and girls from the neighboring college. Mostly, he sits gossiping in the barber shop or goes fishing. No one has ever heard Mrs. Pettibone complain.

A month ago Mrs. Pettibone's niece came to live with them. She is seventeen, pert, and very pretty. In the drugstore this afternoon, she laughingly remarked that she needed a new pair of shoes. Mr. Pettibone, who was in the store at that time, took a ten-dollar bill from the cash register and told her to buy the shoes. A man who walked into the store an hour later was startled to see Mrs. Pettibone standing in the corner behind the counter crying.

Superficially, at least, Mrs. Pettibone is a considerably less colorful figure than Orlando; yet she has an important dramatic ingredient which he lacks. That is a hurt. Since a human being who suffers pain usually tries to do something about it, Mrs. Pettibone is potentially active. That makes her good story material. While Orlando will decorate a play, or help to develop it, Mrs. Pettibone will *create* the play.

Let it be assumed that the man who comes upon Mrs. Pettibone's crying is the author. He has known her, perhaps, for some time; never before has he ever seen her emotionally

uncontrolled. Why did she break down this afternoon? He will begin to wonder: was Mrs. Pettibone tired, and did some rather trivial annoyance, which would have left her unmoved on another day, upset her today? Or could it be possible that under that gray exterior of hers she has always had a secret hunger? The author will look into what he knows of her past: her girlhood spent trouping around the country with an evangelist father; her quarrel with her sister, the mother of the visiting niece; her impetuous marriage to Mr. Pettibone. There might not be very much there that could be related directly with the present lady druggist and her behavior this afternoon, but there will probably be enough to set the author's thoughts to working. What actual facts cannot supply, his imagination will. If he thinks about Mrs. Pettibone long enough, he will be able to create in his mind the image of a frustrated woman with a strong desire—a desire to escape from the monotony of her drugstore routine, or to free herself from bondage to a bullying husband, or to resume a girlhood career, or to lay a dark ghost, or to regain a lost love.

One character and the suggestion of a want provide a starting point for a dozen different dramatic stories. The author might exploit the incident of the ten-dollar bill and the niece's shoes to make a rather conventional play of jealousy. He might ignore that incident and pick another on which to pivot a play of marital misunderstanding. Maybe the author will be feeling this evening in a mood to write a melodrama, in which case he will depart from fact and invent a new series of incidents which reach a climax in murder concocted out of the black chemicals in the prescription room.

Many dramas spring out of the personality and the want of a single character. Far more grow out of a combination of factors taken from the lives of several characters. The color

may come from one, the desire from another, and an inciting incident from the life of a third. Conceivably, a playwright acquainted with the two figures just described, and also the doctor sketched in the preceding chapter, might pose himself this question: Suppose Orlando, like Mrs. Pettibone, were thoroughly bored with the dull grooves of his life and wanted to escape, and he had an opportunity to win at least a little temporary freedom by selling his car and using the money for a trip. However, suppose the car is the only means by which his nagging but long-ailing wife can get out of the prison of her sick room. What kind of story could I make out of that?

Before he finishes plotting his play, the dramatist may change his principal character from a factory worker to a filing clerk, a farmer, a bond salesman, or the senior partner in an advertising firm, and move the setting of his play from a small town to a large city, and then to a village on the sea-coast. The final story and the central figure in it may have little in them to remind one even faintly of the germinal ideas from which they sprang. That does not matter at all. The seed thoughts served their purpose and they are now forgotten. They have been absorbed into the fine new growth which developed from them.

In successful play writing, knowledge must ever be wedded to imagination. There must be both these parents or there will be no product worthy of the name of theatre.

Mines for Plot Ideas.

To say that the dramatist will find most of his play material in living models of his own acquaintance does not mean that he should refrain from hunting elsewhere for all the

additional germ thoughts he can get. Plot ideas especially are worth searching for.

The best mines for plot ideas outside of everyday life lie in that vast body of story material which is common to us all: those tales, anecdotes, accounts, and bits of history which we have heard countless times since childhood. One of the richest of the mines is children's fairy stories: Cinderella, Jack-the-Giant-Killer, Puss-in-Boots, The Sleeping Beauty, Bluebeard and His Wives, Beauty and the Beast, Hansel and Gretel, The Ugly Duckling, The Goose Girl, and Snow White. Such stories contain sure-fire situations tested and sifted through centuries of retelling. For adult play scripts the adventures of Cinderella and Jack-the-Giant-Killer are often refined and overlaid with a thick coating of sophistication. Sometimes Cinderella and Jack are treated tenderly, sometimes roughly. Sometimes their dreams, struggles, and achievements are presented seriously, sometimes they are laughed at. But in every case the basic plot of the old fairy story is there.

Another gold mine, perhaps richer even than the children's tales, is the familiar stories from the Bible: Adam, Eve, and the Serpent; Salome, Herod, and John the Baptist; Cain and Abel; Joseph and his Brethren; Joseph and Potiphar's Wife; David and Goliath; David and the Wife of Uriah; Samson and Delilah; Ruth and Naomi; Jezebel and Naboth's Vineyard; Esther in the Court; and others. Associated with this group of fundamental story materials are the parables of Jesus, such as the Prodigal Son, the Ten Virgins, and the Good Samaritan. All of these stories are intensely human, and the situations depicted in them have been used, in different dress, time and again since they were first set down.

The dramatic relationships represented by children's fairy

stories and stories from the Bible are earthy, simple, and direct. If the playwright wants to stimulate his plot-making thoughts in the field of more involved psychology, the kind of psychology which reflects a struggle to reach an adult adjustment with the forces of religion and society, he can find plenty of basic models in the myths and legends of different lands. The Greek tales, especially, are full of "complexes," and violent cross-combinations of double and triple passions expressed in every kind of behavior pattern. The critical dilemmas of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Cassandra, of Jason, Medea, and Creusa, of Electra, Orestes, and the Furies, of Theseus, Phaedra, and Hippolytus, of Edipus and Jocasta, of Antigone and Creon, of Aurora and Tithonus, of Dido and Aeneas, of Pygmalion and his statue—these and others in the old classic stories provide scenario material for a lifetime of writing.

One of the chief reasons why the fairy tales, Biblical accounts, and classic legends are so valuable to the playmaker today is that they have long been a part of our folk thinking. Even people who have never read any of the books in which these stories are recorded know the characters and their adventures. They are a part of our lives.

Since every spectator in a theatre audience, whether he realizes it or not, has been influenced by the old stories, and his present thinking is conditioned at least to some extent by his affection for the originals, he is rather particular about the way in which the derivations are made. If Cinderella's slipper is not found in the end, or if Jack's giant is not big enough to serve as a real challenge to the wits of the little fellow, the playwright must be ready to show reason indeed!

The Playwright's Imagination

However, valuable as all this story material is to the dramatist, it possesses in it no final magic. It will not write the dramatist's script; that he must do himself. What he can hope to find in the traditional tale is some sound human situation, shown by time to be dramatically effective. That is a lot. But the bare framework the playwright borrows from the past can serve at best, of course, as just the start of his own creation. Out of his observation, developed by imagination, he must make in each case a new figure which, though it may be related to Jack-the-Giant-Killer, the Prodigal Son, or Medea, is also someone possessing an individual life of his own. And the hunger, the opposition, the struggle, and the outcome in such a character's story must be freshly adapted to fit the thought and manners of today.

SHAPING THE PLAY



IV

FIRST STEPS IN WRITING

The Inescapable Pain of Writing

A FEW years ago a questionnaire was sent to a score of leading authors in this country carrying a question, "Do you really like to write?" The answer was almost overwhelmingly in the negative. All of the persons approached admitted that they found a strong satisfaction in being able to put words together, and in getting their literary work produced. But, with scarcely any exception, they added that the actual writing itself caused in them an almost unspeakable agony.

Many young authors, confronted with the pain which attends their early efforts to crystallize their thinking and to put it down neatly on paper, have wondered whether or not they were abnormally dull. It is true, of course, that many of those who aspire to literary activity are unfitted to follow such a career; but the bare fact of labor proves very little, one way or the other, about a man's ultimate ability to write. Some of the most successful of the world's novelists, short-story writers, and dramatists are among those who sweat most profusely at their work. The rewards for fine craftsmanship are great, but the price that must be paid for a worthy achievement is often enormous.

These remarks are made here not to discourage the new playwright, but simply to warn him that if he actually wishes to create a play, he must be prepared to roll up his sleeves and work just as hard as the veterans. There is no short-cut

to playmaking that anyone has yet been able to discover. Writing for the theatre demands some inherent talent, but more, it requires a strong constitution and a tireless grasp on a moving pencil.

A wise man has remarked that the only way to write is to apply the seat of the pants to the seat of a chair, and keep it there. He might have added: "and to start doing today what one is tempted to postpone till tomorrow!" The sooner one takes the initial plunge, the easier will be the rest of the job.

Each playwright has his own way of working, and one man's method may or may not be helpful to another man. Literary composition, like painting and the writing of music, depends on an intensively individual exercise of the artist. However, there are certain fairly common practices that have proved to be generally useful. The outline of work in the following pages, founded on these practices, may be helpful to the new dramatist who has not yet fully developed his own technique of writing.

The Process of Writing

Most veteran writers say that getting a play onto paper is very much like fishing. First, the dramatist throws out from his mind a baited line and waits for a nibble. That is the period in which he is seeking his first idea. When the playwright feels the strike on his mental line, he moves steadily but firmly to draw his fish in. As a wise sportsman, however, he does not try to reel in his fish all at once; he gives it plenty of play, alternately pulling on the line and letting it run. But each time he pulls, he draws the fish nearer until he finally lands it.

Translated into writing practice, this means that the composition of a play is commonly done in four steps:

First, the playwright has his strike. He gets an idea for a play. He turns it over in his imagination, and very probably he does some scribbling on odd pieces of paper to help his thoughts to flow. Having spent an hour or two at this, he gives the idea a rest, letting it incubate for a while—a few days, a few weeks, or even longer. During this period he does no writing on the subject; but he may do some reading in books and other sources which have something to contribute to the material he intends to deal with. If there is any research to be done with regard to biographical data and local color, the playwright will attend to this. However, if there is nothing of this kind that he can pursue to advantage, the playwright may deliberately turn his mind to a wholly different writing project, or attend to some routine business on his farm, or to an errand in the city.

At the end of the first incubating period, the playwright sits down with his idea and makes a rough scenario of it. He usually finds that the idea has, like a cellular growth, divided and multiplied considerably in the time that has passed. What he draws at this point may be a fairly elaborate outline of the proposed play, or it may be just a two-page sketch of the author's feelings about the characters in it, and their relationship to each other. At least, the playwright writes something, something which covers several pages of scratch paper. Having done this, the playwright puts his notes aside and lets them incubate once more.

If the author had trouble with his preliminary sketch—which is very likely—he may feel tempted to let the second incubating period be an extended one. He is wise, therefore, if he sets a time limit on that period and makes himself respect the limit; otherwise he may never write the play at all. On the day he has set for himself, the dramatist cancels all other engagements and sits down resolutely at his desk.

He grasps a pencil in his hand and, taking a deep breath, plunges straight into the task of writing the first draft of his drama. Usually he does not pause very much for revision in this stage of the composition, but pushes courageously along, however crude the whole piece may now seem to be to him, until he reaches a tentative ending. Through all of this third step, the playwright works mostly out of his own impulses. He tries not to think of rules of playwriting, and he avoids as if it were poison any guidebook on dramaturgy.

When he has finished that first draft, and given it a little chance to cool, he reads it over. The sight of it will probably make him intensely ill; but if he is a veteran writer he knows how not to be disturbed by that first impression, because he realizes that a certain amount of revulsion on his part is natural. He also realizes that the play has just begun to take form. There is therefore not too much cause for alarm.

The dramatist, gazing at the first somewhat amorphous script, may decide that the whole idea needs to incubate a little more. On the other hand, he may feel that there is here enough basic stuff to work on immediately. In which case, he will start on the long fourth step of the writing process. That is the rewriting.

It is a very true saying in the theatre that "a play is not written, it is rewritten." The revision is that part of play-making which tests the real mettle of the aspiring dramatist. He must be prepared to rewrite, not once, but several times—six or seven times is not at all uncommon. Some young authors are appalled by the amount of good paper they have to stuff into their wastebaskets. Such a disposition of much hard labor will have to be accepted. By the laws of intellectual as well as biological survival, the fittest live and thrive only at a terrible cost to the unfit.

During the fourth step, that is, the revision, the appren-

tice playwright may find a guidebook really helpful. It will be useful, however, only if he can make himself read it a little at a time while he continues his writing; and it will be able to aid him only in so far as it shows him how to clarify his own thinking and to apply general tests. Any part of the book that he finds himself disagreeing with, or any statements that are now so new or foreign to his way of thinking that they require a deliberate act of memorization for him to retain them, had better be skipped. Sometime later he may wish to return to them and give them another thought, but not now. A manual for any kind of creative exercise is valuable to the artist chiefly in its power to *suggest*.

Establishing Good Writing Habits

One of the most important things for the young writer is to establish good writing habits. He should plan to put something down on paper every day—not necessarily on the same subject, but on some subject—and he should do this at the same hour if possible. If the writer is a business or professional man, a housewife, a school teacher, or a student in a university, who writes "on the side," he or she may not be able to do much at one time. Nevertheless, he should do *something*. One hour devoted to writing each day is far better than twenty hours all in one lump at the end of the month.

There should be no exceptions to this schedule. Writers, new and veteran, have a bad inclination to procrastinate and the only way they can combat it is to hold themselves in iron discipline. On those exceptionally busy days when one can not possibly spend a full hour at one's desk, one should resolve to sit down there for at least fifteen minutes. The re-

suits of that brief period of scribbling may not be literature; but at least one has kept the steam up and the machinery going. When at last one reaches a week-end and can devote several consecutive hours to writing, one has then only to throw a little more coal under the boiler, open up the throttle, and let things roll. If, however, at such a time the writer must build a brand new fire under a stone-cold boiler, and scrape the accumulated rust off the machinery, he is likely to fritter away the whole precious week-end without producing anything.

That which causes most of the agony in any man's life as an author is the first few minutes of the daily writing period, that time when the man's creative thoughts, settled into a lazy slumber by hours of inactivity, have to be stirred once more into life. Then it is that one usually has a strong temptation to sit perfectly still, gazing dejectedly at the clean, blank paper before one, and to curse oneself for ever thinking that one is an author. Experience has shown that the best way to get oneself into a condition to write is simply to write. If the dramatist cannot think of a good resolution for the scene he has been struggling with, if he cannot this evening seem even to feel his characters clearly, let him try writing a little detached dialogue. It may be utter drivel. That does not matter. After three or four pages of this, he will usually find that his mind has started to function, and now all he has to do is to add a few more pages to the already well-stuffed wastebasket, draw out a new sheet, and begin his day's work. Occasionally, when the playwright glances back over those first few minutes of aimless scribbling, he will find that by some miracle he has caught the flying tail of a good idea, one that he can use. So perhaps the time did not turn out to be such a waste as it seemed at first to be.

Playwriting in a Group

If he can possibly do so, the beginning playwright should ally himself with a group of other writers, preferably persons who know something about the theatre and are interested in the same literary form. In such a group he should find much stimulation. With his companions he will be able to trade ideas, and their friendly but critical minds will help him keep a good perspective on his work.

One of the most valuable services such a group can provide is their insistence that the writer meet his deadlines. He is much more likely to put forth that last heroic bit of effort needed to complete the long-struggled-over second act if he has solemnly given his word to read it on a certain night in a certain place than if he is laboring only to satisfy his own conscience. It is often surprising what an effective prod to creation is just a little fear of social embarrassment.

The playwright is fortunate if he can add to his association with a writing group some connection also with a producing group. The two may be one. In any case, the playwright should try to get his scripts staged occasionally. If no other means are available, he may be able to persuade his literary companions to participate in an informal "reading rehearsal," just so the playwright can listen to some of his lines and see a little of the movement he has designed. Any kind of concrete visualization of his script, finished or crude, will help the young author to view what he is doing with fresh eyes.



V

CHECK: THE GENERAL IMPRESSION *

Testing the Script

WHEN the playwright has completed the first draft of his script and has started on the revision, he will doubtless wish to submit his work to a series of critical tests in order to see just what he has accomplished so far and what still needs to be done. This chapter and following chapters outline four checks for dramatic writing which the author may find useful for his testing.

The initial check is concerned with the general impression. Before the author takes a single step in the direction of an analysis of his script he should make a firm resolution to try **to** feel out the present total impact of his work. He should refrain from giving much attention to details; they are now of secondary importance. At this stage of the composition, the really vital questions will be those that have to do with the effect of the play as a whole. The author will try to sense his design in the large, and decide if he is driving in the right direction.

Reading the Script Objectively

Stepping out of his role as the creator, and into the place

* If the playwright, seeking to use this book as a guide, is tempted to glance at this or following chapters before he has started to write he should reread the *Prologue*.

of an imaginary spectator if he can, the author will ask himself:

1. Does the play capture attention? Would it hold my interest on a stage for two full hours (or a half hour, if the play is a one act) without flagging?
2. Would I be convinced as well as entertained?
3. What are now the chief virtues of the play? How can these be strengthened further?
4. What are now the chief weaknesses? How can these be remedied?

These are samples of the questions the playwright should present to himself as honestly and as objectively as he can. Only after he has replied to them satisfactorily should he let himself work on the subsidiary ideas. If the total impact of the composition so far is weak, the author will get nowhere by trying to prove through a number of printed "principles of writing" that he has given regard to all the rules, and therefore his drama really *must* be good. On the other hand, if he seems to have done well in his present draft, he should make a careful note of where its strength lies, and take pains that he does not lose this when he goes about his task of re-writing details.

Because it is often difficult for him to look at his work with completely detached and unprejudiced eyes, the playwright is wise to get the aid of qualified friends to help him direct this first criticism. A group of consultants is, as already intimated, better than one since the Members of the group together can give a more representative reaction than one man alone. The several of them, through their variations of viewpoint, will be able to approximate an intelligent cross section of an audience's feelings.

However, as the writer listens to his critics' comments, he should resolve to take what they have to say selectively. As a

courteous friend, he may nod his head approvingly to the many suggestions for revision that are bound to be made, without taking them all to heart. He will remember that almost every person called upon to give his opinion on a work of art naturally yearns to add a little of his own creative thought to the product he contemplates. So he is likely to recommend changes which would fit logically, perhaps admirably, into a new version which the critic would fashion out of his particular kind of imagination, but which may bear only a tenuous relationship -to the play the author is trying to build.

What the playwright should seek for most from his friends in this first conference is their over-all impression. Some of the other things they say by the way will be worth noting, but the writer will try not to burden his mind with too many small ideas now. At this time he wants simply to check the main lines of his composition. He wants to see his purpose clearly, and to get a broad view of the components of the design. The details will come later.

Analysis

After the author has established a first long sight of his play and has adjusted his goal, he should with profit be ready to submit his work to a series of critical checks covering both the subject matter and the form of his work. Three such checks follow.

However, to repeat, when the writer finally attacks the problem of revising his script with respect to the separate elements and factors of his design, he should strive to retain steadily before his eyes the image of the whole, and to keep his work moving toward that one total effect he has set as his goal.



VI

CHECK: THE INNER FORCES

"The Fighting Triad"

WHEN the playwright starts to analyze his script critically, one of the first things he is bound to do is check the inner forces which activate his story. The following suggestions are designed to give him some help in this.

Nearly all successful plays are built around a triad so arranged as to imply a conflict:

PRINCIPAL FORCE OPPOSING FORCE DECIDING AGENT

The Principal Force is that driving desire of the central character which motivates the action. It is his desire for an object or person, or for a change of condition. The Opposing Force is the desire of someone else—a rival, foe, or other inimical presence—to block the fulfillment of the first character's want. And the Deciding Agent is that thing which finally turns the course of the conflict to the advantage of the first or the second force. The age-old plot involving two men and a girl is a perfect example of the triad:

PRINCIPAL FORCE	OPPOSING FORCE	DECIDING AGENT
The desire of the man for the girl	The desire of the rival for the same girl	The mind of the girl

Sometimes the Opposing Force is not derived from a second person, but from another, conflicting, feeling in the

principal character himself. When this is the case, the warring sides of the same man are objectified by visible symbols, so the audience may be able to sense clearly the separation between the two forces and the way they are working against each other:

PRINCIPAL FORCE	OPPOSING FORCE	DECIDING AGENT
The desire of the principal character to defend a worthy cause (symbolized by an admirable representative of that cause who is visibly active)	An obsessive fear of ridicule (symbolized by a visible victim of the criticism of the cause)	The principal character's basic faith in the cause

Occasionally, the Opposing Force is not a human emotion at all, but the resisting power of some object in nature, such as a storm, a river, a mountain, or a forest fire, which seems at the moment to be endowed with an animate and malicious desire to destroy the hero or whatever he treasures. In effect, therefore, it, like a human adversary, provides a kind of opposing wish.

PRINCIPAL FORCE	OPPOSING FORCE	DECIDING AGENT
The desire of an engineer to bind the power of a river	The resistance of the river (which seems to be animated by an almost human urge to remain free)	The mind of the engineer

Because of the contentious nature of this triad, it can be called the Fighting Triad. Here are a number of simple examples of the Fighting Triad:

PRINCIPAL FORCE	OPPOSING FORCE	DECIDING AGENT
The desire of a prisoner to be freed	The desire of a lawyer to see him convicted	The sympathetic understanding of a judge

PRINCIPAL FORCE	OPPOSING FORCE	DECIDING AGENT
The desire of a detective to catch a criminal	The desire of the criminal to escape	The superior mind of the detective
The desire of a social outcast to regain his place in society	The opposing prejudice of society (its desire to keep him out)	The ghost of a past indiscretion
A man's impulse to quarrel with a woman	The woman's desire to strike back at him	Their mutual love for each other
The desire of a wife to assert her own individuality	The desire of her husband to dominate her	The superior reasoning power of the wife
The desire of a man to retain the love and respect of his wife	The desire of the wife's mother to dominate her daughter	The wife's common sense
The desire of a woman to retain the love of her son	The opposing desire of the son's wife for control of her husband's affection	The son's love for the younger woman
The desire of an ambitious man to achieve a political position	The opposing desire of another ambitious man	The shrewder mind of the first man
The desire of a woman to preserve her vanity	The mockery of rivals (their desire to tear down her vanity)	Her wilful blindness
The desire of a man to possess his farm	The desire of his landlord to dispossess him	A crushing recognition of helplessness
The desire of a woman to retain possession of a piece of land	The desire of her family to be freed from the domination of the land	The woman's iron will

PRINCIPAL FORCE	OPPOSING FORCE	DECIDING AGENT
The desire of a man to be a crusading reformer	Human nature's natural resistance to change (symbolized by someone on whom the reformer is experimenting unsuccessfully)	The spiritual blindness of the crusader
The desire of a man to awaken the conscience of a community with regard to a civic evil	The desire of certain "vested interests" to keep the status quo	The man's tireless courage
The desire of a woman to escape a terrifying sense of loneliness	The sense of loneliness (which seems almost to have an animate urge to haunt her)	The positive will of the woman
The desire of a man to gratify some appetite	The resistance by the man's common sense (recognizing the consequences)	A bit of false rationalization
The desire of a man to preserve his faith in an ideal	Driving doubts (objectified in persons who tear at the man's faith)	The man's respect for his own reason
An artist's aggressive hunger for beauty	A belligerent opposition by forces of ugliness	The man's steady belief that beauty can be found
The desire of a scientist to conquer a disease	The resistance of the evil forces in the disease	The scientist's persistence *

* Anyone who wishes to investigate the effective plays of the past will note that most, if not all, have made use of the Fighting Triad. The following are typical. *Agamemnon*, a conflict between a king's desire to glorify himself and an injured queen's desire to destroy him, decided by her cunning. *Oedipus*: a conflict between a king's desire to maintain his sense of spiritual security, and the ghost of a past indiscretion (activated, as it were, by an urge to dissolve the security), decided by the moral law of the gods. *Romeo*

Each of the three factors in the Triad usually represents the force, or power, of a single character; but sometimes it represents a compact group, such as a Three Musketeers (active as one), and occasionally a whole mass, such as a political body or collective society (with one mind).

Unity in the Triad

When the playwright examines a number of typical triads like the ones above, he notices certain general characteristics. First, the two forces are always active, and they are motivated explicitly or implicitly by emotional urges. Even the engineer's obstreperous river and the woman's haunting sense of loneliness seem to possess a kind of independent and living impulse to resist the efforts of the persons who strive to con-

and Juliet a conflict between the passionate desire of a boy and girl to get together and the blind desire of their families to keep them apart, decided by the power of the boy and girl's love. *Hamlet*: a conflict between a prince's desire to avenge the death of his father and his uncle's desire to thwart his efforts, decided by the prince's indecision. *A Doll's House* a conflict between a young wife's desire to be an individual and a husband's desire to keep her a plaything, decided by the force of the wife's convictions. *Candida* (George Bernard Shaw) a conflict between a young poet's desire to win the love of a middle-aged woman and her desire to maintain a domestic balance in her home, decided by her good sense. *Beyond the Horizon* (Eugene O'Neill): a conflict between the desire of a sensitive man to explore a world of adventure "beyond the horizon" and the hard realities of a New England farm (possessed, as it were, by an animate desire to hold him back), decided by the relentless force of the realities. *The Emperor Jones* (Eugene O'Neill) a conflict between a man's desire to escape capture and the desire of his enemies to trap him, decided by his primitive fear of the supernatural. *Winterset* (Maxwell Anderson) a conflict between the bitter desire of a boy to clear his father's name and the desire of a group of hunted people to preserve their secrets, decided by his discovery of a way of life beyond bitterness. *Idiot's Delight* (Robert Sherwood) a conflict between a man's desire to live well and the destructive force of war (which seems to wish to engulf him), decided by his compassionate love for a deserted woman. *The Little Foxes* (Lillian Hellman): a conflict between the desire of a greedy woman to drive her husband to death so she can have his property and his desire to resist her scheme, decided by her ruthless will.

quer them. If either of the forces ever becomes passive or inert, it ceases to be a force. No conflict results from its association with the other forces, and there is consequently no drama.

Another thing to be observed is that the Deciding Agent is sometimes lodged in the person of a third person, such as "the girl," or "the judge," in the examples above; sometimes it is an extension of one or both of the first two characters, such as "the superior mind of the detective," or the husband and wife's "mutual love for each other." Where the Deciding Agent will be found depends in each case on the form of the story. If the plot is centered on two chief characters, the Agent will be in one or both of them; if it is centered on three, the Agent is likely to be in the third member—the one that is not a contestant.

Still another thing the playwright notes is that the Deciding Agent is an action of mind. It is never a thoughtless occurrence. It never makes an appearance just by coincidence. Inexperienced authors tend to plot their motivations this way:

PRINCIPAL FORCE	OPPOSING FORCE	DECIDING AGENT
The desire of a poor man to pay the mortgage on his property	The desire of a heartless landlord to foreclose	The timely arrival in the mail of a check from a long forgotten uncle

This is not a true Fighting Triad because the third member of it has no relation to the others. What poses here as a Deciding Agent is just a lucky accident, without any inevitable connection with the minds and the actions of either the landlord or the poor man.

Therefore, the fourth observation of the playwright will be that the truly dramatic Triad is constructed with each

member intimately related to the other two, exerting an influence on them. It has a three-sided unity.

Stream-of-Life Plays

The Fighting Triad applies, as stated, to the plotting of almost all plays. Very occasionally, however, one sees dramatic pieces which seem to ignore the Triad rather successfully. These are usually plays which base their principal appeal on stream-of-life picturization. Three notable examples which come immediately to mind are Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, Marc Connelly's *Green Pastures*, and Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*.

If one examines such plays carefully, however, one finds almost always, under the picture elements, some rudiments of the Triad. In *The Cherry Orchard* there is a deep, though very subtly presented, conflict between the whole class of rotting aristocracy and the rising peasants; and the mind of one representative of the peasants has a considerable effect on the outcome. Through *Green Pastures* drive the opposing forces of The Lord and The Devil, and The Lord's patient wisdom is a deciding factor in the end.

In Wilder's *Our Town*, the conflict is more illusive. It is a kind of timeless struggle between living and dying in the daily existence of people in a small American town. The heroine's recognition of a way to accept the fact of both without too much pain resolves the conflict.

So far, few playwrights—especially when they deal with a full-length play—have been able to dispense with the Triad entirely; it is a fundamental structure, and the author needs it to provide his story and color material with a solid framework.

It cannot be said too frequently that there are no rules in

dramaturgy, except that the final result shall be worthy of an audience's attention. If the beginning playwright thinks he can work out a better form than that suggested in these pages, it is his privilege, of course, to experiment as freely as he chooses. However, it might be wise for him to try writing two or three pieces in accordance with conventional methods before he begins to test out a more novel technique, just to prove to himself that he *can* plot a play of conflict, and is not throwing that form aside merely because he is too lazy **or** impotent to think it through.



VII

CHECK: THE OUTER FORM

Rules or Practice?

AFTER the playwright has employed the concept of the Fighting Triad to test the motive power in his new script, he will use another check for the outer form. This latter check will occupy the greater part of his attention in the remaining stages of the script revision.

Since the problems of form are so intimately associated with the main questions of a writer's technique, books on dramaturgy commonly devote most of their space to a discussion of them. It is my belief that an elaborate study of such points as "exposition," "inciting influence," "rising and falling action," "single and double reversals," "surprise," "recognition," "catastrophe," "denouement," and similar terms can be very valuable to an author who has already written considerably and now wishes to perfect his skill as a dramatic designer, but that those studies only confuse and therefore inhibit the beginner. They make him intellectualize objectively; and experience shows that the unseasoned author does relatively little creating when he is in an over-brainy mood. Under such conditions his subjective emotions and intuitive impulses, essential to free composition, are paralyzed. His imagination does not function well.

It is true that the ambitious writer cannot ignore the importance of fine craftsmanship. But he should be careful in

the early period of his career to avoid letting himself get obsessed with literary rules. There is little doubt that the most telling first lessons in craftsmanship are those learned by trial and error in the pain of actual writing. These are especially telling when they are assisted by the friendly comments of other writers and, when practicable, by the franker responses of a theatre audience.

"The Iron Check List"

Nevertheless, a brief chart of certain large features commonly to be noted in a play can be helpful. If the young writer uses it as a rough check for his experimental work—looking at it when he needs it but not lingering over it—it should aid him in deciding with respect to a particular form problem whether he is marching along a fair road or going up a blind alley.

Eventually, of course, the playwright will make up his own list of technical reminders. In the meantime, he may find the following check at least provocative. So that it can be glimpsed conveniently, it is presented as a formulary:

* PASTO

These five letters indicate the fundamental structure of a play:

- PREPARATION
- ATTACK
- STRUGGLE
- TURN
- OUTCOME

Because the playwright will want to distinguish this check list from other less basic lists he may use later, and because

he may wish also to remind himself that an effective script is almost impossible without the five points indicated, he can call this his "Iron Check."

Here are a few points pertinent to the list.

"Pasto"

Preparation. An effective play, says Aristotle, has a beginning, a middle, and an end. The most important thing to be provided at its beginning is information which will orient the audience with respect to the action about to be seen. The spectators wish to know the background of the characters in the play, their relationship to each other, and what it was that caused the present problem. Also, the spectators want to be well introduced to the leading characters in the drama, and to acquire a feeling of the environment in which they move. Commonly the preparatory dialogue is presented in one passage soon after the rise of the first curtain, while sometimes it is worked in gradually, a few facts at a time, through the first third, or even more, of the play. In this second plan, the background is released at those points where it is most useful, and the main action of the play begins almost with the start of the play. The preparatory section takes some of the most skilful writing of the whole play because an audience is primarily interested in action, and it does not want to be made conscious that it is being fed facts. Especially it resents the obvious old-fashioned technique of introducing a character such as a servant, neighbor, or gossip solely for the purpose of asking or answering questions or giving news.

Attack. The dramatic struggle must start somewhere; where it begins is the point of attack. The fight has been brewing, and now it is precipitated with a word or action.

The rival taunts the hero, or tells him that he is about to show the girl some special attention, or he kisses her in the hero's presence; or the prisoner kicks the sheriff, steals his car, or shoots his dog. Now the contest is on. (In the modern "well-made" three-act play the Attack comes at a point fairly early in the first act.)

Struggle. This is the chief part—"the guts"—of the play. Far this reason, it properly occupies the principal amount of space. Inexperienced dramatists often fail to write in sufficient struggle. They cannot think of enough twists and throws for the wrestling match. Struggle will be discussed in some detail in the next section.

Turn. Another name for this is "crisis." It is the point at which one or the other party in the conflict gets the telling grip on his opponent and swings him under. For dramatic reasons, just before this moment comes, the individual who succeeds ultimately is usually shown to be in his most unsuccessful condition. Immediately prior to the turning point, the hero appears to be in the gravest danger of losing. Now, by superior intelligence or courage, he manages to do that one thing which will swing the advantage his way. The result is a happy ending. Or, just before the turning point, the hero seems to have the finest reason to anticipate success; the prize seems to be almost in his grasp. His enemy appears to be beaten. Then the enemy works the advantage his way, and the hero finally loses. The result is an unhappy ending. (In the "well-made" three-act play the Turn usually comes late in the last act.)

Outcome. This is the ending. In this section the playwright shows quickly and neatly how it all works out. What does the boy think of the girl now that he has won her? How does she respond to his valiant love? What is the sheriff going to do with the captured bad man? In the plays of today,

the outcome is usually very brief. Just enough is presented to satisfy the audience that the conflict is really won or lost, and to suggest what the future will be.

The Struggle Section

Each young dramatist usually has some trouble with structure which he feels is peculiarly his own. One writer has difficulty getting his plays started; as soon as he has sweated out a Preparation, the story rolls easily. Another man is able to build a beginning and a middle, but finds he cannot work out a satisfactory end. Still others worry about the Attack or the Turn. By far the greater number, however, have trouble with the Struggle. Since, because of the nature of drama, the Struggle occupies the biggest and most important spot in the play, when it collapses, everything else—character, dialogue, and setting—falls with it.

The failure of a Struggle to build successfully can usually be traced to one or both of two faults: (1) the motives for the conflict are not strong enough to sustain it, or (2) the line of the conflict is too straight.

The cure for the first fault is to strengthen the two opposing desires in accordance with the Fighting Triad diagramed in Chapter VI. If the conflict is to have vitality, the hero must really wish to achieve his purpose, and his opposer must just as vigorously strive to obstruct him. The more intensively the two figures are affected by emotional urges, the more readily will they move into battle and maintain the battle once it has begun.

The solution of the second problem is to provide more complications. A "complication" in dramaturgy is any kind of character trait, feeling, action, or incident which, projected into the stream of the main contest, tends to exert a disrup-

tive influence on it. The complication is sometimes another side of the hero himself, a personal weakness, such as an inclination to drink, a hasty temper, or a streak of fear. Sometimes it is an entangling affection for an object like a farm, a child, or a woman, which pulls his attention away from his primary purpose and softens his resolve. Often it is an unlucky accident, such as the recurrence of an old malady just when the hero needs his strength most, or the sudden death of a friend whose help the hero wants desperately. The complications may be the failure of a bank, or a flood, or a forest fire, or even an unseasonal change of weather. Just as often it is something a little less tangible but just as real, such as the discovery of a new viewpoint, a fresh glimpse into human nature, a growing awareness of one's moral relationship to other people. The problem raised by each of the several disrupting influences must be solved by the hero before he can achieve any victory in his main battle.

In writing a one-act play, the author usually snarls up his struggle with one or two entanglements only. That is about all he can handle without confusion in the short form. In designing a full-length play, however, he can exploit to advantage several more complications. The main conflict section in a typical three-act drama today occupies an hour to an hour and a half of performance time. In this considerable period the author has plenty of opportunity to trip up his hero and knock him about and thereby develop into effective magnitude the sympathetic concern (suspense) of the audience.

Every successful writer of conflict drama has made full use of this opportunity. In the span allotted to the struggle in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare complicates the efforts of the Prince to avenge his father by giving him a hesitant personality; then the dramatist makes the Prince love dearly one of his princi-

pal opponents, his mother; and he entangles his feelings still further by letting the girl, Ophelia, to whom Hamlet's affections are attached, serve with his knowledge as a tool of his enemies. Other complications the dramatist throws in are the unexpected intrusion of two old schoolmates, Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern, the Prince's unintentional killing of Polonius, and the tragic suicide of Ophelia.

Into the conflict of *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare has introduced similar disrupting factors: the quick temper of Romeo, the Duke's decree against dueling, the impetuous behavior of the hot-headed Mercutio and Tybalt, the secret action of the sleeping drug, and the failure of Friar Laurence's messenger to inform Romeo of the plan before his return from Mantua.

The plot of Eugene O'Neill's *Beyond the Horizon* is very different from those of *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, but the present-day playwright's use of complications is like Shakespeare's. There is Robert Mayo's preoccupation with poetic dreamings and his tendency toward inaction, his wife's failure to understand his dreams, the triangular love between Ruth and the two brothers, the loss of the stabilizing influence of the elder Mayos, the nagging of the paralytic mother-in-law, the hot weather, the leaving of the hired man, the letter and visit from Andrew, the death of the child, and Robert's own illness. An examination of the Struggle sections of any of the other O'Neill plays—*The Emperor Jones*, *Desire Under the Elms*, *Strange Interlude*—or the plays of Henrik Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw, Robert Sherwood, Maxwell Anderson, Paul Green, or Thornton Wilder—will reveal similar examples of entangled protagonists.

Complications for the hero are often complemented with one or two complications for the opposition. They give the hero a temporary advantage, a little hope, which is dashed or

at least dampened when the opposer in turn solves his problem. Thus the struggle seesaws back and forth, one side getting a little ahead and then the other. Up to the point of the Turn, however, the advantage is kept somewhat in favor of the opposition so that the hero, whether he wins or loses in the end, will always command our respect for his will to win.

The experienced playwright devises and exploits his complications with care. He picks only such character-traits, actions, or incidents as may logically be related to the situation he wishes to depict—Hamlet's hesitancy will seem natural in a person of his thoughtful habits, Tybalt's antagonism will be plausible in a man who is a rival kinsman, the death of Robert Mayo's child could be caused partly, at least, by the improvidence of the father. The author is careful to see at every point that the complications are *entanglements* and not just *distractions*.

The playwright thinks of complications as bad and good forces. Factors which work against the hero to benefit the villain make bad forces. Those which work for the hero against the villain make good forces. Complications which merely interrupt the conflict without helping either side are dramatically useless and must be eliminated.

The skilful author distributes the complications through the struggle in such a way as to have each exert its influence where it will be most effective. He does not crowd them all into the first few pages. He spaces them in sequence, letting the hero's fortunes rise and fall with them. He puts a block in the path of the hero. It trips him. Then the hero begins to manage the situation; he seems to be making progress. But just as he approaches a solution with respect to that problem, he is faced by a new one. Thus the action runs until the complications engulf the hero and he goes down in defeat, or he conquers them all and achieves a victory. (In

the "well-made" three-act play the most dramatic complication is frequently introduced right at the end of the second act, where it creates the greatest possible suspense for the Turn and Outcome of the third act.)

The Magic Factor of Proportion

Many learned words have been written on the five parts of dramatic structure. No one, however, has been able to say just how they must be put together in order to produce the dramatic effect so earnestly sought by the playwright.

Just how long should the Preparation be? How can one judge as to the amount of background information the audience must have in order to appreciate the conflict to the fullest, while at the same time one avoids boring the audience with too many facts? Where should the point of Attack be placed: in the middle of the preparatory section, or at its close? How many complications should there be in the Struggle? Should the Turn come near the beginning or the close of the third act, or perhaps at the end of the second act? Should the Outcome occupy three speeches or a whole scene?

The answer is, of course, that there is no rule applicable to all plays. Each drama is an individual organism comprised of its own peculiar materials, which demand a shaping appropriate to them alone. The magic factor is *proportion*. And no one can say finally what is good proportion for a specific play, except the original designer himself, the dramatist.



VIII

THE GOLDEN CHECK

The Need for a Second Check List

IT CAN be said with small fear of dispute that most successful plays conform to the Iron Check List. It cannot be said with equal truth that a play which meets the test of that list will of necessity be a successful play. A script may have all the parts of PASTO, each in its proper place, and still fail miserably on the stage. If the writer needs an Iron Check List to help him see it he has put into his composition all the fundamental pieces which make a play, he should have still another series of symbols to aid him in evaluating quality.

To distinguish it from the Iron Check List, he might call the second means of testing the "Golden Check List." On that list he would certainly include the following items:

Theme

- Issue
- Drive

Theme

• The theme is the subject or text of a play. It is the essential idea of the play, an idea which can be set down in a simple statement of very few words. The theme is based on a commonly-accepted truth, and more often than not it can be expressed in terms of a familiar saying:

A bird in the hand is worth two in a bush
Tis love that makes the world go 'round
A house divided against itself cannot stand
Better lean victory than fat slavery
He laughs best who laughs last
Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad
Make not your sauce till you have caught your fish
Better a lean jade than an empty halter
Love is like the measles; we are not apt to have it
severely but once *

Some young playwrights confuse theme with topic. Topic is the tag for the kind of material the play deals with, such as "mother love," or "greed for power," or "man against society." Theme goes deeper than that.

Frequently the writer mixes the concept of theme with synopsis. Synopsis is a brief outline of the story, and it has little to do with the inner idea. The theme is strictly idea; it is concerned, not with the story itself, but with the human truth behind the story.

A well-written script has one principal theme and one only. It is so simple that it can be stated in a dozen words or

* Some other aphorisms, and plays which have used them, or their equivalents, for themes. Ambition knows no gorge but the grave (*Macbeth*, Shakespeare), Hell has no fury like a woman scorned (*Medea*, Euripides), Pride goeth before destruction (*Corwlanus*, Shakespeare); Cunning often outwits itself (*Volpone*, Jonson); Even silken cords can make heavy fetters (*A Doll's House*, Ibsen); A fence between makes love more keen (*The Romancers*, Rostand); Fear has big eyes (*The Emperor Jones*, Eugene O'Neill), Call a dog a bad name and you might as well hang him (*The Children's Hour*, Lillian Hellman); Lips however rosy must be fed (*Saturday's Children*, Maxwell Anderson); A royal heart is often hidden beneath a ragged cloak (*My Heart's in the Highlands*, William Saroyan); You can't take it with you (*You Can't Take It with You*, Hart and Kaufmann).

less. If the dramatist who is trying to crystallize the thought of his composition finds that he requires more words, he can pretty well make up his mind that the whole plan of thinking in his play is muddy.

A theme is as necessary for the lightest of comedies as it is for the profoundest of tragedies. It is the lamp for the whole involved structure of the play. The spectator in the audience needs that central idea to illuminate his mind while he lets his feelings run this way and that. It gives him assurance that he and the playwright are thinking together. The theme, as the central reference, helps the spectator appreciate the relationship between and thus it aids him in understanding without contusion the various complexities of the playwright's esthetic design.

Usually, as stated, the theme assumes the form of a commonplace. Sometimes, however, the playwright with an eye to whimsy or satire, or with a genuine disbelief in one of the old so-called "truths," decides to write a drama with a new theme, one which is peculiarly his own. For instance, he might choose to change the proverb about the birds to run:

For the man of imagination, a bird in the bush is worth two in the hand.

Or, he might alter the maxim on love to conform with his conviction that:

Love may make the world go 'round, but money makes it dance.

When the dramatist tampers in this way with the conventional beliefs of the people in his country at his time, he must be very careful not to alienate the minds of his audience in the middle of his play. The only sure way he can prevent this is to steep himself in the folk-thinking of these people, to make himself understand completely and sympathetically

all their primary faiths, dreams, loyalties, and fears—whether he personally holds to them or not—in order to be able to build his radical argument on the firm foundation stones of common premises.

For example, an intense young dramatic poet, freshly disillusioned by the frailties of human nature, may believe firmly that:

The only time a man really touches any sort of dignity is in the moment of his death.

That statement may suit him perfectly, but almost certainly he will find few persons in his audience ready to agree with him. Most of the traditional thinking of Western peoples, reflected in centuries of literature, art, and music, has conditioned the everyday person (the kind of person who makes up most of the playwright's audience) to view the conscious struggling of man toward the achievement of a distant perfection far more worthy of admiration than the mere biological accident of birth or death.

What the dramatist wishing to break with past truths has to do, therefore, if he wants to keep his spectators' minds following in an unbroken line through the thoughts, emotions, and actions of his dramatic story, is to take great care that he does not violate too many traditional faiths of his spectators at any one time, and that when he does advance a radical idea he gives it irrefutable support with dialogue and action built out of thoughts which he knows the spectators will accept. **And** the support must be *more than* abstract arguments uttered by characters seated passively by a sitting-room fire. It must be dynamic action, human images which the audience can see and *feel*, as well as hear.

To summarize the challenge which should be directed to the playwright's script on the item of Theme: he should be prepared to ask himself at least three questions:

- (1) Is the complex design of my play unified and directed by a single theme which I can state in a dozen words or less?
- (2) Will my theme be accepted as valid by my audience?
- (3) If my theme is unconventional or novel, have I given it sufficient support with dialogue and action founded on common premises to make the ultimate acceptance inevitable?

Issue

Another mighty stumbling block over which a new script tends to fall is the basic issue. The writer may have started work on his play with what seemed to be a clear concept of the central dilemma, and he may have been able, when challenged, to say readily just who was supposed to conflict with whom. However, as the play developed, and new characters introduced themselves, and the old characters changed, and the course of the story took unexpected turns never anticipated at the start of the writing, the dramatic problem got more and more involved. What is worse, when the author examines his script, he is likely to be horrified by the discovery that he has, not one, but two or three dilemmas!

The best way to comb out the dramaturgical snarl, when there is doubt as to who is opposing whom, and over what, is to reapply the check of the Fighting Triad. The author will try to line up all his forces in the three positions. He will try to see which is the Principal Force, which the Opposing Force, which the Deciding Agent, and make everything else support these. Whatever cannot be so placed should be reshaped, or eliminated ruthlessly, with no regrets. If the

issue between the two central Forces is to be clear, there must be no tag-ends of extraneous motives cluttering it.

Then the author will re-examine his play in the light of the Iron List in order to make sure that the issue is active throughout the whole section he has devoted to the Struggle. It should spring into life at the point of Attack and remain very much alive through the Turn. The end of the play will resolve the issue.

Young playwrights dearly love subplots. When questioned on the subject of the primary issue of the play, they will reply proudly that what seems to be a second issue unrelated to the main dilemma under consideration is part of a subplot. Such authors will find on their further study of modern dramaturgy that double plotting is now held in less popular favor than it once was. And more unhappy experiences with involved story plans will probably convince the writers that it is wiser to master the simpler forms first.

Again to summarize: the playwright checking the Issue in his script may well ask himself these questions:

- (1) Is the issue between the conflicting parties in my play clear? (Just what are they trying to get accomplished or decided?)
- (2) Is the issue important, interesting?
- (3) At the stage in my writing career at which I have now arrived, am I trying to be unreasonably subtle? Would it not be better if I simplified my plot for greater clarity?

Drive

The drive in a play springs directly out of the primary desire of the leading character. When he wants, the play has

action. When he stops wanting, the play sits down and rests. The more intensely that character desires, the more, movement the whole drama has. If the author recognizes this, he will feel the need for checking his writing constantly for the evidence it shows of the emotional hunger of his protagonist.

It is not enough, however, for the hero alone to want. If he is to have an interestingly difficult time working to achieve his desire, he must have vigorous resistance. This means that the opposer also must have strong feelings. So, the playwright checking the drive in his play must give ceaseless thought to the motivating desires of both the protagonist and the antagonist.

Once more to summarize: the playwright, considering the third item in his Golden Check List, might ask himself these questions:

- (1) the desire of the principal character clear and strong; and is it of such a nature as to win sympathy and hold the attention of the audience?
- (2) Does the desire of the opponent serve as worthy resistance to the other man's desire?
- (3) Do the two desires meet head on in such a way as to generate the greatest possible amount of dramatic heat consistent with the issue in this play?

DEVELOPING THE PLAY



IX

THROUGH THE EYES OF THE ACTOR

The Playwright's Collaborators

IN THE theatre, the play-script is often referred to as the "dramatic score," It is not the "play" proper, that thing which the theatre audience sees and hears and to which it responds with tears and laughter, but the *written directions* for that play. In that respect it is like the sheets of musical notation which a composer prepares for a concert. The black symbols on such a paper are not themselves tone, but guides for it. They tell the singer where to place his voice, the accompanists how to move their fingers, and the conductor how to manipulate his baton, in order to produce certain musical effects.

Playmaking viewed broadly is a collaborative effort. The author is the first artist in sequence. He has the first vision, and he is the first person to do something concrete about that vision. He takes it out of the mists of thought and fastens it to paper. But after he has written it down, he has to turn it over to others. They are the interpreters: actors, scenic artists, engineers, craftsmen, organizers, and so on, all made under the supervision of a director.

Since the success or failure of a new play-script depends inevitably on how effectively it can be translated into a living performance, it behooves the dramatist to give plenty of

thought to the basic requirements of his collaborators. Some of these are described in the following pages.

The first of the requirements to be considered are those of the actor.

Dramatic Presences

The actor expects the playwright to compose his drama in terms of living presences. He knows that the basic stuff out of which the author must construct his script is human thoughts and emotions, things which are inward and unseen. But he also knows that if this inward stuff is to be translated into sensible action on a stage, the writer must provide suitable symbols with which the actor can work.

In other words, the actor demands that the author—writing literary directions for a stage performance shall think throughout his composition in forms of visible and audible imagery. While he writes, the author must see physical appearance and movement, and hear sound—tangible representations of inward thoughts and feelings. He must create presences, presences which will stir the spectator's five senses so compellingly that he cannot escape the feeling of personal impact, or fail to be affected by it.

The actor can never stand quietly on the stage in the person of one of the author's characters and hope to have the audience read his mind. He must use words to reveal that mind; and he must have more than words. He must have changes of facial expression and many kinds of bodily motion. He must have all these outward manifestations to show his dynamic relationship to the other human presences about him—how he is drawn or repulsed by them, how they stir his rising and ebbing energies, how they stimulate his impulses to show anger and love, to strike, destroy, or fondle and build.

The world of the stage in which a dramatic character moves is filled with not only human presences but others as well. These are attached to the objects he handles. In accordance with what they may be able to do to advance or hinder a man's search for adjustment in a given situation, the tools, utensils, and furniture he uses—even the walls around him—may assume personal traits of good and evil. So the playwright has to think of all the presences which constitute the actor's environment.

Those objects are especially apt to have presence which have long been associated with the life of a forceful man or woman. A certain chair sat in for years by a particular person may upon his death exert a lingering influence which other people respect. That influence may be kindly, humorous, or even terrifying. Thus, not only a chair, but also a table, a bed, a flower stand, a book, or even a kitchen kettle can be made by the author to have presence.

These presences, human and extra-human, compose the theatre community in which the actor plays. They are absolutely necessary to him. Without them he cannot even begin the task of projecting the playwright's mind, for they are the medium of his translation.

A Character of Importance

Of equal concern to the actor is the quality of the dramatic individual he is to personate. Because the player is by virtue of his office an interpreter rather than a creator, he must have substance to work with. He dreads having to undertake a thinly-written characterization—for where there is little humanity to translate, there he as an actor can scarcely exist. He wants a well-drawn role, consistent and reasonably detailed, one which, when he reads it, will stir his

whole mind and heart and make him want to get on his feet and put his hands into action. He may, it is true, feel as if he is receiving a little left-handed flattery when he hears a writer say about a certain point of characterization, "The player will take care of that." However, he is seldom grateful if he finds himself on a stage trying, by the sheer force of his own bare presence as a performer, to convince an apathetic audience that the lines he is uttering mean something more than the playwright put into them. He knows that the performance can have real body only if the richness of the actor's imagination is added to, and does not stand in place of, the playwright's mind.

The actor demands that the individual he is portraying be important to his creator. If he can get the dramatist to admit that he himself does not care much one way or another about the personality he has drawn—he neither loves him nor hates him, and he has really little concern whether or not he achieves his heart's desire—then the actor wants to have nothing to do with the part. There may be neutral playwriting, the actor will say, but never a neutral performance. The audience would all go home.

One thing young dramatists often fail to understand is the fact that human traits of character must be exaggerated in order to be effective in the theatre. The figure the playwright wishes to portray may be a "common man"—the neighborhood grocer, or Uncle Johnny who lives over in Jonesville—but the man who finds his way before an audience has to have a little more stature than the everyday model. The author must select certain salient characteristics he wants to exploit, certain mannerisms plus a special kind of shrewdness, perhaps, an Irish sense of humor, or a patient courage, and then build up these particular features until

the stage figure seems possessed of the "best" of the original, made big enough to command attention.

Everyone remembers the games he played as a child when he impersonated people not himself. The individual he chose to be was always someone older, more able in the ways of life, than he. The boy never wanted to assume the person of a youngster similar to himself. He had to be a "doctor," a "motor-man," a "storekeeper," a "manager of a circus," a "detective," or a "cowboy." Always the individual was someone superior to himself.

The adult who comes as a spectator to the playhouse to participate vicariously in make-believe has the same desire to lose himself in the physical, emotional, or spiritual adventures of a personality akin to, but, at the same time, richer than his own. The character he sees—and *feels*—*may* be a king, or he may be a beggar. The calling is not important. What really affects the spectator is the character's capacity for living gloriously, or at least excitingly, in a sequence of critical events.

In other words, the actor demands that the character he is assigned to personate be one somehow significant enough to evoke a feeling response from his audience. That is, he must be touched with a quality that makes him for the moment heroic. This is fully as necessary in a "realistic" prose play as it is in a romantic verse drama, and there must be a strong touch of it even in comedy.

To say that every figure in a playwright's script must have dramatic stature implies, of course, a measure of reasonable proportion. Not every man, woman or child in the story for the stage needs to be presented with the same degree of magnitude as the protagonist. Nevertheless, the player of even the bit part expects to find in his role something of at least minor quality. He must be able to do the waiter or bellboy

with an unusually smart air; he must be able to portray the ragged man who appears for just a moment at the door, as someone worth remembering.

"Someone to Root for"

The actor, whatever may be the part he is playing, hopes earnestly that the script contains at least one leading figure on which the audience can lavish its affection. Even the most hardened spectator has to identify his mind and feeling with someone. If the spectator cannot make himself personally concerned about the success or failure of at least one party in the dramatic struggle, he is not likely to care about the struggle at all.

The American playwright, Howard Lindsay, has remarked that every young author "wants to write a play about a bitch." He then calls attention to the fact that very few of these "bitch" plays succeed. It is true that from time to time a veteran dramatist does mold a protagonist out of a bad man or woman, and wins approval for his work. The reason he manages to succeed with material which is by nature unpromising is that he is able to endow his sinner with lustrous grandeur which makes him, by a kind of reverse process, a hero in his own right. The magnificent villain is a man of perspicacity, courage, and stamina. He has a mind so keen that he can view the sniveling little "righteous" lives about him with justifiable contempt. Here are powers enviable in any man. The experienced playwright makes his sinner commanding in the same way the great figure of the Devil himself is commanding. The inexperienced playwright makes his "bitch" merely unpleasant.

Every actor on the stage benefits when a play is based solidly on the idea of "someone to root for." All the persons

helping a likable protagonist have significance in the eyes of an audience because they are helping a good cause. All the persons opposing are likewise noteworthy because they are threatening the cause. To repeat, an actor wants to be able to make the audience have a feeling about him. He never wants to be viewed just indifferently.

Something to Fear

A primary principle of dramatic design is contrast. Without it there can be no form; there can be no up without down, no light without dark, no beauty without ugliness, no good without evil. The principle of contrast which applies in every other phase of drama applies also in the relationship of character to character. If the audience has one man it wants to root for, it must have another man it cannot root for. That man will be, of course, the opponent.

Someone has pointed out shrewdly that while a play is activated by its hero, it is never stronger than its villain. That is because the villain supplies the darkness that makes the admirable character stand out clearly in all his shining goodness. The blacker the villain and the more the audience has reason to dread his actions, the more it will be concerned about the hero and wish to see him succeed.

The presence which we here term the "villain" is not always, of course, a human personality. It may ~~not be a man~~ at all, but a force moving through the minds of people. The real danger to the union of Romeo and Juliet is not any Montague or Capulet as such, but the blind hatred which affects the rival Houses. The black influence in *A Doll's House* is not the general personality of Torvold, who is a rather decent individual, but his obstinate prejudice.

The thing for the Playwright to bear in mind is simply

this: he must give as much thought to the opposing force as he does to the principal; and the opposing force must be something the audience can fear—and therefore hate—with enough feeling to make the conquest of it seem eminently desirable.

Action

"The skeleton of a play is always a pantomime." This statement has as much truth today as it had when it was uttered forty years ago. If anything, it has even more validity now because playgoers, especially in the modern American theatre, have grown increasingly eye-minded,

A talky drama may contain much intrinsically dramatic material, but the actors engaged in presenting it have little opportunity to exploit it because they cannot demonstrate in deeds. The audience wants more than words, it wants sensuous evidence of all the relationships of all the characters in the drama, and it wants those characters to show by movement how they feel toward each other: whether they are impelled to approach or withdraw, rise or sink, expand or contract, with regard to their Associations; and whether they desire to embrace, nurture, enhance, or extend each other's effective presences, or to check, limit or destroy them. The actor cannot give full expression to all these whirling forces if he spends most of his time on the stage being intellectual in a chair. He must *do* things.

One fundamental requirement of a stageworthy script therefore is that it shall have in it directions for a considerable physical stir. This means that it will contain a reasonably lively number of entrances, exits, risings, sittings, and crossings from spot to spot. But it means also much more than this. The movements indicated must be expressive. They cannot be just mechanical stage business inserted for

the purpose of "pepping up" the play artificially. What the dramatist has to cultivate assiduously is movement which reveals the changing attitudes of the various characters toward each other, movement which gives visible utterance to their desire to help or hinder each other's activities.

Physical movement is a very important part of dramatic action, but it is not all of it. Another vital factor is change. The player demands that the script be full of interesting developments pointed up by strong contrasts. He knows that he cannot possibly sustain his role before audience if he is forced always to occupy the same position on the stage and to engage the same people in the same line of conversation. His part must grow, and the situation must grow. There must be ups and downs and ins and outs. And the whole stream of the performance must flow and ebb and flow again.

A third, and perhaps most important, factor in dramatic action is a continuing sense of suspense, a sense of something ever impending. The actor must feel that all the time he is on the stage the audience is listening to his words and viewing his movements with expectancy, eager to see what he will do next. The existence of suspense means that the author has given due thought to the impelling drives in the play, that he has designed the central dilemma in such a way as to make the audience want to see it solved, and he is holding the solution for the most effective moment near the end of the story. He has made each part have a place in the onward drive. When an actor can see this in his particular role, he knows that it too is filled with action.

Words with Wings

The characters of a play may be conceived with imagination and their relationship may be planned with action, yet

they may remain forever dumb for the reason that they have no good words to exchange with each other.

The actor worries first about what he has to say, and then he has to worry just as much about the way he says it. Dramatic dialogue is his vocal means of communication with his audience, and he is therefore very sensitive about its form. The actor realizes, as many amateur dramatists often do not, that the words of the stage have to be more eloquent than their counterparts in the everyday world. They must be a little more exact, a little more pointed, a little more pungent. They must be efficiently expressive and strongly evocative. They can never be purely reportorial, that is, literal transcriptions of common talk outside the theatre, for that would deny the whole concept of theatre. Even in the most realistic of plays, the dialogue must have a tang to it. The playwright designs it. While making it seem natural, he actually gives it an extra measure of salty flavor.

There are, of course, no rules for the writing of dialogue. There never could be, for dialogue is the most intensely personal thing about a playwright's composition. It is possible, however, to indicate a few general characteristics to be found in the lines of the more successful plays:

First, the language is simple and idiomatic. The words are mostly everyday, Anglo-Saxon. The dialogue can be spoken aloud with ease. It is smooth, it has no tongue-twisters; and it is rhythmical, it has a good swing to it. The strong words come neatly at those points in the speeches where thought needs to be emphasized. And there are no loose-ends of sentences flapping around to steal the actor's breath, or to tangle up his vocal apparatus. The words are well chosen and they are well ordered.

Second, the speeches tend to be short. There is one thought, and one only, in each speech. And the sentences are

typically brief and straight-forward. They have to be that way so the audience can catch them on the run. Except in verse drama, like Shakespeare's, the number of words in each sentence does not exceed twenty-five. Many of the sentences are little more than phrases.

Third, effective dialogue has continuity. A person listening to it would have a distinct feeling of incompleteness if the sequence of utterance stopped anywhere before the end of the scene. Each speech evokes the next one. Character is forced to reply to another, because of the way he speaks.

A young author who wishes to apply to his dialogue the test of continuity can ask himself two questions: (a) Do my speeches bounce: does each in turn leap at the other party in the conversation in such a way as to force him to receive it and to throw words back? and (b) Could the give and take of verbal activity be stopped at any point without violating the sense of expectancy in the audience? If the author can confidently answer "yes" to his first question and "no" to the second, he should have some assurance that his lines do have drive in them.

Most important of all, dramatic dialogue is richly suggestive. It is full of imagery. It appeals to the spectator's imagination. By doing this, it can be very economical in statement and still imply much. The best part of the play, the most exciting thoughts and emotions, are built between the lines.

The ability to write eloquent dialogue springs partly from a natural gift for speech. To a considerably greater extent, however, it grows out of ceaseless practice supported by a careful reading of many good models. "



X

THROUGH THE EYES OF THE SCENIC ARTIST

The Designer's Concern with Environment

WHAT the scenic artist (commonly referred to as "the designer") is concerned about is the element of visual environment. He it is who must devise a setting for the stage action. The setting he makes must not only place the action of the play, but also provide architectural and mechanical means for it, and surround it with a persuasive feeling. The artist likes to have considerable freedom for his planning, but he realizes that he cannot go very far with this until he knows also what the playwright has in mind. Action and surroundings are by nature so interactive that it is impossible logically to complete, or even to think of, one without the other. They are both part of the same design. Therefore, before the scenic artist begins to apply his own imagination to the problem of setting, he expects the playwright to meet three or four general requirements with regard to the planning of it.

Expressive Atmosphere

The first demand that the artist makes of the author is that he decide just what kind of environmental atmosphere he wants his characters to move in. There are a number of questions that have to be answered. Is the atmosphere light or heavy, the kind which nurtures a feeling of romance or

comedy, or one which breeds the dark passions of tragedy? And just where is the place the dramatist has picked for his story? Is it in the country, a small town, or a city? If the place is a city, what city? (New York, Chicago, and Atlanta have entirely different environmental personalities.) If the setting is an apartment, what type of apartment: wealthy, middle-class, or poor?

Every detail of a room—the height of the ceiling, the size of doors, the color of wallpaper, the window curtains, the furniture, the lighting fixtures—all produce an effect on the thoughts of the occupants. The same details reflect eloquently the tastes and longings of the people who live with them. This is especially true about the decorations the occupants have set up: flowers, pottery, pictures, and, of course, those ever tale-telling curtains. Equally expressive are the tools, utensils, and other household articles which the occupants are habitually handling and which for that reason have become almost an extension of the human characters themselves.

Here is a typical example of a stage description, taken from Scene 2 of the first act of Eugene O'Neill's *Beyond the Horizon*.

(The sitting room of the Mayo farm house about nine o'clock the same night. On the left, two windows looking out on the fields. Against the wall between the windows, an old-fashioned walnut desk. In the left corner, rear, a sideboard with a mirror. In the rear wall to the right of the sideboard, a window looking out on the road. Next to the window a door leading out into the yard. Farther right, a black horse-hair sofa, and another door opening on a bedroom. In the corner, a straight-backed chair. In the right wall, near the middle, an open doorway leading to the kitchen. Farther forward a double-heater stove with coal scuttle, etc. In the center of the newly carpeted floor, an oak dining-room table with a red cover. In the center of the table, a

large oil reading lamp. Four chairs, three rockers with crocheted tidies on their backs, and one straight-backed, are placed about the table. The walls are papered a dark red with a scrolly-figured pattern.

(Everything in the room is clean, well-kept, and in its exact place, yet there is no suggestion of primness about the whole. Rather the atmosphere is one of the orderly comfort of a simple, hard-earned prosperity, enjoyed and maintained by the family as a unit.)

At the beginning of Act II the character and circumstances of the Mayo family have changed, and the setting reflects the alteration.

(Same as Act One, Scene Two. Sitting room of the farm house about half past twelve in the afternoon of a hot, sun-baked day in mid-summer, three years later. All the windows are open, but no breeze stirs the sqiled white curtains. A patched screen door is in the rear. Through it the yard can be seen, its small stretch of lawn divided by the dirt path leading to the door from the gate in the white picket fence which borders the road.

(The room has changed, not so much in its outward appearance as in its general atmosphere. Little significant details give evidence of carelessness, of inefficiency, of an industry gone to seed. The chairs appear shabby from lack of paint; the table cover is spotted and askew; holes show in the curtains; a child's doll, with one arm gone, lies under the table; a hoe stands in a corner; a man's coat is flung on the couch in the rear; the desk is cluttered up with odds and ends; a number of books are piled carelessly on the sideboard. The noon enervation of the sultry, scorching day seems to have penetrated indoors, causing even inanimate objects to wear an aspect of despondent exhaustion.)

Five years later the inhabitants have sunk lower still and the playwright indicates this visually at the opening of Act III.

(The whole atmosphere of the room, contrasted with that of former years, is one of an habitual poverty too hopelessly resigned to be any longer ashamed or even conscious of itself.) *

The marvelous development of the electric lamp and all the complex equipment **the complex equipment devised** to control its direction of throw, its color, and its intensity on the stage, have given the scenic artist in recent years many new opportunities for creating effects of sunlight, lamplight, candlelight, and firelight, and even to show seasonal change. He earnestly hopes, therefore, that when the playwright prepares his script he will make a clear-cut decision about the time of day and month, whether the sky is fair or cloudy, and what is the temperature of the air both inside the room and outside the window. All of these things have an influence on the characters the actors will portray, and the scenic artist wants to be able to use them.

Although the modern author commonly writes out a fairly full description of the setting he has in mind, he cannot put down everything. If he did that he would have to clutter his dialogue with so many stage directions that there would be little room left for the spoken. What the author usually does, therefore, is to describe rather exactly the visual mood he has in mind, and then to add enough specific notes with regard to architecture and furnishings to suggest the rest of the setting. At that point the scenic artist takes over. However, as this member of the interpreting teams goes to work on his drawing, he wants to feel that the playwright, though he used just a few words to describe the environment, actually felt its complete presence so **intimately all the way through his composition that he devised every detail of action**

* Eugene O'Neill *Beyond the Horizon*, Reprinted by courtesy of Random House, New York.

Plenty of Space

A proscenium opening of a standard-size stage today is about 30 feet. The acting space behind the curtain line has about the same width. This is a fairly large area. The scenic artist expects the author to make good use of all of it, avoiding the common temptation to huddle the doors and the heaviest pieces of furniture on one side of the room and leave the other side bare.

One of the most exploitable things on the stage is space, and the playwright should take full advantage of it. Space thrown around a dramatic personality gives him individuality and magnitude. For this reason, leading figures in the dramatic story need to be distributed about the acting area in accordance with a plan which gives each "of them plenty of room in which to establish himself. Of course, the distances can be disregarded when there are good reasons for the characters to get together, but the playwright is wise to think of his spatial design as large. Well-separated doors, windows, and furniture help not only to place the actors where each can be well-picturized when he is still, but also to give him opportunities for expressive movements through space when he goes into action.

While most beginning writers tend to think of their stage settings in terms of areas too small for the best projection of their dramatic story, a few err in the opposite way. The most frequent mistake in this kind of over-visualization occurs in the direction of depth. An acting area with a breadth of 30 feet seldom extends back from the curtain line more than 15 feet or 20 feet at most. Possibly, the sky drop and certain other background landscape pieces, like the silhouettes of distant mountains or roof-tops, may be put back farther, but the depth of the main set from front to rear is never

as much as the breadth. This means that the playwright should be careful not to ask for too many doors, tables, and cupboards along the side walls. The scenic artist will not be able to get them all in.

Good Sightlines

Because of the way spectators sit in an auditorium and the way the acting area is lighted, there are certain spots on the stage which are more suitable for dramatic action than others. In general, the best place is a broad strip down stage, extending right and left to points about 5 feet from the sides of the proscenium frame. It is true that special lighting, either temporary or permanent, may pick out for emphasis a particular part of the set at the back, or right or left. However, if the author calls for this special kind of arrangement for his acting area he should do it with a good reason, that is, because his eyes are open to a good effect, and not because he is careless.

Mostly, the author is showing poor planning when he asks for an important entrance way up in an Up-Right or Up-Left corner, or he places a sofa or chair for an important passage of dialogue close against a side wall. Actors forced to use such entrances and furniture are very likely to find themselves out of view of spectators seated far over on the same side of the auditorium.

Almost as poor judgment is shown where chairs designed to be employed in important scenes are pushed up against the back wall. Here, where the light is ample for the scenery, it is seldom strong enough for a really clear illumination of the actors' faces, and when an extended dialogue is **spoken from** this area it usually come to come from such a misty distance that it lacks any feeling of intimacy.

What is said here about the placement of articles for action applies also, to a considerable extent, to the design of the scenery itself. What are pictorially the most expressive features should never be concentrated at the side, but at the center and back, in those places where they can be seen equally well by the spectators in the middle, right, and left of the auditorium, both downstairs and in the balcony. But after the playwright has done that, he should give some thought also to the side walls of the stage set. When these are not sufficiently designed they can look very bare, especially to the spectators who must gaze at them directly from across the auditorium.

In order to avoid the more common mistakes in spatial design, including those involving sightlines, the playwright should make a thorough study of the playhouse where he hopes to produce—or one similar to it—and then work out his floor plans carefully to scale. After he has done this for several plays, he may be able so well to carry the feeling of the stage in his mind that he will not have to prepare any further drawings to aid him.

The Experimental Setting

The suggestions in the preceding paragraphs apply to visual environments in the more conventional theatre buildings. The younger dramatists today, however, are doing much interesting experimental writing in forms which spill beyond the limits of the old proscenium frame, or which do away with the frame entirely. Some of them, especially those writing for outdoor productions, conceive their action as placed, not on one stage, but two or three. As time goes on, new, even more flexible, acting areas will be devised. The playwright as creator has the right to think of the best pos-

sible means for the projection of his vision. But whatever may be the shape of the acting place in which he wants to see his drama produced, he must make sure that the form of the setting and the spirit of the play are united, that the performers can use the setting well, and that the audience can see it clearly.

The Problem of Economy

Not the least of the scenic designer's headaches is caused by the chronic condition of his budget. Often when the author hears him being explosive about some item in the projected setting and concludes that he is therefore a singularly uncooperative team-mate, he does not realize that the designer is only worried about the cost. The artist likes to dream with the writer about azure pools, floating golden balconies, and marvelously-wrought curving staircases, but he knows realistically that they can never be built for this coming production in Jones's Theatre.

Here are a few tips the scenic artist will give the ambitious playwright—assuming that the author really wants to get his play done, and knows that it will not be done if it costs too much.

- * Do not design your action for five different settings if two will serve as well. (Often the intensity of the action will gain by concentration.)
- * Make each setting as simple as possible, without compromising its expressive qualities. Avoid all unnecessary, that is, meaningless, elaborations.
- * Hesitate before you decide to ask the scenic artist for the Cathedral of St. John the Divine or Grand Central Station. If you must pick a place like this, do not call for a full-view setting. Select a spot in which

the architectural details and the furnishings are comparatively uncomplicated—a corner, a corridor, a bench under a window—and then angle the walls in such a way as to shut out the sight of the rest of the building.

Remember that the most expensive building material for scenery is lumber. For this reason, do not ask for more solid doors and stairways than you absolutely have to have. Be economical with the platforms. They will not add just a trifle to the cost of your show. They can very easily multiply the cost several times.

Take full advantage of the lighting facilities. A few spotlights flexibly controlled may cut the cost of a set in half and at the same time increase the expressive quality of it tremendously.



XI

THROUGH THE EYES OF THE STAGEMANAGER

An Orderly Performance

ONE of the most important members of the team of stage collaborators is the stagemanager. He "runs the show" during the performance of the play. Others may dream up beautiful visions and strut their products under the name of Art. The stagemanager must see to it that the efforts of the creators and interpreters hang together in an effective two-hour exhibit, an exhibit which is marred by no false entrances, no unexpected pauses, no miscues, no disturbing sights and sounds, nothing to break the rapt attention of the audience.

The stagemanager is a hard-working, conscientious person. He is often also a harassed person. Since there are many details about the acting, scenery, properties, lighting, costumes, and sound effects that can go wrong in the natural run of even the best-managed performance, the stagemanager is profoundly grateful to the playwright who gives him in the first place well-ordered script.

He prays fervently that the entrances and exits of every actor are clearly marked. And he prays just as fervently that the author has allowed plenty of time off stage for all such adjustments as costume changes. The playwright who allows one whole page between an exit in one dress and a reappearance in another may not know that the time he has allowed for that change is one scant minute. (Perhaps he spent

an hour writing that page and he feels, therefore, that the playing time involved must be considerable.)

Another place where the stagemanager looks for careful thought is in the changes between scenes within an act. Since such scenes are usually designed to follow each other with only a minimum break of time, players closing one scene in one costume and opening the next in another may find that the shift of clothes called for is impossible to make in the short pause indicated. The playwright is wise to anticipate this difficulty and to work out his action in such a way as to get the actor off the stage before the end of the first scene, or to bring him on again a moment or two after the opening of the next.

Along with the costume changes, the stagemanager has to worry about the scenery changes. His work of supervision is simplified immeasurably, of course, when there are one or two shifts only, and these occur conveniently at act breaks. But he knows that this is not always possible; some dramatic stories are bound to be set in several different places, and some of the shifts have to be made quickly within an act division. Accepting the fact that such play designing is often necessary, he nevertheless finds himself irritated when he discovers that certain hard changes come, apparently without reason, in a period between intermissions. When the stage-manager reads a script in which a ten-minute scene in the complicated interior of the super-submarine "Behemoth," is followed by another short scene in the Giant Redwood Forest, and that is succeeded in turn by an equally brief scene before the altar in St. Patrick's Cathedral, he knows that the problem he faces in trying to maintain a sense of continuity is enormous.

Costumes and scenery are just two of the points on which the author can effect cooperation with his stagemanager.

Others include offstage voices, music, sound effects, lighting, and properties. The best way to prevent unnecessary obstacles to a smooth performance is for the playwright to go over his script carefully page by page trying to visualize it on the stage, and then to see if there are any points in the design which can be mended before the play goes into the hands of the producing staff.

GETTING A PERSPECTIVE ON THE PLAY



XII

THROUGH THE EYES OF THE AUDIENCE

The Theatre as a Social Institution

THE art of the theatre is of all the arts in the world fundamentally the most associative. The story-writer, the painter, the dancer, the musician, though they may labor with other persons, can, and often do, perfect their forms in solitude. When they have completed their works they commonly present them, not to large assemblies of people, but to selected companies. This is never true of the dramatic craftsman. From the beginning to the end he knows that he creates individually as part of a group, and that the things he makes must win eventually the approval of big and numerous gatherings. He knows that unless he can do this, he will scarcely be regarded by either his companions or the public at large as any artist at all. One tact stands out forever in his mind: the theatre is preeminently a social institution.

The Mind of the Audience

The playwright writes for an audience. He writes to affect it. He writes to communicate something to it and to get a response from it. Whether his creative mind converses with the godly presences of Olympus or the lowly creatures of Slum Alley, whether he fancies himself a poet, prophet, or

plain hack entertainer, his ultimate purpose will always be the same, to move spectators.

In order to write effectively, then, every dramatist must make a close study of play-goers. He must see many spectators at many plays, under many different kinds of conditions. He must sit with them, talk with them, listen to their remarks during intermission, and observe them carefully both when they enter the theatre and when they leave it. He must see these people also at their homes and at their work. Thus, little by little, he will learn certain facts about their habits of attention, and about the things they want when they come to the theatre; and in accordance with these discoveries he will shape his own viewpoint toward his writing.

Doubtless, the first, and perhaps the most important, fact that the author will find is that a Body of spectators has a young mind. No matter what may be the ages of the individuals in the group,

attitudes outside outside the theatre, their collective mind while they are there is definitely youthful. They come to the hall of make-believe to play and, since it is impossible to abandon oneself unreservedly to an adventurous game when one's mind is aged -cluttered with obsessive doubts and worries--everyone willingly drops for a while the burden of maturity. That is one reason for the childlike nature of the audience.

audience. There is another, a reason connected with the psychology of crowds. People herded together, not just in the theatre, but anywhere, tend to behave as younger than when they are separated. They laugh more easily, cry more freely, and yield themselves more readily to exhibitions of fear, anger, or hatred. They do this because these actions are primitive and, since all men are more alike in their childhood traits than they are in their acquired, "grown-up"* ones, they inter-

act upon each other on a fundamentally youthful level. They slough off the restraints of their learned habits, and act naturally.

While the mind of the theatre audience is characteristically young, it is by no means witless. As a matter of fact, it is always keenly alert. It is always very shrewd. Authors who have mistaken a youthful spirit for a lack of intelligence have invariably failed. The childlikeness of the audience is revealed simply in its general attitude, in its readiness to believe, and in its desire to feel as well as to think.

The playwright, when he begins to write, has to recognize this state of mind. He will take account of it in the way he presents his material. He will avoid intellectual abstractions. He will use imagery. Although his medium is literary he makes his words build pictures, the kind of pictures that delight children, richly provocative, sensuously vivid. He works to affect his spectators through many different avenues of impression. He appeals to their ears. He appeals to their eyes. He uses color, motion, elements of pageantry, dancing, and music, every kind of thing that will help the spectator forget for a little while the seat he occupies, and project himself into the action on the stage, to feel like a child at play.

But this does not mean that the author expects the audience to stop thinking. It may think profoundly. Active in the mind of an audience—even an apparently rather naive one—is much of the wisdom of the ages. The author must deal with this, whether he wishes to or not.

Looking at the whole problem of theatre appeal very broadly, the dramatist soon finds that the audience, is impelled to come to a play three strong desires. The first desire is for *diversion*. All men, young and old, high-brow, low-brow, rich and poor, get a little weary of their daily worlds from time to time. Even the man or woman who is

fundamentally most contented occasionally has to have a vacation from his own personality and from the grooves in which it moves, and to step by imagination into the shoes of another character. There is nowhere he can more effectively get out of himself and into somebody else, some more alive than himself, than in the playhouse. In the playhouse he finds a blessed relief.

The second great desire which the spectator hopes to have satisfied is for *stimulation*. He wants to get his emotions, dulled by the routine of daily existence, reawakened. He wants to exercise them. He wants to stretch his laughing muscles, to feel the lump in his throat, to sense fear, and the mockery of fear, and triumphant pride. He wants to re-experience the tender pain of love, the lusty joy of conquest, the free exaltation that comes when something long sought and striven for is round at last and possessed fully. He wants to feel alive in every part of him.

If the spectator is a man of thought (which most spectators are), he will want all he can get of diversion and stimulation. But he will also want something more: something to stir his mind. He will want to have his vision of life clarified. He will want illumination. Looking at the world through the clear eyes of the author, he hopes to see new ideas, and to Have old ones reaffirmed in such a way as to make him feel a ~~little wiser—or at least a little smarter—about the world~~ around him.

There is still a fourth reason why the spectator looks with such longing at the theatre. It is a reason only a little less important than those already mentioned. The theatre is a place where the spectator can feast his senses. He can see beautiful images and hear beautiful sounds. The theatre is space, color, light, and motion. From front to back and all around is a spirit of festival. So, to the primary desires for

diversion, stimulation, and illumination, may be added also, sensation.

These are just a few of the observations which the playwright will make about the people for whom he is trying to write. The more keenly he analyses their fundamental cravings—not just their surface appetites but their deep, underlying, unchanging hungers—the more intelligent he will be as a dramatic artist. When he has acquired a really sympathetic understanding he will know how to meet the desire for diversion with character portraits which are interesting, believable, and lovable; how to satisfy the want for stimulation with mental and physical adventures which stir those characters' emotions; and how to grant the wish for illumination by founding the whole dramatic design on concepts of human truth. At the same time, the dramatist will try to touch his play with sensuous beauty. He will make it pleasurable to see and hear, just for the color and sound of it.

Subject: Man

Leonardo da Vinci once said: "Every good artist has two subjects: Man, and the hopes of his soul." In this short statement is contained all the truth of writing and other creative work.

First, the artist deals with the substance of Man, because it is the most fascinating substance there is. Man's physical presence, Man's body, Man's action, Man's words, Man's labor—these have been the objects of study by scientists, poets, and philosophers for thousands of years, and the interest in them is just as keen today as it was long ago.

Then the artist deals with the hopes of Man's soul, because these are what makes his substance move and do. The deep, never-sleeping hungers of Man's spirit, his ceaseless search for

an answer to the question of his existence, and his imperishable belief that somewhere, sometime he will see clearly just what he has been struggling for blindly through the long age these are the things to which thoughtful persons in every period have devoted the best of their minds. These are the things which compel them to build their works of art: verse, music, architecture, sculpture, and story-telling. The hopes of Man's soul have produced an especially active influence on the literature of the theatre.

The accumulated wisdom of the dramatic artists from the time of the first Egyptian poets down to the present seems to say this to each new author: "Present the *whole person*. Do not show just his sensuous exterior, for that will make a drama of shallow interest. Do not show just his intellectual mind, for that will make a play of wordy arguments. Do not show just his heart, for if you do that, you will create a story filled with sentimental feelings but nothing more. Let the character you build have a good body, full of warm blood and eager muscles; but at the same time let him be a rational being.

"Write as if you could see the entire course of Evolution stirring there in the body and mind of your stage personality. On the surface of your figure are the unmistakable marks of civilization. But beneath that surface lurk the fears and desires of the primitive savage trying to preserve himself and his little world of precious associations against an inimicable universe, and to advance a little. If you look long enough, you will be able to see in the same figure the smiling features of Bill Brown who lives next door, or Jack Smith who runs the hardware store down the street—or your grandfather, or your wife—and also the jungle creature who was his ancestor several thousand years ago.

"Try to glimpse in your person the image not only of the

savage and his urbanized descendent, but also of that special elevated individual toward which he aspires: the man who has achieved freedom, affection, power, or knowledge, and has thereby conquered the devil that haunts his path. These three: the present, the past, and the longed-for future, constitute the dimensions of the stage character."

"To accept the concept of the whole man need not restrict the playwright in any way. He can write as profoundly or as lightly as he chooses. He may compose in the style of the Realists, the Heroic Romanticists, the Farce Comedians, or the Downright-Mean Satirists. From the viewpoint of content, the manner of presentation is of secondary importance; if the playwright builds his design on a solid foundation of "human truth, he is bound to have at least some quality in his product.

Mankind speaks to the Artist: "I am very old. In order to arrive at what I am today, I have had to undergo much in the five hundred thousand years of my existence. Laugh at me if you will, but do not sneer! Cry over me if you will, but do not snivel! Treat me roughly or gently, but do not lightly pass me by!"

SAMPLE PAGES FROM A PLAY SCRIPT

Introduction.

THERE are a number of acceptable typing forms for dramatic scripts. The one indicated on the following pages is the form most generally recommended by producers' playreaders.

The character's name, in capital letters, is placed in the middle of the page, with a double space before it. Both dialogue and stage directions are single-spaced. Incidental business is indented 8 spaces while blocks of business and descriptions are indented to the center line, with a double space between paragraphs.

A typescript prepared in this form generally runs to 20 or 30 pages for a one-act play and to about 100 pages for a full-length play.

The several forms for published scripts can be found in printed books of plays.

■ A N N A C H R I S T I E " ¹

A Play in Three Acts

By

EUGENE O'NEILL

¹ *The following pages reprinted by permission of Random House, New York.*

CHARACTERS

"JOHNNY-THE-PRIEST."

TWO LONGSHOREMEN.

A POSTMAN.

LARRY, bartender.

CHRIS CHRISTOPHERSON, captain of the barge
Simeon Winthrop.

MARTHY OWEN.

ANNA CHRISTOPHERSON, Chris's daughter.

THREE MEN OF A STEAMER'S CREW.

MAT BURKE, a stoker.

JOHNSON, deckhand on the barge.

SCENES

ACT ONE

"Johnny-the-Priest's" saloon near the water
front, New York City.

ACT TWO

The barge, Simeon Winthrop, at anchor in the
harbor of Provincetown, Mass. Ten days later.

ACT THREE

Cabin of the barge, at dock in Boston. A week
later.

ACT FOUR

The same. Two days later.

" A N N A C H R I S T I E "

ACT ONE

THE SCENE: ("JOHNNY-THE-PRIEST'S"
saloon near South
Street, New York City.
The stage is divided
into two sections, show-
ing a small back room
on the right. On the
left, forward, of the
barroom, a large win-
dow looking out on the
street. Beyond it, the
main entrance—a double
swinging door. Farther
back, another window.
The bar runs from left
to right nearly the
whole length of the rear
wall. In back of the
bar, a small show case
displaying a few bottles
of case goods, for which
there is evidently
little call. The remain-
der of the rear space in
front of the large mir-
rors is occupied by
half-barrels of cheap
whiskey of the "nickel-
a-shot" variety, from
which the liquor is
drawn by means of spig-
ots. On the right is an
open doorway leading to
the back room. In the
back room are four round
wooden tables with five
chairs grouped about
each. In the rear, a

family entrance opening on a side street.

It is late afternoon of a day in fall.)

AT RISE: (As the curtain rises, JOHNNY is discovered. "JOHNNY-THE-PRIEST" deserves his nickname. With his pale, thin, clean-shaven face, mild blue eyes and white hair, a cassock would seem more suited to him than the apron he wears. Neither his voice nor his general manner dispel this illusion which has made him a personage of the waterfront. They are soft and bland. But beneath all his mildness one senses the man behind the mask—cynical, callous, hard as nails. He is lounging at ease behind the bar, a pair of spectacles on his nose, reading an evening paper.

Two longshoremen enter from the street, wearing their working aprons, the button of the-union pinned conspicuously on the caps pulled sideways on their heads at an aggressive angle.)

FIRST LONGSHOREMAN

(As they range themselves at the bar.)
Gimme a shock. Number Two.
(He tosses a coin on the bar.)

SECOND LONGSHOREMAN

Same here.
(JOHNNY sets two glasses of barrel
whiskey before them.)

FIRST LONGSHOREMAN

Here's luck!
(The other nods. They gulp down their
whiskey.)

SECOND LONGSHOREMAN

(Putting money on the bar.)
Give us another

FIRST LONGSHOREMAN

Gimme a scoop this time—lager and porter. I'm
dry.

SECOND LONGSHOREMAN

Same here.

(JOHNNY draws the lager
and porter and sets the
big, foaming schooners
before them. They drink
down half the contents
and start to talk to-
gether hurriedly in low
tones. The door on the
left is swung open and
LARRY enters. He is a
boyish, red-cheeked,
rather good-looking
young fellow of twenty
or so.)

LARRY

(Nodding to JOHNNY—cheerily.)

Hello, boss.

JOHNNY

Hello, Larry.

(With a glance at his watch.)

Just on time.

(LARRY goes to the right behind the bar, takes off his coat, and puts on an apron.)

FIRST LONGSHOREMAN

(Abruptly.)

Let's drink up and get back to it.

(They finish their drinks and go out left. THE POSTMAN enters as they leave. He exchanges nods with JOHNNY and throws a letter on the bar.)

THE POSTMAN

Addressed care of you, Johnny. Know him?

JOHNNY

(Picks up the letter, adjusting his spectacles. LARRY comes and peers over his shoulders. JOHNNY reads very slowly.)

Christopher Christopherson.

THE POSTMAN

(Helpfully.)

Square-head name.

LARRY

Old Chris—that's who.

JOHNNY

Oh, sure. I was forgetting Chris carried a hell of a name like that. Letters come here for him sometimes before, I remember now. Long time ago, though.

THE POSTMAN

It'll get him all right then?

JOHNNY

Sure thing. He comes here whenever he's in port.

THE POSTMAN

(Turning to go.)

Sailor, eh?

JOHNNY

(With a grin.)

Captain of a coal barge.

THE POSTMAN

(Laughing.)

Some job! Well, s'long.

JOHNNY

S'long. I'll see he gets it.

(THE POSTMAN goes out. JOHNNY scrutinizes the letter.)

You got good eyes, Larry. Where's it from?

LARRY

(After a glance.)

St. Paul. That'll be in Minnesota, I'm thinkin¹. Looks like a woman's writing, too, the old divil!

JOHNNY

He's got a daughter somewheres out West, I think he told me once.

(He puts the letter on the cash register.)

Come to think of it, I ain't seen old Chris in a dog's age.

(Putting his overcoat on, he comes
around the end of the bar.)

Guess I'll be gettin' home. See you tomorrow.

LARRY

Good-night to ye, boss.

(As JOHNNY goes toward the street door, it is pushed open and CHRISTOPHER CHRISTOPHERSON enters. He is a short, squat, broad-shouldered man of about fifty, with a round, weather-beaten, red face from which his light blue eyes peer short-sight edly, twinkling with a simple good humor. His large mouth, overhung by a thick, drooping, yellow mustache, is childishly self-willed and weak, of an obstinate kindliness. A thick neck is jammed like a post into the heavy trunk of his body. His arms with their big, hairy, freckled hands, and his stumpy legs terminating in large flat feet, are awkwardly short and muscular. He walks with a clumsy, rolling gait. His voice, when not raised in a hollow boom, is toned down to a sly, confidential half-whisper with something vaguely plaintive in its quality. He is dressed

in a wrinkled, ill-fitting dark suit of shore clothes, and wears a faded cap of gray cloth over his mop of grizzled, blond hair. Just now his face beams with a too-blissful happiness, and he has evidently been drinking. He reaches his hand out to JOHNNY.)

CHRIS

Hello, Yohnny! Have drink on me. Come on, Larry Give us drink. Have one yourself.
(Putting his hand in his pocket.)
Ay gat money-plenty money . . .

JOHNNY

(Shakes CHRIS by the hand.)
Speak of the devil. We was just talkin' about you.

LARRY

(Coming to the end of the bar.)
Hello, Chris. Put it there.
(They shake hands.)

CHRIS

(Beaming.)
Give us drink.

JOHNNY

(With a grin.)
You got a half-snootful now. Where'd you get it?

CHRIS

(Grinning.)
Oder fallar on oder barge-Irish fallar-he gat bottle whisky and we drank it, yust us two. Dot whisky gat kick, by yingo! Ay yust come ashore.

Give us drink, Larry. Ay vas little drunk, not much. Yust feel good,

(He laughs and commences to sing in a nasal, high-pitched quaver.)

"My Yosephine, come board de ship. Long time Ay wait for you. De moon she shi-i-i-ine. She looka yust like you. Tehee-tehee, tehee-tehee, tehee-tehee, tehee-tehee."

(To the accompaniment of this last he waves his hand as if he were conducting an orchestra.)

JOHNNY

(With a laugh.)

Same old Yosie, eh Chris?

CHRIS

You don't know good song when you hear him. Italian fallar on oder barge, he learn me dat. Give us drink.

(He throws change on the bar.)

LARRY

(With a professional air.)

What's your pleasure, gentlemen?

JOHNNY

Small beer, Larry.

CHRIS

Whisky - Number Two.

LARRY

(As he gets their drinks.)

I'll take a cigar on you.

CHRIS

(Lifting his glass.)

Skoal !

(He drinks.)

JOHNNY

Drink hearty.

CHRIS

(Immediately.)

Have Oder drink.

JOHNNY

No. Some other time. Got to go home now. So you've just landed? Where are you in from this time?

CHRIS

Norfolk. Ve make slow voyage—dirty vedder—yust fog, fog, fog, all bloody time!

(There is an insistent ring from the doorbell at the family entrance in the back room. CHRIS gives a start—hurriedly.)

Ay go open, Larry. Ay forgat. It vas Marthy. She come with me.

(He goes into the back room.)

LARRY

(With a chuckle.)

He's still got that same cow livin' with him, the old fool!

JOHNNY

(With a grin.)

A sport, Chris is. Well, I'll beat it home. S'long.

(He goes to the street door.)

LARRY

So long, boss.

JOHNNY

Oh—don't forget to give him his letter.

LARRY

I won't.

(JOHNNY goes out. In the meantime, CHRIS has opened the family en-

trance door, admitting MARTHY. She might be forty or fifty. Her jowly, mottled face, with its thick red nose, is streaked with interlacing purple veins. Her thick, gray hair is piled anyhow in a greasy mop on top of her round head. Her figure is flabby and fat ; her breath comes in wheezy gasps ; she speaks in a loud, mannish voice, punctuated by explosions of hoarse laughter. But there still twinkles in her blood-shot blue eyes a youthful lust for life which hard usage has failed to stifle, a sense of humor mocking, but good-tempered. She wears a man's cap, double-breasted man's jacket, and a grimy, calico skirt. Her bare feet are encased in a man's brogans several sizes too large for her, which gives her a shuffling, wobbly gait.)

MARTHY

(Grumblingly.)

What yuh tryin' to do, Dutchy - keep me standin' out there all day?

(She comes forward and sits at the table in the right corner, front.)

CHRIS

(Mollifyingly.)

Ay'm sorry, Marthy, Ay talk to Yohnny, Ay for-gat. What you goin' take for drink?

MARTHY

(Appeased.)

Gimme a scoop of lager an' ale.

CHRIS

Ay go bring him back,

(He returns to the bar.)

Lager and ale for Marthy, Larry. Whisky for me.

(He throws change on the bar.)

LARRY

Right you are.

(Then remembering, he takes the letter from in back of the bar.)

Here's a letter for you—from St. Paul, Min-nesota—and a lady's writin'.

(He grins.)

CHRIS

(Quickly—taking it.)

Oh, den it come from my daughter, Anna. She live dere.

(He turns the letter over in his hands uncertainly.)

Ay don't gat letter from Anna—must be a year.

LARRY

(Jokingly.)

That's a fine fairy tale to be tellin'—your daughter! Sure I'll bet it's some bum.

CHRIS

(Soberly.)

No. Dis come from Anna.

(Engrossed by the letter in his hand—uncertainty.)

By golly, Ay tank Ay'm too drunk for read dis

letter from Anna. Ay tank Ay sat down for a minute. You bring drinks in back room, Larry.

(He goes into the room on right.)

MARTHY

(Angrily.)

Where's my lager an' ale, yuh big stiff?

CHRIS

(Preoccupied.)

Larry bring him.

(He sits down opposite her. LARRY brings in the drinks and sets them on the table. He and MARTHY exchange nods of recognition. LARRY stands looking at CHRIS curiously. MARTHY takes a long draught of her schooner and heaves a huge sigh of satisfaction, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand. CHRIS stares at the letter for a moment—slowly opens it, and, squinting his eyes, commences to read laboriously, his lips moving as he spells out the words. As he reads his face lights up with an expression of mingled joy and bewilderment.)

LARRY

Good news?

MARTHY

(Her curiosity also aroused.)

What's that yuh got—a letter, fur Gawd's sake?

CHRIS

(Pauses for a moment, after finishing the letter, as if to let the news sink in—then suddenly pounds his fist on the table with happy excitement.)

Py yiminy! Yust tank, Anna say she's comin' here right away! She gat sick on yob in St. Paul, she say. It's short letter, don't tal me much more'n dat.

(Beaming.)

Py golly, dat's good news all at one time for ole fallar!

(Then turning to MARTHY rather shame-facedly.)

You know, Marthy, Ay've tole you Ay don't see my Anna since she vas little gel in Sveden five

year ole.

year o l e . M A R T H Y

How old'll she be now?

CHRIS

She must be—lat me see—she must be twenty year ole, py Yo I

LARRY

(Surprised.)

You've not seen her in fifteen years?

CHRIS

(Suddenly growing somber—in a low tone.)

No. Ven she was little gel, Ay vas bo'sum on vindjammer. Ay never gat home only few time dem year. Ay'm fool sailor fallar. My voman—Anna's mother—she gat tired vait all time Sveden for me ven I don't never come. She come dis country, bring Anna, dey go out Minnesota, live with her cousins on farm. Den ven her mo'der die ven Ay vas on voyage, Ay tank it's better dem cousins keep Anna. Ay tank it's better Anna live on farm, den she don't know dat ole davil, sea, she don't know fa'der like me.

LARRY

(With a wink at MARTHY.)

This girl, now, 'll be marrying a sailor herself, likely. It's in the blood.

CHRIS

(Suddenly springing to his feet and smashing his fist on the table in a rage.)

No, py God! She don't do dat !

MARTHY

(Grasping her schooner hastily-angrily.)

Hey, look out, yuh nut! Wanta spill my suds for me?

WARMING-UP EXERCISES

THESE EXERCISES *are designed to help the beginning playwright get his thoughts flowing. They should not be considered ends in themselves; and they should never be permitted to replace actual work on a dramatic script.*

1. Find and jot down on paper a number of germinal ideas for plays, trying to get at least one example for each of the following:

- A mood
- A truth
- A situation
- A story
- A character

2. Find an idea for a play in some person you know; another idea in some incident you know. Look for these, not afar off, but in everyday life near at hand.

3. Find an idea for a play in a newspaper item, and another one in a "want-ad."

4. Find an idea for a play in the written biography of a man or woman, not previously dramatized; or in a bit of national or local history, or a folk ballad or folk story.

5. Try to see which of the germinal ideas you have gathered so far can be adapted best to dramatic development, and why. From one of the ideas, write a compact scenario of a play. Limit it to 200 or 300 words, so you can have no opportunity to wander.

6. Examine the scenario you have just written and try to decide if what you have is really the outline of a play. Is it more appropriately the plan of a novel, or of a short story?

If it still seems to be a good outline for a play, decide whether the drama now indicated is full-length or one-act.

7. Pick an interesting personality with whom you are acquainted, study his appearance and manners, but particularly his thoughts. Try to discover in him some element of restless desire—some hidden or manifest feeling of revolt against a situation in which he finds himself at this time—and use this as the starting point of a play about him. (If necessary, put together two or more personalities to make one actively dramatic character.)

8. Work out a plot for a simple modern play from the story-framework of a children's fairy tale, a Biblical account, or a classical legend.

9. Read, and analyze the content and form of a number of good and bad scripts written by other dramatists. If you are now working on a one-act play, read the shorter forms; if a full-length play, the longer ones. Fit your study to your work. Apply to the plays the tests suggested in Chapters V-VIII:

The General Impression

The Fighting Triad (*principal force, opposing force, and deciding agent*)

The Iron Check ("*pasto*")

The Golden Check (*theme, issue, and drive*)

10. Try to evaluate the literary quality of the same plays. Examine the characterization, dialogue, stage directions, and general ideas. Seek to determine if the plays could be acted well, mounted effectively, and if they could be performed in a reasonably economical and orderly way.

