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THE TEACHING OF PLAYWRITING:
AS OBSERVED IN FOURTEEN
TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN PLAYWRITING BOOKS

by

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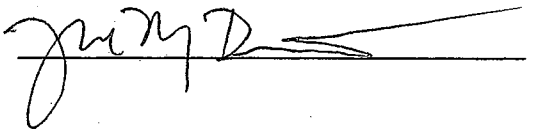
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Sam Smiley — 11-16-90

Sam Smiley
Professor of Theatre Arts

Date

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
	ABSTRACT	5
1.	INTRODUCTION	6
2.	HISTORICAL PROTOTYPES	17
3.	BEGINNING TWENTIETH-CENTURY PATTERNS	35
4.	EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY TRENDS	52
5.	MID-TWENTIETH-CENTURY DIVERGING STRATEGIES . . .	79
6.	LATE TWENTIETH-CENTURY IDEALS	95
7.	CONCLUSION	119
	WORKS CITED	131

ABSTRACT

An examination of 14 noteworthy twentieth-century American playwriting books reveals methods of teaching playwriting, as well as techniques for writing plays. The methods prescribed vary in application and approach--from a focus on the process of writing a play to the distribution of the product after completion.

The study observes the different playwriting techniques offered to the playwright by summarizing the style, format, material, and purpose of each book. It offers a guide for playwrights who wish to explore various methods of writing plays.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The teaching of playwriting in America arguably begins with George Pierce Baker. In 1904 at Radcliffe and the following year at Harvard, he established English 47, the first authorized class on how to write plays by an institution of higher education in this country. Prior to that time, universities insisted on studying plays as literature and allowed dramatic clubs to be formed to facilitate student productions. Baker's ideas revolved around a more practical approach, and he convinced Harvard to institute a workshop in which new plays being written in his class could be performed. With the creation of the 47 Workshop, Baker was able to combine both the literary aspects of drama in his courses on dramatic literature as well as emphasize the practical application of drama with workshop productions. Melding these two different approaches to drama begins America's heritage for the study of drama in a university setting in the twentieth century.

Following Baker's lead in balancing literature with production, subsequent playwriting teachers in American universities explored their own ideas. This study examines noteworthy playwriting books of this century, beginning with Baker, to understand better the interpretive variety

playwriting teachers place on the two aspects of teaching playwriting.

In a sense a play has a dual nature. A play functions as a kind of literature which can be read and must represent a set of instructions to a director, actors, and designers. Marian Gallaway compares the written text to music and architecture. She says that the playscript is like the blueprint of a play. The end of a play exists both in the mind of the reader and in the eyes of the audience. Because of drama's inherent duality, Edward Mabley concludes that creating a play is one of the most challenging forms of literary writing (3). To craft a play which successfully balances these two components, John Gassner suggests that a playwright be exposed to a "broad cultural base" (170). Kenneth Thorpe Rowe enumerates the particulars of that base. Any writer who plans "to tackle writing a play should be prepared for an arduous job . . . for intensive study of the history of drama, technique, the theatre; for intensive thinking, for intensive self-criticism and rewriting" (24).

Such preparation requires education. Whether the education comes from a formal study in an university or happens from experiences in life is a continuing debate. Most authorities recommend both. Yet there is a supplementary approach that needs to be considered. The

playwriting, or the "how-to-write-a-play," book serves as a source for learning the principles of dramatic construction. Such books demonstrate the application of playwriting principles to formulate a technique for writing plays. John Gassner considers a good education for a playwright one that accounts for what he calls the "triple concern with the man, the writer, and the theatrician" (176).

Playwrights, as artists, use themselves to create. Knowing the self becomes a crucial step to successful playwriting. Having the ability, or craftsmanship, to organize ideas and situations as a dramatic event develops from understanding playwriting principles. Books on playwriting can aid such an endeavor.

The actual writing of a play can be a lonely experience, but a production of one requires cooperation and coordination among different theatrical artists. To write plays that are comprehendible for production, a playwright must understand the nature of theatre and how other theatricians perform their functions. The study of the 14 playwriting books that follows focuses on how each addresses the education of the playwright in relation to the self, the discipline of writing, and the collaborative process of play production.

The study of drama, and therefore, playwriting, comprises two areas: theory and practice. Hubert Heffner identifies dramatic theory as its "spirit or memory" and defines dramatic practice as its "construction" (51). A theoretical approach to playwriting concerns itself with the process of creating a play. Such an approach follows an intrinsic (or Aristotelian) aesthetic in that it focuses on the manner of something coming into being. The discipline centers on dramatic theory, theatre history, and the principles of playwriting. The emphasis of an intrinsic aesthetic is to know. A practical approach to the study of playwriting concentrates on the effect, or purpose, of the final product on others. This application focuses on doing and is labeled extrinsic (or Platonic).

A practical education includes two kinds of effects. A playwright is asked to construct and complete a written script. One learns how to write plays by writing them. In his pragmatic essay, Some Thoughts on Playwriting, Thornton Wilder also considers the collaborative nature of theatre (164). Experiencing the technical aspects of theatre aids the playwright "to use the dramatic medium to the full when he needs to" (Gassner 173). Gassner adds that attending rehearsals, revising works, and observing audience reactions strengthens a playwright's ability to gauge "how

a play works and can be made to work--or perhaps cannot be made to work--on the stage" (172).

Most playwriting books include both theoretical and practical approaches for writing plays. Many of these books define the principles of dramatic construction similarly. The differences occur in the emphases that each book places on specific principles and to the degree of attention given to either theory or practice.

The initial search of playwriting books for consideration in this study uncovered over eighty titles. Some of the volumes found were books on dramatic theory which included a section on play construction or the principles of playwriting. Authors of those books apparently intended them for a more generic audience interested in overviews of theatre principles. In A Play and Its Parts, Gerald Weales extends beyond the boundaries of writing a play. He includes a discussion of dramatic theory for play analysis and illustrates the technical principles of sets, costumes, props, lights, and sound.

In order to create a homogeneous base to study techniques of playwriting, each book included must be primarily a playwriting book rather than a book on dramatic theory which contains playwriting principles. What distinguishes a playwriting book from a book on dramatic theory which has a section on playwriting is simply its

intended audience. For this study, only books on playwriting written for playwrights are included. In most cases, the playwright addressed is the novice, but there are exceptions. The Playwright's Handbook by Frank Pike and Thomas G. Dunn divides playwrights into beginning, intermediate, and advanced, according to the level of their experience.

An interest in the education of the playwright as offered in playwriting books forms a second criteria for the books included in this study. From an empirical standpoint, teachers of playwriting acquaint students with a particular theory and practice. Their methods have been honed by observations to both process and product. Limiting the study to playwriting books written by playwriting teachers (many of whom are playwrights themselves) provides a commonality to evaluate one type of education.

A teacher's function is twofold, as is the nature of drama. In order to analyze clearly, a teacher must be objective about a subject. Curiously, books written by playwrights about playwriting lack the specifics which characterize books written by the teachers of playwriting. The function of playwrights is to be subjective about their material. When asked to write about how they accomplish what they do, it is evidently difficult for them to

articulate properly their playwriting process. William Archer writes that a dramatist is "scarcely the best guide for dramatists. He cannot analyze his own practice and discriminate between that in it which is of universal validity, and that which may be good for him, but would be bad for any one else" (8).

The other function of teaching is to pass along condensed experiences to the student. Rowe describes his purpose:

> If a book or course in playwriting can help, it will be as a concentrated experience. That is all teaching is, a head-start on experience. There is no secret formula for writing a good play, but the selection and organization of material which is available to all may sensitize the student, so to speak, to experience, so that perceptions come in months which might have taken years. (Rowe 24)

Many of the books in this study acknowledge that one purpose for writing the book, and ostensibly for the studying of playwriting techniques, is to shorten the apprentice time.

The teacher-authors included in this study do not necessarily come from traditional academic ranks. John Howard Lawson and Lajos Egri taught privately in both Los

Angeles and New York. William Packard teaches at the H[erbert] B[erghof] Studios in New York. Their importance to the heritage of teaching playwriting is as justifiable as the teachers from more traditional, or academic, settings.

The authors included in this study are, or were, respected and well-known for their contributions to the teaching of playwriting. Respect, in this case, is based on the references from proceeding authors for past work. Most playwriting books acknowledge previous works and the influence of others' work on their own. In a study which chronicles several generations, to be well-known refers to the acid test of time. Availability and accessibility to the books, especially those written in the early decades of the century, determined their feasibility in this study. Three main sources were used to obtain copies of the books: Books in Print, the University of Arizona library card catalogue and interlibrary loan system, and bookstores including those specializing in drama books and second-hand books.

The majority of the extant playwriting books written for playwrights have been published in the twentieth century. There are notable predecessors which address issues of play construction. The advice of Horace, the ethics of Lessing, the neoclassic code of Castelvetro, and

of course, the theory of Aristotle are valuable to playwrights and important to know. But their intended audiences are not strictly playwrights, nor are the authors themselves playwriting teachers.

Historically, the teaching of playwriting is a relatively recent phenomenon. Beginning in the nineteenth century, books began to appear which were dedicated to play construction. In The Technique of the Drama (1863), Gustav Freytag set down the basic rules of drama. Dale Ramsey, the dramaturg for the Dramatists Guild, identifies Freytag as "the first writer for the modern stage to conceive of play construction as a subject for technical treatments" (29). Marvin Carlson notes that "Freytag's book, translated into English in 1894, served well into the twentieth century as the standard manual for young playwrights" (258-59). In 1890, Alfred Hennequin, a professor at Michigan State University, published one of the first books dedicated to the craft of playwriting for playwrights. What follows in the form of playwriting books in the next century from perhaps a half a dozen nineteenth-century models represents an explosion in how-to-write-a-play books.

The range of this study does not explore why there are so many playwriting books in the twentieth century. Rather, the research acknowledges that the volume of books

warrants a study. The choice of American authors stems directly from the phenomenon which occurred in American education in the twentieth century. Starting with George Pierce Baker's 47 class and subsequent workshop at Harvard, the inclusion of playwriting as a serious course of study in higher education is apparently an American innovation.

The discussions of the books follow a chronological pattern determined by a book's publication date. Most books rely on previous playwriting theories and presuppose some knowledge about other books in the field of playwriting. Arranging the books chronologically aids in understanding the differences and similarities between the books. In some ways, this study chronicles a history of playwriting theory in the twentieth century.

The chapters are arbitrarily divided into decades to reinforce the sequential presentation of the study. The discussion of each book consists of four parts which examine how each book is organized. They include: (1) the main, or key, ideas expressed; (2) the format of the book; (3) the style of the book; and (4) the overall purpose of the book.

Discussions of the following books (in chronological order) and authors constitute this study: Dramatic Technique by George Pierce Baker, Theory and Technique of Playwriting by John Lawson, Write That Play by Kenneth

Thorpe Rowe, The Art of Dramatic Writing by Lajos Egri, An Introduction to Playwriting by Samuel Selden, Constructing a Play by Marian Gallaway, A Primer of Playwriting by Kenneth Macgowan, The Playwright's Art: Stage, Radio, Television, Motion Pictures by Roger M. Busfield, Jr., Playwriting: How to Write for the Theater by Bernard Grebanier, Playwriting: The Structure of Action by Sam Smiley, Writing, Producing & Selling Your Play: The Complete Guide for the Beginning & Advanced Playwright by Louis Catron, The Playwright's Handbook by Frank Pike and Thomas G. Dunn, and Composing Drama for Stage and Screen by Stanley Longman.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL PROTOTYPES

One common aspect of playwriting books is the reference to past works. Except for The Playwright's Handbook, each book in this study endorses such a practice. Whether the author agrees or disagrees, ideas from other sources are acknowledged and add weight to individual arguments. For some of these books, past scholarship becomes a starting point. In A Primer of Playwriting, Kenneth Macgowan begins each chapter with at least one quote from a previous playwriting book. For others, referring to prior theories establishes a reverent tone. Marian Gallaway delicately integrates other sources to support her ideas. For others still, the reference to past work forms an elaborate bibliography and definitions as seen in Composing Drama for Stage and Screen by Stanley Longman. Because many of the books in this study rely on a reader's general knowledge of playwriting practices and dramatic theory, this chapter examines major dramatic theories and techniques for playwriting that existed prior to the twentieth century.

Dramatic theory covers a wide range of subjects, such as the nature of drama, play analysis, and theatre history. For playwrights, the most useful dramatic theories express

principles of play construction. Theorists employ them for analysis; playwrights treat them as principles of craft. Theory books discuss larger issues as well, such as the place for theatre in society and the nature of theatre in relation to the historical context in which a book is written. Gotthold Lessing's critical writings in the Hamburg Dramaturgy contain such larger issues (Robertson 491).

The play analysis sections of the dramatic theory books usually include advice to the would-be playwright. A well-known play is analyzed and broken down into its components. From the analysis, a playwright can deduce principles that are used as tools when crafting a play. A principle is an operative idea. In art a principle concerns itself with matters of craftsmanship and theory that can be learned. Sam Smiley distinguishes over ten principles that can be used to create a story. These include: balance, stake, obstacles, crises, climax, and resolution. Not every story employs or needs every principle. The point is to understand how to use them when writing or rewriting a play (Smiley 53-61).

In some instances, a playwriting book details rules for playwriting. A rule is an enforced principle. Lajos Egri simply states that "you must have a premise" in order to have a play (6). Certain styles of playwriting emerge

with the enforcement of playwriting rules. Obvious examples such as the French neoclassic rules spring to mind. But subtle persuasion can influence style as well. Louis Catron constructs his book around writing realistic plays. The distinction between rules and principles is blurred at times but their importance stems not from their definitions but rather the applications of them by playwriting theorists. The twentieth-century playwriting books range from those that use principles to analyze plays for prescriptive purposes to those that offer specific rules to be followed exactly. Most twentieth-century playwriting books consider both.

To begin at the beginning means to begin with Aristotle's Poetics. The importance of this slight volume to the writing of plays is inestimable. According to Marvin Carlson, "western theatrical theory essentially begins with Aristotle" (15). It is a rare playwriting book which does not mention Aristotle or his ideas. Barrett H. Clark notes that "there are few, if any, important contributions to drama theory and criticism which fail to take account of the [Poetics]" (4). Of the books in this study, only Dramatic Technique and The Playwright's Handbook do not refer directly to Aristotle. Clearly, a review of his major ideas is crucial to this study.

By analyzing the texts of the great Greek dramatists in the fifth century BC, Aristotle discovered how they were constructed. His intention was not prescriptive, as the Renaissance humanists regarded him, but to explore the creative process. His ideas have been absorbed, interpreted, and used to support many of the theories about drama and playwriting which followed him. In The Idea of a Theater, Francis Fergusson adapts the principles of Aristotle to study ten plays. Louis Catron designs an entire section, comprising nine chapters, around Aristotle's six elements of drama. John Lawson launches his book with a chapter on his interpretation of Aristotle.

The principle of action and the elements of drama, detailed in Poetics, have directly affected the material of playwriting books. In Chapter Six, Aristotle describes action in terms of tragedy. "For tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality" (Adams 52). Carlson states that no one argues the importance of Aristotle, but no one seems to agree on definitions (16).

The concept of action is a good case in point. Action as the basis for writing a good drama has been heavily endorsed in the twentieth century. Stanley Longman writes in a glossary section that "it [action] is the very basis

of drama" (275). The importance of action to Sam Smiley becomes apparent in his definition of drama: "Drama is structured action" (41). For John Lawson, "the problem of action is the whole problem of dramatic construction and cannot be considered as a separate question" (169). Drama simply means action in Greek. The many definitions and uses of the word have not been so simple.

The end of a tragedy, and hence a play, results from the working out of the action. An action refers not only to the physical movement but to what Fergusson calls a "psychic energy working outward" (Fergusson Poetics 65). That action is complete and whole, meaning that it has a beginning, middle, and end. Aristotle adds that tragedy is presented in a dramatic, not a narrative form. In other words, the play must not tell us the actions, but should show them to us. Catron writes that "the art of drama is showing, not telling, what meaning lies within the actions" (15). Baker reiterates that "actions speak louder than words" (21). A dramatic form implies what characters do, not what they think.

In analyzing the Greek tragedies, Aristotle determined six elements that comprised them. The six elements of tragedy--plot, character, thought, diction, melody, and spectacle--have become, in many playwriting books, the six elements of drama. They are used as guidelines for play

construction. For Aristotle, however, the elements were an exercise in inductive reasoning. Aristotle's interest in biology influenced his approach to analyzing plays. Using works of art that he knew, he tried to discover how the play was put together. He viewed life as a process that moved towards an ideal (Carlson 17). His interest in the process of becoming lead to his conclusions. An Aristotelian approach is an intrinsic one with its emphasis on process not product.

In terms of art, Aristotle's system focuses on the creation of an artwork. His intrinsic point of view concerns itself with the making of a work and not a work's ultimate purpose or societal function. His approach uncovers principles for making the best possible art object. In the Physics, Aristotle defined four causes for bringing a thing into being.

> It is clear, then, that there are causes, and that they are as many in number as we say; for they correspond to the different ways in which we can answer the question "why?" The ultimate answer to that question can be reduced to saying what the thing is . . . ; or to saying what the first mover was . . . ; or to naming the purpose . . . ; or, in the case of things that come into being, to naming the matter. (222-23)

Smiley succinctly labels the causes as material cause, formal cause, efficient cause, and final cause (10). He transfers their concepts to the creation of an art object. The material cause is "what the thing is" (Aristotle 222). It is the medium employed and consists of "the concrete materials, or matter, used. In a play, the material is words" (Smiley 10). "What the first mover was" (Aristotle 223) translates as the formal cause. A formal cause has two connotations: (1) it is the organization of any art work, and (2) it represents the "controlling idea in the work itself" (Smiley 10). "To name the purpose" (Aristotle 223) happens as a result of the other three causes. "To the matter, the form, the mover, and the purpose. Three of these often come together into one; for the essence and the purpose are one; and the proximate source of movement is of the same kind" (Aristotle 223). The final cause is the "purpose, goal, or function of the art object" (Smiley 10). Naming the matter is the efficient cause. It is the "overall style [applied] to a whole play, from [the] use of words in the dialogue to the implications [gotten] into the script about how it should be produced" (10).

In a form-matter progression (or formal cause, material cause, and efficient cause to create final cause), a play can be identified into qualitative parts (43). "Every tragedy, then, must have six parts on which its

quality depends: plot, character, speech, mind, spectacle, and melody" (Aristotle 417). Plot, character, and mind (or thought) represent the constructed objects. Speech and melody are the media employed. Spectacle presents itself as the manner in which the whole is seen. Any drama can be divided into these six elements. Smiley attests to the nature of the elements as "comprehensive and exclusive" (Smiley 11). The pervasive adoption of the elements as principles of play construction attest to their universal nature.

The influence of the Poetics on the technique of playwriting and theories of the drama is obvious. Defining action as the core of engaging drama and describing how to construct an action by use of the six elements, Aristotle provides a pragmatic system for writing plays. Other concepts expressed in the Poetics, such as catharsis, are important. But for playwrights, struggling to write coherent plays, the idea that its creation is part of a logical process influences them the most.

While Aristotle drew conclusions on the structure of plays based on pre-existing ones, Horace, in Ars Poetica, prescribed the do's and don't's of playwriting. Aristotle concerned himself with principles of creating. Horace, on the other hand, developed rules. Like Aristotle, Horace examined the play examples and practices of his time to

formulate his ideas. Horace advocated a prescriptive method for writing. Ars Poetica was actually a verse letter to the Piso Family (Adams 67). One speculation about its purpose is that he wrote on request to offer advice to the son of a family friend who wanted to be a playwright. Horace had clear notions on how to proceed.

Horace's importance to playwriting stems from two factors: (1) the specific rules of writing he advocated, and (2) designating drama as the main subject of the work (Carlson 24-25). As a lyric poet, Horace's interest in the subject of playwriting and how one becomes a playwright sound personal and idiosyncratic. He believed that one has a natural inclination to writing and therefore should work hard to continue to develop such talent. "For my part, I do not see what study can do without a rich vein of natural gift, nor what the native gift can do without culture: so much does each ask of the other and swear allegiance to it" (Adams 74).

Barrett H. Clark describes the work as a "somewhat arbitrary manual" (24). Horace is exact in how he thinks a play ought to be constructed and conceived.

> The marvelous and the offensive should be kept offstage and handled by narrative. The play must contain five acts. God should appear only when absolutely required to resolve the action. No

> more than three speaking characters should normally be on stage together. (Carlson 24)

Horace was writing about a particular mode of play fashionable at the time. The rules do not directly affect playwriting today. But other thoughts remain part of the playwriting canon.

To Horace, the purpose of drama was twofold: to be both pleasurable and useful. "The aim of the poet is either to benefit, or to amuse, or to make his words at once please and give lessons of life" (Adams 73). He instructed his charge to read the Greek models night and day. He advised that poets write what they know. "My advice to one who is to pass as a trained artist will be to take as his model real life and manners, and from thence to draw the language that will seem like that of real life" (73). Finally, he strongly urged a writer to practice writing.

The significance of Horace's advice to later playwriting books lies in the dedication to the art of the playwright. He addressed the issues of craftsmanship as they pertained to creating a playwright. His extrinsic style described a play as an end product, not as a process. When examining later playwriting books and dramatic theories, it is important to understand the differences between an extrinsic and intrinsic approach to creating.

Discussing Aristotle and Horace provides an origin for the concepts as well as a comparison.

To leap from Aristotle and Horace to the theorists of the nineteenth century indicates a gap between these periods of playwriting theory. There are portions of extant treatises which can be extrapolated as helpful to playwrights, but they are few. Hrosvitha, the tenth-century German playwright, writes about her craft but only in terms of what she tried to accomplish. She represents a link between Horace and the Neoclassicists in that her comments come from a writer's perspective. With the discovery of Aristotle's Poetics in the sixteenth century, the Neoclassicists interpreted his works as laws and establish ironclad rules that must be strictly followed. Castelvetro, the sixteenth-century Italian critic, was the first to state that the unities of action, time, and place are essential (Brockett 113). The Neoclassicists adopted the rule of five acts directly from Horace. From Aristotle and Horace, they appropriate verisimilitude, or the appearance of truth (111-12).

Fred Nolte, in his book on Lessing, Grillparzer, and Goethe, calls Gotthold Lessing, the eighteenth-century German critic, the greatest dramatic critic since Aristotle (146). Lessing provided an inestimable service to later generations in his compiled writings known as the Hamburg

Dramaturgy, which he used as a forum for expressing his thoughts on the nature of drama. Lessing attacked the Neoclassicists for their strictness and for what he considered their misinterpretation of Aristotle's notion of unity. His definition of action defers to Aristotle: "On the stage we want to see who the people are, and we can only see it from their actions" (Lessing 27). Actions speak louder than words for Lessing, and he writes often of motivation as action, not physical deeds.

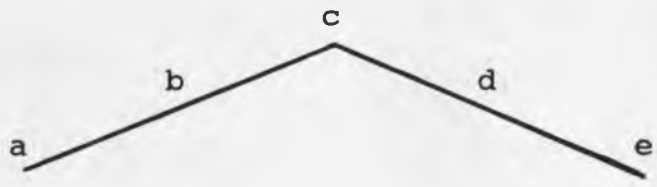
Lessing also insisted on morality in drama. John Gardner defines morality as life-affirming (23). Lessing hints that morality also means having a purpose. "To act with a purpose is what raises man above the brutes, to invent with purpose, to imitate with a purpose, is that which distinguishes genius from the petty artists who only invent to invent, imitate to imitate" (Lessing 99). Lessing provides an important link between Aristotle and the playwriting theorists of the nineteenth century for his contemporary reevaluation of Aristotle and for writing on the responsibilities of the creative process.

As for nineteenth-century playwriting theories, three books prove especially influential to the twentieth-century playwriting books. These are: Technique of the Drama by Gustav Freytag, The Law of the Drama by Ferdinand Brunetière, and Play-Making: A Manual of Craftsmanship by

William Archer. Summarizing several key ideas expressed in these books frames the in-depth discussions of the latter books.

An examination of Gustav Freytag's Technique of the Drama reveals a pragmatic approach to the technical aspects of the craft of playwriting. In some ways, his advice harkens back to Horace in its specificity. What he attempts to do, however, is discern the basic laws of dramatic construction. He analyzes five dramatic writers--Sophocles, Shakespeare, Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller--for their common elements.

Freytag's lasting contribution stems from his idea that a play's action can be diagrammed as a linear progression. He illustrated this point with a drawing now known as the "Freytag Pyramid" (Freytag 115):



He subtitled it "Five Parts and Three Crises of Drama." He labeled the parts as: (a) introduction, (b) rise, (c) climax, (d) return or fall, and (e) catastrophe. They each have their own purpose in construction. A play has three crises which are the introduction, climax, and catastrophe. A crisis "rises from the introduction with the entrance of

the exciting forces of the climax, and falls from here to the catastrophe" (114-15). One of the major drawbacks to this theory is that all five parts are drawn having equal length. The climax comes in the middle of the play. While his equilateral plotting falls out of favor in twentieth-century books, the idea that a play is a constructed object that can be evaluated revolutionizes playwriting. What is theory before now becomes concrete.

Freytag believes that drama presents a struggle (104). He defines a play as a series of struggles and determines that the initial struggle needs to be revealed early on for the audience (125). He carefully details how this can be accomplished. Judicious use of the exposition aids the linear progression.

Freytag speaks of writing a play as if it were a craft which can be learned. His idea of it as a constructed object supposes that if A, or introduction, is properly constructed, then B, C, D, and E will follow sequentially. In order for the pyramid to work (in other words, for A to begin and for B, C, D, and E to follow), a play needs dramatic action. Action is the course of events that evince the inner life of the characters "only as participation in an event or occurrence, the course and internal connection of which become apparent to the spectator the dramatic process in the soul of the poet"

(22). He proposes that action is not the events themselves but the motivation behind the events.

> An action, in itself, is not dramatic. Passionate feeling, in itself, is not dramatic. Not the presentation of a passion for itself, but of a passion which leads to action is the business of dramatic art; not the presentation of an event for itself, but for its effect on a human soul is the dramatist's mission. (19)

The essence of drama, for Freytag, is the inner drive, or passion, which creates events. Freytag demonstrates how that drive can be mechanically manipulated to cause dramatic action.

Freytag's diagrammed construct has a significant effect on twentieth-century playwriting approaches. W. T. Price, a turn-of-the-century lawyer, postulates a formula for writing a play, known as "The Proposition" (50). Lawson diagrams it as: A b c d e f G H. "A is the exposition; b c d e f are the cycles of the rising action; G is the obligatory scene; H is the climax" (246). Not every writer accepts such a literal approach, but the persuasive feature from Freytag illustrates that a play is a constructed object.

Ferdinand Brunetière, a nineteenth-century French academician, elevates Freytag's idea of struggle to the

idea of volition, or human willpower. In his book, The Law of the Drama, Brunetière says that theater is the "spectacle of a will striving towards a goal, and conscious of the means which it employs" (Clark 382). In an Aristotelian sense, action substitutes for striving and the means refers to the causes. The will represents the inner force within a character. Consciousness affects actions and creates conflict. Conflict is the core of dramatic action.

Brunetière's conception of conflict as the central ingredient to drama has its supporters and detractors. Kenneth Macgowan, in a chapter titled "Wills in Conflict," supports the idea of the conflict of wills but stresses that it is only a tool in the craft of playwriting (Macgowan 89).

The British playwright and critic William Archer vehemently disagrees with Brunetière's theory that conflict is the essence of drama. In his book, Play-Making: A Manual of Craftsmanship, he directly attacks Brunetière's position on the importance of conflict. "It is clearly an error to make conflict indispensable to drama and especially to insist that the conflict must be between will and will" (Archer 31). He has little patience for the followers of Brunetière's definition of will in a psychological or metaphysical vein. He cautions on the

inadequacy of hanging the balance of a play on an obstacle, fearing that many a good play would not have been written if the dramatist had stopped to ask himself if he had an adequate obstacle for it (33).

Archer advises the use of a scenario. "In a dramatic structure of any considerable extent, proportion, balance, and the interconnection of parts are so essential that a scenario is almost as indispensable to a dramatist as a set of plans to an architect" (54). He wants it flexible to prepare for any changes, especially in character. He considers it to be an "unfavorable sign when a drama presents itself at an early stage with a forced and unalterable outline" (56). He fears that such a play will have no life to it.

Archer defines a play as a "more or less rapidly-developing crisis in dealing or circumstance" (56). For him, a play has a progression, but unlike Freytag, he believes that the crisis must occur near the end of the play. The crisis builds as a result of tensions and circumstance. Crisis is the essence of drama to him, not conflict (36).

The distinction between playwriting principles and dramatic theory is not always a clearly defined one. Principles do not always govern practices; similarly, theory does not represent dramatic reality. Contrarily,

principles emerge as specifics whereas theories remain more abstract. Dramatic theory certainly influences playwriting principles. The empirical explorations of Aristotle laid a groundwork. By offering rules, Horace set a pattern for prescription that some future playwriting books adopt. Each of the nineteenth-century theorists had his key element to propose as the essential ingredient in drama. These examples act as historical prototypes to the principles and ideas of playwriting craftsmanship in the twentieth-century playwriting books.

CHAPTER THREE

BEGINNING TWENTIETH-CENTURY PATTERNS

This chapter examines three books: Dramatic Technique by George Pierce Baker, Theory and Technique of Playwriting by John Howard Lawson, and Write That Play by Kenneth Thorpe Rowe. The period covered is the 1920s and 1930s. Although Baker's book appeared first in 1919, its placement at the beginning of this study refers to its importance to the field of playwriting and subsequent playwriting books. There were many playwriting books published during these two decades, especially in the 1920s. What distinguishes the three books chosen for discussion is their continuing influence on playwriting and distinct points of view.

When Baker's book was published, he had been teaching playwriting for approximately 15 years. Curiously, his thoughts on teaching playwriting are not what one might initially expect from an experienced teacher. In the Preface, he writes of his concern about the rise in playwriting courses (Baker v). His concern materializes from his doubts of the capabilities of undergraduates. From his experience of teaching, he concludes that undergraduates were not yet mature to espouse ideas and emotions in such a sophisticated form as drama.

Dramatic technique refers to the means of expressing one's ideas and emotions. Baker believes that by exposing the inexperienced playwright to solutions found by other dramatists to problems that may be similar, he could shorten the time of a playwright's apprenticeship (iv). Baker sees himself as a crucial link in the education and process of becoming a playwright--the teacher-pupil consultations are as important as reading plays, going to performances, and learning other theories.

The book's subject is the process of how to get a play written. He concerns himself little with the parts of playwriting; rather, the emphasis is getting it down on paper. To that end he urges "complete freedom of choice in subject and complete freedom in treatment so that the individuality of the artist may have its best expression" (iv). With a heavy use of examples from past plays, he attempts to show how to write a play, rather than tell.

According to Baker, the only essential ingredient for drama is emotion. A "play is the shortest distance from emotions to emotions" (21). He agrees with Aristotle on the importance of action. He believes what characters do in crises defines them, not what they may think.

Baker incorporates action with his idea of drama. A playwright has two goals: "first, as promptly as possible to win the attention of the audience; secondly, to hold

that interest steady or, better, to increase it till the final curtain falls" (16). Baker insists that emotion maintains the desired audience interest. Action represents the "quickest means of arousing emotion in an audience" (21). Drama, then, is a "presentation of an individual or group of individuals so as to move an audience to responsive emotion of the kind desired by the dramatist and to the amount required" (13).

In an Aristotelian context, Baker does not enlist the elements as structural tools. Their inclusion strengthens his position on emotional response. Plot evolves from a constant process of selecting the subject matter, proportioning the material, and arranging the emphasis. The purpose of the process is to shape an action which makes clear the dramatist's idea (80-81). The clearer the point of view of the play, the stronger is the emotional response of the audience (154).

As for the other elements, Baker addresses character, thought, and dialogue. While a play can exist without character, it cannot exist without some form of action. Characterization, however, is important to action, much as Aristotle described character as the material of plot. "Characterization is the chief means of creating in an audience sympathy for the subject or the people of the play" (234).

Thought involves the appropriateness of initial subject matter in terms of audience appeal. While he advocates complete freedom of choice, he admits that some subjects are more worthy of emotional exploration than others and a playwright is wise to know of them (515).

In a long chapter on dialogue, Baker divides the page into two columns. On one side, he exhibits an example of an effective dialogue. On the other, he explains why the dialogue is not as effective (309-419). He cautions that good dialogue does not maintain audience interest by itself (154). Baker notes that if the character and the situation are clearly assigned, then the right words should come from the characters to carry the emotion to the audience (344).

Baker considers the scenario an integral part of the process in writing a play. Using a scenario properly provides a dramatist with the best way to define the play (79-80). He elaborates on what should be included in a scenario: setting, number of acts, genre, dramatic personae, time and place, historical background, and detailed descriptions of the action in each scene (426-466). The chapter on scenario contains numerous examples. Baker laments the rush to actual writing. If playwrights employ a scenario, they could avoid any backtracking.

> The very people who shrink from forcing themselves to work out all the details required by a good scenario are merely dodging the inevitable. He who wants to write his play rapidly will find that he makes time in his final composition by taking all the time he needs in the preliminary task of drawing a good scenario. (463)

For Baker, a scenario focuses on the emotional quality for each scene. To accomplish this, Baker advises a flexible scenario which can adjust itself (461-62). The scenario functions like a "photograph of the mind of the person who writes it. If he is not ready to write his play, the scenario will show it" (462-63). Clearly, in Baker's technique, a scenario holds a significant place in the process of writing plays.

The style of the book is fundamentally non-technical. Under broad chapter headings, Baker presents a thesis and sets out to illustrate it through the use of many examples. He summarizes at the end of each chapter. The book contains ten chapters beginning with the essentials of drama which are action and emotion. What follows is his technique for achieving those essentials. To transform a subject into a dramatic plot, a playwright uses clearness, proportion, and arrangement (47). Once the play is shaped,

the details of characterization and dialogue are secured with the use of a scenario.

Baker concludes the book with a brief chapter on the dramatist and his public. He advises playwrights to write for themselves and not for the public because eventually the public would dictate what subjects can be dramatized (514). He believes that the only reason people become playwrights is because they "cannot be happy except in writing plays" (520). He recognizes that writing plays is a difficult art but thinks the rewards are great. As for his technique, he offers it as a means for playwrights to discover their own style.

> Accept these principles as stated or quarrel with most of them; but realize that any principles, whether accepted from others or self-taught, should be but the beginning of a life-long training by which the individual will pass from what he shares of general dramatic expression to what is peculiarly his own expression. (520-21)

Stripped to its essentials, Baker's book develops one equation: the more powerful the emotional response in an audience, the better the play. How one approaches that cumulative power is the point of the book. He suggests using his compositional practices such as clearness, arrangement, movement, proportion, selection, and emphasis.

Writing for the stage implies an inherent structure. By maintaining an intrinsic tone throughout, Baker dedicates himself to the process and evolution of such a structure.

Theory and Technique of Playwriting by John Howard Lawson first appeared in 1936. Its numerous editions since illustrate both its popularity and importance to playwrights and playwriting teachers. Along with the books of Baker and Archer, it ranks as one of the most influential books in the first half of the twentieth century.

Lawson divides the book into four parts. The first two parts present an historical overview of dramatic philosophy and criticism from Aristotle to Ibsen, Shaw to O'Neill. Part Three on dramatic structure and Part Four on dramatic composition deal directly with the special problems of the playwright and the playwriting process.

In a new introduction written in 1960, Lawson steadfastly adheres to the notion that theatre must have social significance, an idea prevalent in the 1930s and 1940s. What he wants is for theatre to return to Shaw's definition of its function: "The theatre is a factor of thought, a prompter of conscience, an elucidator of social conduct, an armory against despair and darkness, and a temple of the ascent of man" (Lawson xxxii).

Lawson presents a logical cycle of how theatre works. A drama is written because it has meaning to the playwright. The events on the stage embody the meaning for the playwright. The meaning from the playwright, and ultimately to the audience, comes from its social significance to that playwright and to that audience. Lawson's point of view is markedly clear from the beginning. His theme of social significance in plays colors everything he says.

Lawson champions conflict as the key element in all drama. He fashions conflict as it relates to will. Drama is the presentation of "a conflict of will" (160). A character's will represents an action. An action is a change in equilibrium. Persons exert their will against other persons to accomplish some specific goal (168). Lawson qualifies the will as conscious, meaning that characters are fully aware of their actions. The strength of the will "required is the strength needed to bring the action to an issue, to create a change of equilibrium between the individual and the environment" (168). The environment in this case is the social framework, or significance, that Lawson asks every drama to have. After all, drama "deals with social relationships" (163).

Lawson tends to hang an entire play on its social framework. He understands the dramatic limitation of such

a broad base. He realizes that a full biography on every character based on social, political, moral, and psychological matter is not necessary for audiences to understand characters. But he insists that knowing as much detail about a character as possible further informs the compressed time on the stage and make it that much richer (201).

> Creating a complex character requires selection. The process of selection is not a narrative process. The playwright is not looking for illustrations or psychological material, but for a system of actions--events which compress the material lives of the characters in moments of explosive tension, and which expand as afar as possible in their effect on the environment. (201)

Widening the play to include moral, social, political, and psychological forces enables playwrights a "more detailed detailed selection of the stage-action. The reserve of events, behind and around the play, gives sweep and sureness to the action, and gives more meaning to every line of dialogue, every gesture, every situation" (202).

Lawson defines a play as a "system of actions," or a system of equilibrium changes (168). His ideal play piles on conflict after conflict and propels them toward a

climax. The pattern of a play follows its thought instead of a cause and effect plausibility. "A play, conforming to the laws of thought, create conventions which violate physical plausibility without a qualm" (230).

Lawson borrows the term continuity from motion pictures to describe the chain of conflicts. As long as an action creates a change in the conflict, it is not necessary that it come from the preceding action. Every change in conflict creates a new set of obstacles. Delaying and intensifying the climax is the idea behind encouraging as many changes in conflict as possible (231). The final, tension-filled moment erupting into a climax is what Lawson wants to happen in every play. In a play, "tension depends on the tensile strength of the elements of the drama, the degree of stress and strain which can be withstood before the final expulsion" (232). A social framework strengthens the elements of drama such as characters, actions, and thoughts.

In defining dramatic action, Lawson distinguishes between action and activity. Action is a kind of activity (170). He complains that Aristotle spoke of the necessity of [dramatic] action for a play, but never clearly defined what he meant by it (5). He assesses action as the basic ingredient of drama (4). Much of Lawson's technique revolves around the proper structuring of action:

selection, unity, exposition, obligatory scene, and climax. The effectiveness of action "does not depend on what people do but on the meaning of what they do" (170). The meaning is reflected in character which contributes to the action.

Lawson addresses the problems of characterization in a late chapter in the book. According to Lawson, "the main problem of characterization is progression" (286). The way to make a character progress, or change, is to force that character through events. Lawson devises a simple equation which propels characters: "the more thoroughly the environment is realized, the more deeply we understand the character" (280).

Curiously, with all the talk about environment, Lawson spends no time discussing the environment of the theatre. A cursory discussion of audience is given as a postscript. Lawson concludes that the "audience is the ultimate necessity which gives the playwright's work its purpose and meaning" (299). If the purpose of drama is to communicate to a live audience who actively respond to that communication, then knowing the social composition of the audience aids in evaluating the response.

Lawson utilizes examples from plays to highlight his ideas. At the end of most chapters, he summarizes his points. He states a previous theory or approach to a

particular definition, questions its validity, and then comes to a new conclusion.

Technique is the use of technical elements for artistic expression. Lawson presents a smooth technique. The social significance of a play creates the scenario. Choosing the right environment leads to the right details. Details create actions. A series of actions cause tensions which resolve at the end with the final climax. The path to the end of a play is, unfortunately, not always easy. Lawson fails to account for the unexpected. He gives the impression that once the process has begun, there is no stopping until the end.

Kenneth Thorpe Rowe's book, Write That Play, was published shortly after Theory and Technique of Playwriting. Written in 1939, the book takes great pains to analyze plays as examples of general principles of playwriting techniques. For students of playwriting who can learn from the use of detailed analysis, this book should be useful. While Baker employs examples from many different plays, Rowe uses an in-depth analysis of three plays to frame his points.

Rowe describes writing plays as an "arduous job" (Rowe 24). The most complicated literary form is a play. It requires both imagination as well as intensive study.

There is no secret formula for writing a good

> play, but the selection and organization of material which is available to all may sensitize the student, so to speak, to experiences, so that perceptions come in months which might have taken years. (24)

Rowe hopes that the insights he provides with the play analyses shorten the trial and error apprenticeship of the playwright.

Rowe initiates the process of writing a play with a definition of one. Like Lawson, he believes that conflict is essential to a play. "Reduced to the barest outline, a play becomes a statement of conflict" (27). The first principle of drama, for Rowe, is unity. Therefore, conflict in a drama must be unified. Using Aristotle's definition, Rowe concurs that it must be unity of an action (29).

After he defines what drama is, Rowe discusses where to find it. "Where there is conflict there is the material of drama" (38). He claims that there are four impulses which stir the dramatic imagination: a plot, a character, a time, or a background (49). He suggests that one write what one knows as a source. He distinguishes between writing what one knows and writing about oneself. Writing about oneself lacks dramatic imagination (45). Other source ideas include transposing old stories in

contemporary terms. He cites O'Neill's Mourning Becomes Electra as an example. He also suggests dramatizing novels.

In the chapter on building a play, Rowe carefully diagrams the structure of a play. An opening situation is "a state of unstable equilibrium" (53). The conflict illustrates the major dramatic question. Discussion of the dramatic question leads to the crisis, or turning point. At the conclusion of the crisis, the play ends in a resolution (53-55). Complications are to be inserted often to keep the action moving forward (57). Freytag's pyramid takes on an irregular shape with the main conflict occurring later in the course of the play.

After the analysis of the two one-act plays, A Night at an Inn and Riders to the Sea, Rowe continues with advice on characterization and dialogue. Character must be convincing and consistent. He suggests the "writer know all about the character, his life between the scenes as well as on the stage, his life before the play opens, his childhood, perhaps his parents and grandparents" (149). He makes clear the need for imagination to bring characters to life onstage. Good dialogue strikes a balance between the fictional character and the author's ideas. The "way of drama is revelation, not exposition" (157).

Following an analysis of A Doll's House, Rowe discusses scenarios and revisions. He advocates that playwrights use a scenario. It has two functions: it indicates the complications, and divides a play into acts, scenes, entrances, and exits. For revisions, he proposes an interesting idea. He suggests using a "two column form, with the summaries of what happens running in one column, and the analysis of function in the other" (340). The action of a play is not only what physically happens but also the motivations behind those happenings. By incorporating the two column form, a playwright can shape both types of actions simultaneously while outlining a proposed script.

Rowe concludes the book with a chapter on the functions and values of the theatre. He discusses how theatre traditionally has fit into society and what the roles of certain types of plays are. He speaks of the Elizabethan theatre in an historical perspective, as a function of society, and as a source for variety. Variety, in this case, means different types of plays. His historical conventions trace elements of the Greek, Elizabethan, and Japanese Noh theatre to the 1930s.

The book contains 15 chapters, two of which are the text and analysis of the three plays. Rowe includes a postscript which is a chapter by chapter analysis of the

book. As a reference guide, the postscript is very useful. He adds a brief section at the end, titled "A note on what to do with a play after it is written." The chapter puts a coda on the end of the playwriting process as he sees it.

Stylistically, the approach is academic. The painstaking play analyses included imply a more scholarly approach to playwriting. The organization of the book proceeds in an even and logical manner. Rowe systematically evaluates the principles of playwriting. The book outlines point by point the technique that he recommends a playwright should follow.

Apparently, Rowe's purpose is to encourage more playwriting. He accumulates and dissects the process of playwriting to shorten the learning process for the novice playwright. The book begins with an assessment of the condition of drama in America. Rowe appraises the theatre of his time (1939) as belonging to playwrights. He perceives George Pierce Baker's classes at Harvard, Frederick Koch at the University of North Carolina with his Carolina Playmakers, and the Federal Play Bureau (21-22) as positive signs. He wants to keep the era of playwriting alive. He knows how difficult it is to write for the theatre. Rowe devotes himself in this book to easing the task.

Maurice Ferber, a student in George Pierce Baker's second class of English 47 at Harvard, tells that "Baker used to say that taking 47 would save the would-be playwright five or ten years of mistakes" (Kinne 107). The advice given by the three books examined in this chapter hopes to achieve the same goal. Each book emphasizes a different point about playwriting that is essential. Baker's technique illustrates how to achieve an emotional response from an audience. Lawson speaks of conflict created by the social significance placed within a drama. Rowe approaches playwriting as an analytical process.

Techniques for writing plays are useful. They do not substitute for inspiration; instead, they enhance and shape it. The three methods presented here for writing plays emphasize that connection. The dual nature of a play extends to the dual nature of writing one. The books included in this chapter are significant for their differing techniques and for their similar goals.

CHAPTER FOUR

EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY TRENDS

The number of playwriting books published in any given period varies. During the 1920s, at least a dozen books appeared, including two on writing the one-act play. Following World War II, another boom period for playwriting books occurred. This chapter treats five of the post World War II books: The Art of Dramatic Writing by Lajos Egri, An Introduction to Playwriting by Samuel Selden, Constructing a Play by Marian Gallaway, A Primer of Playwriting by Kenneth Macgowan, and The Playwright's Art by Roger M. Busfield, Jr.

Lajos Egri, originally from Hungary, taught writing in New York at the Egri School of Writing in addition to teaching writing to members of the film industry in Los Angeles. The Art of Dramatic Writing is a revision of an earlier work, How to Write a Play (1942). Since its appearance in 1946, the importance to playwrights and playwriting teachers remains strong. Teachers still recommend The Art of Dramatic Writing to playwrights (Kahn 1990). The book exudes an enthusiasm for its point of view that is inspirational.

The Art of Dramatic Writing contains four broad chapters: premise, character, conflict, and a general

section. The first three topics present themselves as Egri's key guides to writing a play. A fuller discussion of them follows a summary of the fourth chapter. In the general section, Egri undertakes lesser points and briefly discusses them. Structured in an essay form, the subjects include dialogue, exposition, the nature of art, how to get ideas, and writing for television. He concludes the book with three appendices. In Appendix A, he analyzes five plays using his methods. A cursory discussion of how to market a play follows. The last appendix lists the longest running plays on Broadway in order of most performances dating from the turn of the century until December 1, 1962.

According to Egri, the foundation for writing any play lies in its premise. "The very first thing you must have is a premise" (Egri 7). A premise is a statement of purpose that proves the basis for an argument. A premise differs from an idea. Many premises begin as ideas, but an idea, by its very nature, remains static. "No idea, and no situation, was ever strong enough to carry you through to its logical conclusion without a clear-cut premise" (6). A premise, however, must be proved, which necessitates an action, and leads to a conclusion. Achieving a conclusion in dramatic terms implies dialogue, movement, and conflict. Egri decrees that the clearer the premise, the better the play (6).

A premise contains character, conflict, and resolution. While it needs to be well-formulated, a premise should not be obvious either (29). A good premise seamlessly connects with story and character. The point of such meticulous preparation work is for the playwright to know exactly where the play is headed. Egri echoes George Pierce Baker when he recommends postponing actual writing until the proper preparations have been laid.

Egri's idea of premise as a key ingredient to the writing of plays is hardly an original one: Brunetière speaks of goal and Lawson calls it environment. Egri differs from the others in how he proposes to formulate the premise. He wants it to originate from character. He argues with Aristotle who writes that character is secondary to the plot. Egri insists that "character creates plot, not vice versa" (95). Words represent a character. Egri declares that character is the basic material that dramatists use (32). He believes that human character is the force which unifies all parts of the play. Premise may be the essential element in a play, but the role of character in dramatic creation is crucial.

The subtitle of <u>The Art of Dramatic Writing</u> is <u>Its Basis in the Creative Interpretation of Human Motives</u>. In a play, characters engage an audience's attention. Therefore, writers must understand human motives, why

people do what they do. He divides character into three dimensions: physiology, sociology, and psychology. Fusing these dimensions creates unity in a character (33-43). Unity of character reflects directly in the clearness of the premise. Egri adds the element of environment, meaning external circumstances, to complete his definition of a character. "A character, then, is the sum total of his physical make-up and the influences his environment exerts upon him" (47).

Egri highlights orchestration and unity of opposites in concluding his discussion on character. Orchestrating characters refers to a variety of the types of characters. Characters that are perfectly orchestrated represent a specific point of view in relation to each other. To ensure the continuance of dramatic conflict, a writer employs the unity of opposites. Simply stated, the unity of opposites "is one in which compromise is impossible" (119).

Delineated characterizations provide a ground for conflict because the goals of one character are not necessarily the goals of another. Designing a character whose goals oppose those of another character establishes a situation in which compromise between the two is impossible. In that situation, the conflict leads naturally to a climax. The climax is the moment when the

two opposite forces confront each other. Without the combination of variety and opposites, Egri claims that a play will never end satisfactorily (124).

Egri relates conflict to character and premise. "The intensity of the conflict will be determined by the strength of will of the three-dimensional individual who is the protagonist" (133). The conflict stems from the conscious will of the protagonist striving to achieve a goal initiated by the premise of the play (137). Egri equates action with motion. Motion is possible through contradiction, or unity of opposites. Contradiction stems from character and creates conflict. Thus, the established cycle of motion, contradiction, and character generates movement. Movement, connected with transition, forces a climax, crises, and resolution (218-29).

For Egri, art is the essence of life, not the mirror of it (266). The essence derives itself from nature. Nature is a constantly evolving process. The art of playwriting must adhere to those natural laws. After all, "life is change" (40). Character, being the most essential dramatic element, must follow that law. A good play comes from knowledge, not instinct. The knowledge invested in character begins the chain reaction.

> A character stands revealed through conflict; conflict begins with a decision; a decision is

> made because of the premise of your play. The character's decision necessarily sets in motion another decision, from his adversary. And it is these decisions, one resulting from the other, which propel the play to its ultimate destination: the proving of the premise. (60-61)

Egri's purpose is to connect nature to art, and in doing so identifies character as the link.

If Egri presents a play as a result of characters proving a premise, Samuel Selden provides a method for shaping the characters and premise into a coherent structure. In An Introduction to Playwriting, Selden supplies checklists for the beginning playwright to follow when writing a play. He fully expects playwrights to create their own methods and eventually set aside his book (Selden 4). What he offers is elementary instruction in playwriting. The guidelines he supplies are only meant as a means to an end, not the ends to a means. He encourages experimentation and originality in the theatre. "In successful playwriting, knowledge must ever be wedded to imagination" (25). His book is a beginning point.

Selden's extensive interest in the theatre subsumes the collaborative elements of it. He comments on the sequence of playmaking. Playwrights initiate the process by crafting a particular vision into a play. The text

passes to the interpretive artists in the theatre: actors, designers, and directors (67). Besides playwriting, Selden has written books on acting (First Steps in Acting), technical components (Stage Scenery and Lighting), and production in general (Modern Theatre Practice). In An Introduction to Playwriting, he encourages the beginning playwright to understand the points of view expressed by actors, designers, stage managers, and audiences. He devotes a chapter to each segment in the collaborative effort.

The book covers the craft of playwriting in four broad sections: Preparing the Material, Shaping the Play, Developing the Play, and a Perspective on the Play. The order of the headings indicates the sequential order of playwriting according to Selden. The first section contains three chapters which discuss the pre-writing steps. He details the kinds of questions that need to be asked and answered during this thinking period. Like Egri, Selden believes in character as an originator of a play. "At least nine out of ten plays start with a character" (9). Bearing in mind the importance of character to a play, its dramatic potential becomes crucial. Suitable characters for a drama are those who desire a change. Wanting something generates movement (21).

Selden next asks a writer to pause at this stage in the process to determine if the idea chosen to write about fits the form of a play (15). Selden's point is to differentiate between the literary forms. In a short story, for instance, he describes the form as narrative and personal. But a play suggests another tack. Selden defines a play by its voice. Plays tell stories through character, not through the self (16). Plays indirectly express a playwright's point of view.

Selden finishes the pre-writing section with a discussion on character and plot. Playwrights should think as much and as deeply as possible before actually writing. He asks that the playwright carefully consider the strength of both the characters and the plot. Selden comments on five factors actors consider in looking at characters: dramatic presence, character of importance, "someone to root for," something to fear, and action (69-75). He includes these criteria as a guideline for creating strong characters.

In the section on "Preparing the Material," Selden presents a simple outline of the steps in writing a play: (1) the germinal idea, (2) scenario, (3) first draft, and (4) revision (32-35). Later, he presents elaborate checklists for the revision phase of the writing process.

These checklists comprise the most interesting contribution Selden makes to the canon of playwriting books.

The first critical analysis of the finished draft deals with the inner forces of the story. One of the primary principles in dramatic structure is creating contrast, or inner forces, to initiate conflict (73). Selden devises a concise triad of a Principle Force, Opposing Force, and Deciding Agent which promotes conflict, climax, and resolution.

> The Principle Force is that driving desire of the central character which motivates the action. The Opposing Force is the desire of someone else 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. (41)

Selden spends little time discussing established playwriting terms such as exposition, rising action, or recognition. While he cautions the beginner to avoid obsessing about craftsmanship terms, he realizes their importance in script revision (49). An effective script contains the five following points of craftsmanship. He presents them as a formula called "The Iron Check List," or as the acronym P A S T O. "These five letters indicate the fundamental structure of a play: Preparation [exposition],

Attack [point of attack], Struggle [crises], Turn [climax], and Outcome [resolution]" (50-53).

Selden presumes a need for a second check list. After ensuring the formal structure of a play contains the five points of PASTO, the playwright uses the second checklist to evaluate the quality of the script. The "Golden Check List" includes the following: Theme, Issue, and Drive. Theme refers to the idea for the story. Issue concerns the central conflict. Drive relates to the protagonist's desire. Confronting the core elements of a play solidifies them. A successful play is single in purpose, clear in its stakes, and strong in convictions (58-64).

Selden ends the book with a brief section on the importance of audience. As well as understanding other theatrical artists, playwrights must know audiences. As a social institution, the theatre represents a place where ideas are communicated. An audience receives the communication. In order to understand their response and to craft plays which they can understand, a playwright needs a knowledge of audience psychology (93).

Selden approaches the material in a strident fashion. With no direct references to other playwriting books and the use of few examples from plays to illustrate points, Selden presents a tightly constructed primer for beginning playwrights. While he stresses several times that the

practicing playwright should develop personal check lists, he also sets forth fixed ideas about plays and the theatre. "It can be said with small fear of dispute that most successful plays conform to the Iron Check List" (58). Ideas can be misconstrued as rules. His purpose is not to provide rules. He understands that craftsmanship is learned by trial and error when actually writing (4). Selden's intention is to provide ideas to beginning playwrights for shaping their own method. The value of this book lies in the outlines it presents. Selden leaves the individual playwright to fill in the details.

In Constructing a Play, Marian Gallaway combines previous thoughts on dramatic technique with a pedantic approach. In many ways, her book, written in 1950, catalogues playwriting techniques in the twentieth century. The numerous references to Baker, Lawson, Egri, and others present an overview of playwriting theory up to the 1950s. Gallaway designs assignments and exercises to coordinate with the theories. She also provides an additional reading list at the end of each chapter which invariably lists other prominent playwriting books. An extensive use of examples from plays reinforces her ideas as well as the other ideas she advocates. The result is a quantitative and scholarly approach to the process of playwriting.

Gallaway borrows from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel to define dramatic action. To Hegel, dramatic refers to a sudden and often decisive change (Gallaway 21). All of life is potentially dramatic as it presents the relationships between people. Naturally, a person strives to assert oneself. In the process of assertion, people collide together which disrupts the initial harmony. The disruption causes conflict. The confrontation leads to reestablishing harmony (21-23). Life is about restoring harmony.

A play illustrates the life process. Gallaway defines a play as "a report on life" (31). The action which results to restore harmony is dramatic action. More directly put, "dramatic action begins with the intrusion of some factor which destroys the peace of the protagonist, forcing him to recognize the disruptive elements and to seek a means of regaining harmony" (69). Drama happens not because someone is right or wrong, but because someone intensely wants something (94). The pattern follows Hegel's dialectical approach: thesis (harmony), antithesis (intrusion), and synthesis (restoration). Gallaway incorporates a dialectical structure for crafting plays.

To begin writing a play, a playwright must have something to say. Gallaway stresses the importance of an individual point of view about the material. Realistic

accuracy in a play is not important to her, but an honest reflection of the playwright's attitude about the subject is. "What characterizes a work of art is the artist's particular attitude toward the world and especially toward the material in which he is writing" (31). Drama requires an emotional response from an audience. In order to obtain such a response, a playwright must know how much emotion the audience should feel. The emotional response of an audience is calculated by the perceptions of a playwright.

The scenario aids in shaping a playwright's perceptions. Gallaway devotes several chapters to the clarity, economy, and emphasis of that point of view in the first draft of the scenario. She cautiously advises that background detail be completed before actual writing begins. "It is not necessary to 'start from the end' but one must know where he is going before charting his course" (114). Expressing a point of view in a play is its key element, according to Gallaway.

Like Selden, Gallaway encourages the playwright to ask questions which test the potential strengths of a play. Before constructing a scenario, she asks five questions: Whom is the play about? What does [he] need to make life harmonious? What impressed [his] getting it? Does [he] get it? How does [he] succeed or fail? (45). Answering these questions provides a unity which supports the point

of view of the playwright as well as leads to a plausible climax. "No amount of fine dialogue or clear situations or tentative characterizations will give the glimpse of unity which is fundamental to the experience of climax" (45).

Another device that Gallaway includes for constructing a unified plot is the "And, But, Therefore" test. In deciding where next to proceed with the story, she illustrates how the three connectives can be used. "And" usually links character relationships in the beginning of a play. Romeo and Juliet love each other. "But" establishes a conflict, contrast, or suspense. But their families are feuding. "Therefore" results in consequences of resolution of the situation. Therefore, they cannot be together. The connectives work on plotting one point to another as well as shaping the overall action of a play (148).

Gallaway says little of Aristotle, except to recommend the Poetics at the end of many chapters. She dismisses the debate of plot versus character. As far as she is concerned, "plot is character in action" (257). Instead, she concentrates on the playwright's task, which is to create plausible characters and actions. To create believable characters, she suggests using a skeleton. "A good play proceeds from real, believable characters: and the most full and understandable revelation of character is through action" (257). Gallaway believes that the ultimate

structural goal of a play is the climax, or the confrontation leading to the restoration of harmony. She calls the structure a skeleton. It represents the course of action, or story, that enables the protagonist to gain his objective (116). To establish a strong action, she devises a dialectical equation: "A [thesis] wants B [synthesis] but C [antithesis] stands in the way" (95).

The rest of the book deals with the basic tools of playwriting such as suspense, complications, pointers, and planters. They are not rules but are presented to save the playwright "time, energy, and the heart-breaking frustration of working by the trial-and-error method" (39). Tools solve problems that arise during the course of planning and writing a play. Gallaway's design for constructing a play follows a linear pattern.

While there are other ways to construct a play, she convincingly presents her point of view with the use of historical precedent and examples from successful plays. Her intent is not to set down rules, but rather to inform and instruct. The organization of the book contributes to that purpose. She defines a concept, illustrates it, and then summarizes. Beginning with an Hegelian point of view, Gallaway illustrates the structural details involved in writing a play.

Kenneth Macgowan's book A Primer of Playwriting was first published in 1951. He too relates many past playwriting theories. But unlike Gallaway, who uses examples to support her theories, Macgowan analyzes past theories to discredit them. In example after example, theory after theory, he champions only those ideas which correspond with his. Arthur Wilmurt, in a review for the Educational Theatre Journal, accurately summarizes the book:

> Although Mr. Macgowan cites over fifty plays to prove his point, it is not quite clear what is proved except that it is possible to have drama without open warfare. This is largely because he has a way of plucking terms from various sources and lumping them against each other. . . One thing anybody . . . can get out of the book is that writing about playwriting is apt to be fraught with complications. (Wilmurt 178-79)

In spite of the confusions, Macgowan establishes his criteria for writing plays. Complications are the key element to him. They constitute the one common factor to all plays that set it apart from other forms of literature (Macgowan 116). He proposes this position throughout the book. Wilmurt captures the essence of the book when he

cleverly combines the complications as a playwriting term with the complications of writing a book about playwriting.

The chapter titled "Definitions, or The Art of Confusion" exposes an inherent difficulty in writing about playwriting. Definitions of playwriting terms differ from writer to writer, generation to generation. "We still use Freytag's terms [rising and falling action], but we give them new meanings" (28). Defining one's terms becomes crucial to effective teaching of playwriting. He believes that technical playwriting craftsmanship can be taught. These include exposition, device of crises, placing the climax, and the use of complications to provide mounting suspense (8).

In a short examination of dramatic structure, Macgowan questions the Hegelian methodology that Lawson and Gallaway promote. He agrees with Hegel that "contradiction is the power that moves things" (35). But the structure of a play, to him, is not as fundamental as A wants B but C stands in the way. Suspense underscores the action of a play. The means by which a playwright maintains that suspense are complications. He borrows the definition of a play from the English playwright Henry Arthur Jones: "A succession of suspenses and crises, or as a succession of conflicts impending and conflicts raging, carried on in

ascending and accelerated climaxes from the beginning to the end of a connected scheme" (38).

Macgowan believes that audiences come to the theatre to be engaged in the action. They want to care (or worry, as Macgowan describes it) about the characters and the outcome of events (36). Therefore, dramatic technique must be used to make them care. Complications are the devices that make audiences worry because they "make each new crisis" (116). Macgowan argues that plays require more than one crisis and therefore need many complications. "Playgoers are easily bored; they must be held by mounting suspense. New crises, born of new complications, provide this" (117). Crises lead to climaxes, and a play, after all, is a series of accelerated climaxes.

In consecutive chapters, Macgowan considers five areas of interest to the playwright. The first problem, as he sees it, is the material. A play can never be better than its material (39). He wants the playwright to avoid writing about the self at first. Only if a writer can objectively interpret and understand the self should it be used (45). A bad way to start a play is to have an idea (113). Rather, start with "an attitude toward a certain character or a certain aspect of life" (60).

In the chapter "The Power of Character," Macgowan declares that character equals plot in importance to play

structure because most plots come from characters (49). He blames Aristotle for emphasizing otherwise (64-66). To him, the importance of strongly drawn characters is vital to the strength of a play. He defines three character principles: believability, three-dimensionality, and selectivity. "The characters must be so selected and developed that they include people who are bound to react upon each other, bound to clash" (63-64). Complications arise from the clash of the characters' wills (178).

Macgowan remains troubled in the "Wills in Conflict" chapter about the necessity of conflict to drama. He cites many plays without conflicts or clash of wills (81). The drama theorist Alan Thompson said that while conflict is usually the chief source of dramatic interest, it is not absolutely necessary (88). Macgowan concludes that the conflict of wills is like other playwriting tools: they are to be used if helpful to the playwright (89).

Macgowan identifies the unity of action as essential. Action refers to the play itself. In the chapter "The Nature of Dramatic Action," he alludes to the confusion that the idea of dramatic action causes for playwrights. He wishes that the original translators had not used the English word "action" for the Greek. Dramatic action refers to more than just physical action. "Action is speech more than movement" (105). The inclusion of

spiritual action to the definition of dramatic action confuses the issue for beginning playwrights. Building on Freytag's model, dramatic action is "what a playwright achieves through the proper interaction of characters" (114). As the play progresses, the interactions of the characters need to grow in intensity along with the accelerating series of climaxes. Macgowan proposes complications based on character to achieve an unity of dramatic action (114).

Macgowan believes in the usefulness of scenarios. "If you start writing before you have worked out your action in detail, you will discover, to your sorrow, how much more complex a play is than you ever imagined" (133). Macgowan expects the scenario to change because new ideas present themselves. To test the play structure, he recommends Selden's "Iron Check List" and the "Golden Check List." He includes Gallaway's "And, But, and Therefore" test as another method to assess a play's structure and solidify a scenario.

Macgowan intends for this book to be just what the title professes, that is, a primer (10). He discusses what he thinks are the important points of playwriting for the beginning playwright. While the style is direct and humorous, the organization of the book skips from point to point. The ten chapters are divided evenly but Macgowan

uses the words and ideas of others to explain his points. The number of quotes and play examples leave little room for his own reflections. What he offers is the common wisdom on different elements of playwriting and asks that the playwright devise his own.

In the 1950s, playwriting books which incorporate writing techniques for other media such as radio, television, and film began to emerge. Roger M. Busfield, Jr. adapts the common wisdom of playwriting to the four dramatic media in The Playwright's Art: Stage, Radio, Television, Motion Pictures, published in 1958. Although Busfield's book is not the first to apply playwriting techniques to other media, the book's intended audience remains beginning playwrights. Theatre Arts Monthly recommended it for writers considering writing a play for the first time (78).

The subtitle is misleading; Busfield never discusses individual strategies for the four dramatic media. Instead, he collects them under the umbrella of dramatic writing. Regardless of the individual characteristics inherent in a certain medium, Busfield maintains that drama's essential elements are common to the four dramatic media. (Busfield 13). Busfield establishes the essential rules of drama and claims that every playwright should know them (12). He quotes playwright John van Druten on the

relationship of writing rules to the playwright: "it is essential first to know what the rules are, to be able to submit to them, and deliberately to set out to refute them" (12). Busfield sets out to provide the rules of playwriting so that they can be manipulated when necessary.

In Chapter Two "The Playwright and Fiction," Busfield reveals a distinction between theatre writing and fiction writing. "Fundamentally, dramatic writing is a time art whereas fiction writing is not" (Busfield 14). Busfield might define a play as something happening now. What is happening now evolves from "characters in action and in conflict with one another, and an audience will instinctively polarize around a character or a group of characters striving to attain a worthy goal" (87).

Busfield approaches drama from the point of view of the audience. The main objective for the playwright is to keep the action growing from the opening situation to the resolution. The action should be constructed with no pauses "for comment or explanation" (16). Busfield is aware of the importance of the audience. In the chapter titled "The Playwright and His Audience," he encourages the playwright to know audiences.

> Though a play is not complete until it has been presented to its audience, the playwright begins his dramatic-writing process with a consideration

> of the audience by creating a protagonist around which the audience will polarize and by providing him with an objective the audience will care if he attains. That is why the playwright must first have a basic understanding of audience identification and the role it plays in successful play making. (49)

Dramatic material, for Busfield, is capable of arousing emotion. What is or is not dramatic remains hard to ascertain because it depends on the right combinations of qualities that are elusive to describe. "It is the task of the playwright to take his raw material, recognize its potentialities, and breathe the necessary life into it so that it may stand on a stage before an audience and evoke a response" (61). Realizing the dramatic potentialities of material and shaping them in a clearly defined form depends on talent and training. Busfield believes that playwrights are born and made.

He advocates the university system as a good training ground for beginning playwrights because of his experiences as an educator at Michigan State. Interestingly, he suggests journalism as a training ground for playwrights. As for play sources, he notes the potential power of a trivial incident. Playwrights must be aware of what happens around them. Anything can dramatized. Busfield

advises keeping a notebook of ideas. It takes imagination and knowledge of human behavior to discover dramatic potential (62-73).

Themes are important to plays. By theme, he means the artist's point of view (77-78). The point of view is important as the unifying factor to a piece of art, according to Busfield, but its intention must be relative to its ability to affect audiences. "Drama at its best combines the appeal to the intellect with an appeal to the emotions" (75). A distinction exists between an expression by an audience to its acceptance by an audience. Busfield acknowledges the difficulties involved for the playwright. He worries that serious themes may displease audiences. The playwright balances between artist and entertainer. "The task, then, of the true dramatists is to translate the best thought into action, to reduce it to terms understood by the average man, to dramatize it for him, and make it interesting" (86).

As far as organizing a play, Busfield remains adamant that character development and plot construction be completed before actual writing. He mentions the use of a scenario but leaves the details of how it gets used to the playwright.

Busfield concludes the chapter on plot construction with a structural analysis form which he derives from

Selden and George McCalmon at Cornell University. He offers this checklist as an example to playwrights who should eventually devise their own. The Dramatic Writing Appraisal Form is divided into two parts: (A) Structural Considerations and (B) Conceptual Considerations. In Part A, the list includes Introduction or Preparation, Attack, Rising Action, Main Crises or Turning Point, Climax, Falling Action, and Conclusion or Outcome. In Part B, Theme, Issue, and Drive are included (120-21).

In the last third of the book, Busfield addresses technical problems such as language, collaboration, rehearsals, and the marketplace with specific advice. In "Writing Procedures and Practices," he discusses the mood and environment for writing, writing hours, and the time required to write a play. At the end of the book in Appendix A, Busfield inserts a series of exercises and projects as a self-stylized program for writing (231-43). The individual exercises correspond to the chapter organization of the book. The group exercises are useful in a classroom setting. Appendix B contains one of the most comprehensive bibliographies from any playwriting book (245-54).

While Busfield reveals no new terminology or any dramatically different concepts from previous playwriting books, he includes the audience in the process of writing

plays. The audience is a collaborator in the theatre as much as actors, directors, designers, producers, and playwrights. He writes of the subconscious impression an audience asserts on a play, especially a new one. He ends the book noting the audience's role in rewrites during rehearsal and production periods (216-17).

Busfield includes quotes from many contemporary theorists and playwrights. The book's scholarly style resembles Gallaway; yet The Playwright's Art reads as a more current book. Written eight years after her book, Busfield incorporates the latest ideas. His book acts like an updated supplement to hers.

In a sense, the books in this chapter represent a transitional period in a chronological study of twentieth-century playwriting books. Acknowledging the past places them in an historical context. The authors also use the past to formulate new ideas. Egri adopts Lawson's terminology but places it in the context of character. Selden organizes play construction principles into useful outlines to follow. Gallaway combines Lawson with Baker to substantiate her bias for play construction. Macgowan quotes theorists, playwrights, and teachers who point out the difficulties of making a play. Busfield notes that drama has responsibilities to its collaborative artistic nature and to the responsiveness of audiences.

These five books serve as a continuing sample of the diversity of techniques utilized in writing about playwriting. There is more than one way to conceive, articulate, and draft a play. There are as many techniques as plays. The possibilities for different kinds of plays and playwriting techniques continue to increase with each new book on playwriting.

CHAPTER FIVE

MID-TWENTIETH-CENTURY DIVERGING STRATEGIES

Only two books on playwriting were published in the twenty year period of 1960 to 1979 which became popular texts. Playwriting: How to Write for the Theater by Bernard Grebanier, published in 1961, and Playwriting: The Structure of Action by Sam Smiley, in 1971, comprehensively illustrate the broad boundaries incorporated in the act of playwriting. Theatre Arts Monthly called Grebanier's book "eminently practical" (Freedley 5). The practicality of the work sustains its popularity with the next generation. Smiley's book wields tremendous influence today and is highly recommended by playwriting teachers to playwriting students (Morton 1990).

Although both books owe a debt to Aristotle, they make use of him in different ways. Grebanier examines plays to arrive at principles. In the preface, he explains that, like Aristotle, he looked at the best plays and determined what they had in common. What marks a play as a best play is never fully developed. He pulls most of his examples from plays that are from the traditional canon--Shakespeare, Racine, Ibsen, Wilde, Chekhov, O'Neill, and Albee. Smiley uses Aristotle's six elements of drama as the basis for principles as a method to create plays.

While the approaches differ, the emphasis of both books is on playwriting from inspiration to publication.

Grebanier's book begins with a comparison between theatre and life. He accepts that theatre is an art. In order to have meaning, as with all works of art, "it must have its roots in the values of the world in which we live--the value of the world as they are or as they should be" (Grebanier 4-5). To him, drama represents the art closest to life.

In the Poetics, Aristotle defines tragedy as an imitation, not of human beings but of action, life, happiness, and unhappiness. Grebanier frames his definition of a play around Aristotle. "The arts do not attempt a carbon copy of life, but an imitation of its values. Imitation implies selection, and selection means heightening" (13). The process of selecting and heightening separates art from life and are therefore inherent qualities of drama. An artist writes a play which is enacted by live people and presented in a theatre for an audience who are a part of the proceedings.

Grebanier stresses the importance of the audience. Because they are there, every moment of a play must count. He draws a triangle to illustrate his point. Whatever is said on stage from one actor travels to the audience first before it affects another actor (16).

In Chapter Two, Grebanier addresses sources for ideas for plays. He outlines three sources: a theme, a situation, and a group of characters. A theme is, simply, the principal or governing idea (20). A situation means a state of affairs. Grebanier diagrams the action of a play as a sequence of situations (24). While a character may interest a playwright initially, he advises placing the character in a situation at once to initiate action and avoid unnecessary character detail (29). A dramatist can use any one of these three sources for the inception of a play. Grebanier illustrates with examples from plays whose inceptions originated from one of the three sources.

Grebanier accepts Aristotle's notion that plot as the "soul of drama" (81). Borrowing from an earlier work of his, Introduction to Imaginative Literature, he defines what he means. Action makes up plot, and plot amounts to the actions that are done during the course of the play. The action in plot has a logical unity within itself. The logical unity refers to Aristotle's notion that a plot has a beginning, middle, and an end. Grebanier's concern is that all incidents relate to the main plot. The selection process for audience presentation initially begins with the selection of incidents for plot (81-83).

Grebanier adopts W. T. Price's law of plot, called the "Proposition." Like Price, he asserts that a standard

formula for plot can be devised. Relating to the beginning, middle, and end pattern he prescribes for a play's action, he proposes the following formula:

> (1) the condition of the action [the first significant event of the play, the event which holds the root of the cause of the action]; (2) the cause of the action [the event which follows from the condition of the action, and which raises a question which the rest of the play must answer]; (3) the resulting action [will answer the question raised by the cause of the action, the question which is the chief business of the plot]. (89)

Grebanier admits that creating a plot requires more than the Proposition. Its categorization of a plot into three simple steps limits the potential structures of plays. In structuring a plot, a climax needs to be considered. The climax is the turning point in the plot, "the point from which there is no return" (108). He identifies with Freytag's pyramid and its equilateral spacing. By occurring at the apex of the triangle the climax gives impetus for the rest of the play. Positioning the climax later in the play forms a lopsided triangle and the play has little time left to fully develop.

In Grebanier's diagram, the climax guides the rest of the play (108-09). For him, the climax is not always the most exciting moment in the play. He interchanges climax with crisis. In observing real life, Grebanier notes that many times a crisis occurs in a trivial or unobserved situation. Placing the climax at the apex of the triangle attempts an imitation of real life. A climax is structured on two levels: (1) it must seem unimportant, and (2) it provides the plot with the remaining action of the play.

Character depends on plot in that its details are revealed through the action (163). Grebanier believes that the "quintessence of drama is conflict or opposition" (190). But he identifies it through character, stating that in good plays, characters are in opposition to their situations and to the other characters. He encourages variety in characterizations.

Due to the selective nature of drama, all aspects of a character cannot be included in a play. But like Lawson, Grebanier stresses that a playwright needs to know more about the characters than can ever be integrated into a play. The more a dramatist knows about the characters, more unconsciously seeps into the play (195).

A play depends on maintaining the interests of the audience. Audiences concern themselves with the characters in a play above all other elements. "It is safe to say

that the better the play, the more the audience is intent upon the characters, rather than on the plot or the theme" (162). For a positive reception of a play it matters if the audience cares that the protagonist attains his goal.

Grebanier organizes the book according to the order he perceives for writing a play. Ideas formulate plots; plots reveal character; character stimulates dialogue. There are five chapters devoted to plot and its components, including climax, proportioning, and character.

The second half of the book caters to related subjects. He writes about the special aspects of the one-act play with brief comments on the television play. Using an excerpt from the play Biography, he illustrates how to achieve character through action. "We must, in plays, know people chiefly by what they do" (219). He discusses dialogue in a detailed fashion, addressing such issues as word order and length of speeches. In the last quarter of the book, he considers different forms of drama (tragedy and comedy), styles of drama (naturalism, symbolism, and expressionism), and secondary characters. Lastly, he briefly focuses on typing the manuscript, selling the play, and small revisions. He includes an appendix of exercises that correlates to each chapter.

The book abounds with examples from plays to illustrate Grebanier's points. Each chapter begins with

pertinent quotes from a variety of sources: plays, theorists, and artists. He introduces and defines an idea. He relates its importance to playwriting. He devotes the rest of a chapter to play excerpts as clarifications. Chapter Four, in which Grebanier presents Price's Proposition, he utilizes no less than 21 play examples to deduce the Proposition and to study the proper proportioning of a plot.

Grebanier's stated purpose is to extrapolate playwriting principles from play examples. The organization of the book suggests otherwise. The inclusion of other playwriting theories precludes an objective reflection of the commonality to the best plays he has chosen to analyze. The key element for writing a play for him is creating a plot. He evidently acquired the idea of the importance of plot directly from Aristotle. He admits that Price's Proposition stands with Aristotle as the most significant contributions to the theory of playwriting (85). The drawing of the triangle is clearly from Freytag. The play examples illustrate points he has already decided are the principles of playwriting. Instead of arriving at a conclusion after examining the plays, Grebanier shapes his book with conclusions already drawn from other sources.

Sam Smiley utilizes Aristotle's six elements as an organizational design for his book, Playwriting: The

Structure of Action. In this highly detailed work, he catalogues a pattern of possible principles to aid the writing of plays. By doing so, the book provides a clearly defined outline describing the writing process from ideas to publication.

A play is a constructed object, and as such it requires a playwright to make choices. Those choices reveal a playwright's vision. That vision consists of a person's ideas, convictions, and assumptions combined with sensory perceptions and emotional sensitivities (Smiley 295). In other words, a playwright needs a personal philosophy in order to make many choices which construct plays. Such a point of view, or philosophy, begins the writing process. Smiley's book explores the cause and effect relationship in the construction of plays.

Smiley chooses the Aristotelian, or intrinsic, system for artistic creation. Aristotle describes a play as an imitation of an action. Smiley explains that Aristotle's imitation means man-made, or artificial. A play is a constructed object and therefore artificial. From an intrinsic aesthetic, how a play comes into being is the goal (10-11).

Aristotle designated four causes for the creation of such an artificial object: material cause, formal cause,

efficient cause, and final cause. Smiley ascribes each cause to a component of playwriting.

> For the playwright, a drama as object is the end of his activity [final cause]. His materials are physical activities, sounds, words, thoughts, and characters [material cause]. The form with which he works is plot--structured human action [formal cause]. And the style of the whole is both his own manner of rendering words and actors' manner of rendering physical actions and sounds [efficient cause]. (295)

In elaborating the principles of drama contained within the four causes, Smiley focuses on the process of writing, not the finished product.

In Chapter Two "The Process of Playwriting," Smiley derives 14 stages to the process of creating a play. They are: (1) creative compulsion, (2) the germinal idea, (3) the collection, (4) the rough scenario, (5) the scenario, (6) the first draft, (7) revisions, (8) the "final" draft, (9) submissions, (10) pre-rehearsal work, (11) the rehearsal period, (12) performances, (13) the post-production version, and (14) publication (38). The process of a creating a play includes its production. "Drama does not come into being except when performed live onstage; in script form, a play is merely a potential

drama" (9). The first 12 steps are crucial for bringing a drama into being.

Smiley recognizes a missing step in the preparatory period that many playwriting theorists have overlooked. Following the collection of materials suitable to the chosen germinal idea, formulating a scenario is the logical next step. For many writers, to arrive at a complete scenario from a mass of miscellaneous notes seems an insurmountable task. Smiley devises a rough scenario as the first step to arranging material in a viable format.

The rough scenario is not an outline for the scenario but contains materials which shape the detailed thought required for a scenario. In the rough scenario, Smiley includes the following elements: (1) working title, (2) action, (3) form, (4) circumstances, (5) subject, (6) characters, (7) conflict, (8) story, (9) thought, (10) dialogue, and (11) schedule. From there, a scenario expands the elements into essentials. The working title becomes the title. The circumstances are stated as they should appear in the script. The character descriptions include every major and minor character, using a six character trait outline. The narrative describes the play scene-by-scene. Finally, the working outline chronicles the play beat-by-beat (25-26).

In "Part II: Principles of Drama," Smiley demonstrates how Aristotle's six elements can be used for writing a play. The six elements--plot, character, thought, diction, sounds, and spectacle--relate to each other in a form-matter connection. Beginning with a plot-to-spectacle pattern, each element is the form for the elements besides it. In other words, spectacle, sounds, diction, thought, and character form plot. Conversely, with a spectacle-to-plot pattern, each element provides the material for those elements next to it. Thought and character are the material for plot. By understanding this relationship, Smiley says that a playwright can then employ all the possible elements of drama to formulate the play (12). Smiley asserts that plot is the most important element to the playwright, with character second, thought third and so forth. The order of the chapters in Part II follow that design.

Smiley defines drama as "structured action" (41). Action is "human change" (42). Dramatic action consists of the instances of human change represented on stage. The organization of those human changes depicted in a play is plot (43). Plot implies a logical structure. The first chapter on the elements is titled "Structure," not plot, to further emphasize the idea of plot as structured action.

Smiley differentiates between plot and story. While plot is the overall organization of an action in a play, a story is merely one means to unify a plot. A story is "a sequence of certain kinds of events, standing in a special relationship to each other" (52). Story plots may be one of the most adequate ways to structure an action, but Smiley does not advocate a story format as the quintessential structure for a play (52). He identifies other kinds of plot, such as mimetic, didactic, horizontal, random, and configurative. What he stresses is structure because every play has a plot. He identifies the ten most basic elements for the construction of a story--balance, disturbance, protagonist, plan, obstacle, complications, sub-stories, crisis, climax, and resolution (60).

Qualities of plot differ from its constructive elements. These include unity, preparation, suspense, surprise, magnitude, and development. The basic construction of any play includes action, structure, and plot. Chapter Three, "Structure," displays many of the main sources of form in drama. They are not presented as rules. "Any one of them can be ignored or avoided" (77). They provide guidelines to be used as possibilities when constructing a play. Knowing their function aids the playwright during writing and revisions.

The five chapters that follow discuss the remaining elements in order of importance to plot. To enact the process of human change, a play needs characters. "Drama is an art chiefly concerned with the relationship of human character to human action" (79). Character is the prime material for plot. For dramatic action to occur, characters must do or say something in relation to each other.

Playwrights differentiate characters by ascribing various kinds of traits and qualities to them. The traits are: biological, physical, dispositional [or bent], motivational [or desires], deliberative [or thought], and decisive [or decisions] (84-91). Some of the crucial qualities which aid in characterization are: volition, stature, interrelation, attractiveness, credibility, and clarity (91-95). Consideration of these aspects of characterization aid the playwright in composing characters which interact to create problems and conflicts, or in other words, action.

Thought functions in drama as the form of diction and the material for character. Thought is internal action and represents the vision of the playwright. By identifying levels of dramatic thought, Smiley provides a yardstick to gauge the effectiveness of that vision. The five guises of thought in drama are: (1) statement [sentience and desire],

(2) amplification or diminution [exaggeration and rationalization], (3) arousal or expression of [rising] emotion, (4) argument [proof and refutation], and (5) meaning of the whole [conception derived from deliberation and decision] (115-27).

In Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight, Smiley discusses the elements of diction, sounds, and spectacle. Diction refers to all the words in a play, including dialogue, stage directions, and play title (159-61). Sound in drama is environmental and integral. The melody created by the composition of sounds--vocal, instrumental, and non-verbal--conveys meaning (184-85). In discussing spectacle, Smiley implies more than the physical actions on stage. A play must be enacted to come into being fully. "Drama is a synthesis of the verbal and the physical, the auditory and the visual" (190).

Smiley stresses the importance for playwrights to know the world of the play. Drama requires the cooperation of different theatre artists and craftsmen who create a spectacle to enact. Because of that enactment, spectacle is the element which separates drama from other writing media. Producing a drama integrates the playwright with the actor, director, and designer. Actors, directors, and designers usually begin with spectacle. By crafting the

particulars of time, place, and milieu, the playwright presents a more unified structure to fellow artists.

In "Part III: Problems of Production," topics addressed relate more to the process of a play than to the process of writing a play. Smiley discusses further the co-creative relationship with theatre artists. He analyzes audiences and the influence they have on the playwriting process. He presents an acceptable manuscript format and advice about copyrights. He ends the chapter on scripts and markets with submission details.

As one of the most comprehensive books on playwriting, Playwriting: The Structure of Action maintains an equally thorough dissection of each aspect of playwriting from the particular to the general. Smiley sees the process of writing a play as a cumulative one, based on a cause and effect relationship between playwriting principles.

> The principles of structure that each playwright employs--and every writer employs some--reveal his particular dimension, his philosophy, his vision. His vision, then controls his selectivity. And his practices in selecting materials are as significant as the structural principles he accepts. (295)

He concludes the book as he begins it. A vision for a particular play emerges from a general vision of life that

a playwright holds. A playwright is an artist. As such, his job is to affirm and deny. "He affirms life by selecting materials and by shaping them to make an object that reflects his vision" (3). Writing a play is a way of life. "All human activity, to some degree, is action" (41). For the playwright, that action requires structure, vision, craft, and image.

Whether as a model for form or content, the influence of Aristotle continues in the twentieth century. Grebanier adopts Aristotle's method for analyzing plays. Smiley endorses Aristotle's six elements as a process for writing plays. Neither book quotes extensively from other twentieth-century playwriting theorists. Evidence of the influence of other ideas exists, but each book claims an exception to the established pattern of directly acknowledging past scholarship. Their unique point of view in regard to structuring plays continues to garner attention.

CHAPTER SIX

LATE TWENTIETH-CENTURY TOOLS

If the number of playwriting books indicates an interest in the craft of the playwright, then the 1980s stands out as an active decades in that regard. Like the 1950s, the last ten years has seen a resurgence in books on how to write plays. Part of the renewed interest can be attributed to the American regional theatre movement. The development of new plays as big business is seen in the rise of play contests, playwriting workshops, and commissions from theatre groups. George Pierce Baker's book Dramatic Technique was reissued in 1976 and has had four printings to date. In an attempt to represent the varied playwriting techniques being tried and offered, the four books chosen for this chapter explore some of those methods. They are: Writing, Producing, and Selling Your Play by Louis Catron, The Playwright's Handbook by Frank Pike and Thomas G. Dunn, Composing Drama for Stage and Screen by Stanley Vincent Longman, and The Art of the Playwright by William Packard.

The audience for Catron's Writing, Producing, and Selling Your Play includes writers from other genres with little practical theatre experience. Catron begins with basic concepts of theatre and playwriting. He believes

that anyone can learn to write a play. But one does not learn the craft from the study of theory alone. Catron approaches playwriting practically. In a departure from stated goals of other playwriting books, Catron designs the book as a supplement to writers enrolled in a formalized course of playwriting study (Catron 2). His teaching experiences at the College of William and Mary provide the examples.

In the first section of the book "The Maker of Plays," Catron identifies several characteristics of playwrights, playwriting, and drama. "A playwright, before anything else, is a master storyteller" (12). But a playwright must also be a craftsman and artist. The artistic bend must be put in proper context. "True originality consists of the playwright letting his or her own voice be heard" (16). The idea of having a voice constitutes the core concept that Catron maintains throughout his book. Conflict, which is the essential ingredient to dramatic action, provides structure. He remains firm on these two points. If a writer is contemplating a play that has no conflict, he suggests that the playwright reconsider the concept.

Besides conflict, Catron introduces other structural elements that all plays must contain. Because plays exist in the present tense, there is a need for a sense of urgency about the staged action. He frequently reminds the

reader that playwriting should be enjoyable and plays are entertainment as well as art (22-25). Like Selden and Gallaway, he concocts a checklist to gauge the dramatic validity of a work. Catron asks that the situations, events, and characters crafted into a play be "possible, plausible, and probable" (26).

In the section "Preparing to Write," Catron features the preparatory stages of playwriting. Many playwriting books warn of writing without a detailed scenario. Catron hopes to curb further the habit of premature writing. He insists on a specific procedure before any actual writing begins. A credo and a journal frame the beginning of playwriting. A credo states personal convictions which are the writer's strong beliefs (32). He believes that a playwright's credo should be written down before any writing starts or before continuing to write (31).

In conjunction with a written credo, Catron suggests maintaining a journal. He describes what a journal physically looks like as well as the nature of its contents. A journal includes character sketches, newspaper clippings, thoughts from self to self, and dialogue. He cites O'Neill's use of a journal to formalize Mourning Becomes Electra as an outstanding example of what a journal can do for the writer (40-41).

For the first play, Catron highly recommends the one-act play genre. The merits of this strategy are practical. One-act plays are not as complicated as full-length plays. He wants to avoid frustration for the beginning playwright. In the chapter "Guidelines for the First Play," Catron enumerates parameters for first plays. Some of these are: stay within the "realistic" mode, limit the number of characters, and keep speeches short (46-50). Overall, the dramatist must remember that "a play depends upon conflict for its dramatic effect, and complications are the active subdivisions of the basic conflict" (50). He concedes that later a playwright might consider breaking the rules.

The chapter on scenarios describes the process for writing them. Like Smiley, Catron includes a first scenario (or rough) and a final scenario. A scenario is like a blueprint. Because a scenario is easier to write than the script, it can "ease the playwright into writing" (63). The first scenario contains all the basic information but no details. Included in it should be: the basic conflict of the play, the play's thought, the characters, the play's genre, length, time and place, and the basic story. The final scenario provides the details (64-65).

The second half of the book deals almost exclusively with Aristotle's six elements. Catron uses many examples from plays to illustrate how the elements function in drama. Plot and character share equal billing in importance. Plot is "character in action" (101). He describes eleven functions of plot. These include: plot is conflict, active, suspenseful, and thoughtful (103-06). The function of plot is to organize the action. "It helps the playwright to force changes in characters, making them react and grow. Plot creates suspense and hold audience attention. It is the basic structure of the whole" (107).

In the discussion on character, Catron identifies the qualities of dramatic characters. Characters are: plausible, selective, decisive, and interesting (154-60). He defines types of characters such as protagonist, antagonist, and confidant. He adds that contrast can create clearer and more dynamic characters (164-75). He emphasizes the need for characters to be playable. He refers to the needs of a performer. A character's line of action cannot be abstract or too large. Instead, a playwright should think in terms of character goals that can be displayed.

At the end of the chapter, Catron provides a checklist for examining each character after the first draft. He suggests reading aloud each character from beginning to

end. When reading the entire play, mark the places where a character seems dull. He concludes with a chart of common problems with characters. He separates them into five categories: protagonist, motivation, dialogue, antagonist, and emotions (181-84).

One of the unique features of the book is a chapter on the playwright in a writing class. Catron sensitively talks about how to give and receive criticism (229). He provides rules for the criticism within the classroom to maintain control and provide structure. "Criticism always refers to the work and never to the person" (232). Given in an appropriate manner, criticism is instructive. From Catron's experiences as a teacher, he understands the dangers of unwarranted and unfair criticism on a writer.

Catron tends to establish rules for writing. He frequently dictates how to proceed. He categorizes subjects in a numerical fashion. In the last chapter of the book, he provides a list for the rehearsal period, covering clarity, conflict, plot, and character (257-63). The impression from reading one list after another is that Catron has devised an ironclad method for writing plays. Bearing in mind his audience (beginning playwrights and writers with no practical experience in the theatre), Catron utilizes an outline format throughout the book to

include basic playwriting concepts in addition to sophisticated revision techniques.

Catron's intent is to provide the methods discovered in his classes. His experiences in the classroom shape the book to include only those methods which have worked. In particular, the structure of the preparatory period in playwriting is one of the strengths of the book.

The Playwright's Handbook by Frank Pike and Thomas G. Dunn use the classroom setting differently than Catron. This book, with two authors, delineates the playwriting craft into creating and marketing. In "Building a Play" (Part One), Pike, a playwright as well as teacher, describes the workshop process. He separates qualities of playwriting experience into three types of workshops: the beginning, the intermediate, and the advanced. In Part Two "Being a Playwright," Dunn, a former Executive Director at New Dramatists, discusses topics related to the playwright, rather than playwriting. The collective point of view in the book is from a practical frame of reference. Pike and Dunn offer no theory per se. Instead, they pass along their collective experiences as a guide for writing plays.

Pike believes that a workshop setting enhances the writing process. A playwriting workshop consists of a group of people interested in writing plays. Within that group, a playwright has the luxury of constructive

criticism while the play is being formed. This book represents the group. Although individuals could benefit from the method outlined, it recreates a session of presenting material to a group for advice and criticism. The exercises ensure material to be discussed and Pike provides the questions to be asked.

Throughout Part One, each workshop refines previous lessons. In the beginning workshop, a setting serves as the arena for conflict (Pike 10). The intermediate workshop asks a writer to create a setting that subtly relates to the conflict by being in the background (56). After learning how to craft a setting in relationship to conflict, the advanced workshop requires the writer to state primary and secondary conflicts as part of a scenario (97-98). The workshops progress from lessons designed to initiate a person unfamiliar with playwriting to those that prescribe a methodology for writing plays.

The beginning and intermediate workshop chapters contain short descriptions of playwriting elements. These short sections usually contain an example from a play and always conclude with an exercise. Completing the exercise aids in learning the principle. The beginning workshop ends with writing a scene, which is defined as the "basic building block of playwriting" (36-42).

The intermediate workshop emphasizes character and emotionality. The subtlety requested in setting carries to character, conflict, and scenic intention as well. The chapter ends with an interesting discussion about understanding the relationship between ritual and drama. A unique method for polishing scenes is also provided. Analyzing a scene by virtue of the disruption of family, social, or personal rituals can define conflicts and resolutions as they relate to the disruptions (72-74).

The advanced workshop provides the technical guidelines for writing a full-length script. This stage outlines the steps that create plays, not the potential principles that may be incorporated into them. After an idea for a play has been formulated, the playwright defines the premise of it. A premise is "the proposition upon which an argument is based" (89). It defines the goals of the play. Because a play literally exists within a limited time frame, a playwright must select and compress only those details which support the premise (92). Revising the rough scenario leads to the final scenario. For the final scenario, Pike includes character descriptions, conflict descriptions, an order to the scenes, and sketching individual scenes (102).

Before actually writing the first draft, Pike asks the playwright to write an exploratory first and last scene.

To know where a play begins and ends is invaluable (106). He urges the playwright to use his instinct when writing these exploratory scenes. The value of the scenes comes after they are written. By assessing the consistency, the shape, and integrity of the two scenes, Pikes hopes to determine potential structural problems before writing the first draft (108-09).

The advanced workshop chapter ends with the writing of the first draft and the processes of several revisions to it. Pike advocates writing the first draft swiftly. The goal for the playwright is a completed play, not a perfect one. When revising the draft, he advises reading the entire play several times. "Think first in terms of the overall play. Think in terms of storyline. Think in terms of the play moving forward--logically, consistently, efficiently, with no holes and no extraneous elements" (113). After the second draft, Pike urges a reading with actors and an audience. The third draft should incorporate comments from the reading and discussions.

Pike encourages playwrights to submit scripts to theatres after the third draft. He reasons that since a play is never perfect, rewrites are a part of the process when a theatre expresses interest in the script for a reading or possible production. There is more to gain by submitting scripts and becoming known than writing and

rewriting alone at home. Pike ends his section by reminding playwrights that the only way to learn how to write plays is to write plays (118).

There is no standard pattern that plays follow from cold readings to Broadway. Due to the unpredictable nature of play production, a playwright often feels helpless in contributing to the fate of a script. In Part Two "Being a Playwright," Thomas G. Dunn addresses the parts of the post-playwriting process in which a playwright can participate. Chapter discussions include "Getting Your Play Read by the Right People," "Entering Contests," and "Making Ends Meet."

In a way, the style of this section borrows from other practical playwriting guides such as The Dramatist Sourcebook. Whereas, the sourcebook offers information about agents, theatres, and contests which is revised and updated each year, The Playwright's Handbook presents itself as a permanent guidebook. Written in 1984, Dunn's information is scant and often outdated in a 1990 market. In "Getting Your Play Produced," Dunn lists theatres, producers, and contests (197-213). The names are well-known. While he states that these lists are not meant to be inclusive, he does not offer advice on how to find other sources.

Several of the more recent playwriting books address playwriting as a business. Dunn dedicates his half of the book to these issues. The nature of the theatre has changed during the course of the twentieth century. Today, completing a script is not the final goal. Playwrights need to be promoters of their work as well. There are more opportunities for the production of new plays. Playwrights' obligations to their work requires them to be conversant with those opportunities. The value of Dunn's portion in The Playwright's Handbook lies in the specific advice he gives in the areas of self-promotion. Dunn constructs sample letters for theatres and producers (223-26). He provides advice on entering contests. There are ten commonsense guidelines which detail the process from inquiry to post-submissions (178-82). These include: send a self-addressed, stamped envelope, send a cover letter with the play, and "don't call to ask if the script arrived" (180).

In the final chapter of the book, Dunn approaches the life of a playwright from a practical point of view. "Making Ends Meet: The Financial Side of Playwriting" offers suggestions to combat the often bleak realities of playwriting. He urges a playwright to find "that position, whether it be academic or administrative or whatever, that allows you time to write and the freedom to pursue a

production or workshop opportunity should it be offered to you" (228). Like Smiley, Dunn concludes that being a playwright requires a "life-style choice" (249).

The goal of playwriting is not only writing the play. The production of the play must be included in its goal. Pike envisions a playwright sending a script, revising a second, and beginning to jot down ideas for a third. The Playwright's Handbook attempts to coordinate the continual flow from idea to script to revision to production and the overlapping quality that presents itself in the hectic life of the committed playwright.

Stanley Vincent Longman defers to past scholarship when prescribing a methodology for playwriting in his book, Composing Drama for Stage and Screen. He includes checklists for the writing period and revisions. Part III concerns itself with the unique problems inherent in writing for film and television. As one of the more thorough playwriting books, Longman adds a glossary of useful terms for playwrights (Longman 275). The bibliography attached is extensive and pertinent (291-94). Written in 1986, the book maintains its contemporary slant by transforming theories from the past into viable constructs for writing plays today.

In an attempt to balance theory with practice, Longman devotes the first part of the book to a discussion on the

nature of drama and the creativity involved. He regards the nature of drama as the bridge between theory and practice. "Composing [drama] calls for meshing your personality with the material of the play and with the potentials drama offers" (xii). The potentials of drama rest with the perceptions of the audience.

In Chapter Two "The Dramatist's Involvement," Longman diagrams the process from the mind of the dramatist to the minds of the audience. A playwright begins with a perception of a facet of experience. He tests the perception in various forms and finally settles on a tone and a presentation. Writing the script includes collaborations from the director and other artists. A play, according to Longman, is a collection of signs on the stage or screen. The audience recognizes the signs, creating an imagined existence. They become aware of the tone and form. They test the imagined world against their own sense of reality. Some facet of human experience now resides in the minds of the audience (23-24). Longman calls this process "the cycle of dramatic creation" (23).

Composing is the key word for Longman. He equates composing music to writing plays. "A playwright composes exchanges of energies among performers who embody fictional characters. Both composer and dramatist use paper as an

intermediate medium for describing their work in its ultimate medium [performance]" (ix). The exchange of energies requires space. A composer uses notes to create music to fill the space; a playwright designs physical actions with words which take up space. Writing a play is the attempt to control the energy exchanged "among actors and audience in the three-dimensional space of a theatre" (35). Playwriting begins with a consideration of space and time on stage. A play is realized on two simultaneous levels: the physical reality of actors and the imagist reality of characters (xi). Composing a play embraces physical dimensions as well as mechanical processes for writing plays.

In Chapter Five "Charting the Play Script," Longman begins with basic playwriting terms. A finished script is only a set of instructions for actors, directors, and designers. Activities devised in scripts reflect the central action in a play. Action is "an exchange of forces seeking to alter, avoid, or adapt. In short, it consists of change" (92). Plot represents the action in a logical pattern. Creating a play requires defining the action through activities and structuring it as the play's plot. Story is one kind of plot. A story is "simply a series of events" (92).

The restriction of physical time on the stage forces a dramatist to make decisions about the material to be dramatized. Traditionally, an evening in the theatre confines itself to a few actual hours. Because of the time limitation, a dramatist is forced to select carefully. "To decide what to dramatize is to decide that something matters now" (95). Longman proposes three questions to guide what to dramatize: What if?, Why now?, and So what?. Answering these questions establishes the premise of a play (95).

Before the scenario, Longman proposes three other methods to test a play's structure. He suggests using Marian Gallaway's But/Therefore principle to construct an outline (93). W. T. Price's proposition posits that plays can be constructed using logic: the condition of the action, the cause of the action, and the resulting action (102). Longman lists the five phases of dramatic action, adapted from Bernard Beckerman's The Dynamics of Drama. These are: (1) the precipitating context [balance], (2) the emergence of a driving force [event which upsets the balance], (3) resistance [antagonist, discovery, or reversal], (4) crux [climax], and (5) denouement [resolution] (105-09).

The scenario is a "brief, concentrated blueprint of the play" (111). Longman delineates between a rough

scenario and a detailed scenario. A rough scenario considers the following: (1) time and place of the action; (2) mode of presentation on stage and to the audience; (3) character descriptions and actions; (4) polarity, or basic tension, to propel the action; and (5) summary of the dramatic action including opening, crux, and closing (111-12). The detailed scenario fills in the first four categories of the rough scenario. In item four, polarity is described by an infinitive verb. For describing the action breakdown, Longman suggests a two column format.

> In the left column, the action of each unity (French scene, motivational unit, or theatrical moment) is listed. The action is described very briefly, concentrating on the essence of each unit. On the right side, for each unit, is a statement of the function the unit serves for the play as a whole. (113)

Placed side by side, the playwright can coordinate the tensions between what happens and why.

In the chapter titled "The Dramatic Script," Longman deals with writing the script itself. His continuing concern is with the connection between a play and its audience. Dialogue plays a crucial role in that connection. "Dialogue is the richest, fullest bridge

between the two worlds, so anything that strengthens that bridge enhances the play as a whole" (145).

In Part IV, Longman addresses revisions on the way toward the final draft. He contributes fresh ideas to the process of rewriting. Somehow a play has a will of its own once the words have been written. Respecting its will means being honest with the work to discover what it is really about (248). Longman offers an eight question analysis to find the play's will:

> Where is the play's crux and what forces lead to it? Who is the play's central character? Where in the play do characters appear? Why is the play set where it is? Why does the action occur at this time? How does the play use its medium? How does the play confront its audience? What is the play about? (252-56)

Each chapter, except those in Part IV, ends with a series of exercises designed to coordinate with the topics. Longman peppers the book with examples from actual play scripts and screen plays. Sometimes he summarizes at the end of a section or a chapter. He repeats himself often from the end of one chapter to the beginning of another. His purpose is to broaden the vision of the playwright. Composing a drama encompasses the world of the play as well as the world of the stage. Put in a wider context, a

playwright's goal must include the physical realities of the stage space and the reactions of the audience.

The subtitle to The Art of the Playwright, by William Packard, is Creating the Magic of Theatre. The magic of theatre begins when the house lights go down and the anticipation of communication between the playwright and the audience is felt. Packard links audiences to playwrights. He writes this book for both of them. In his mind, the audience has as much input on the realization of a play as the playwright. "If [the] dramatic actions and onstage visuals work well onstage, the playwright will know it because the audience will know it" (Packard 152). Packard undertakes a journey from why one writes plays to the process of playwriting. Liberally interspersed throughout the 13 chapters and afterword are quotations and examples from plays to acquaint the theatregoer as well as the playwright with playwriting concerns.

Packard begins the book with a discussion of dramatic versus narrative. He summarizes dramatic writing succinctly: show don't tell (3). There are three basic principles to dramatic writing: actions, visuals, and stakes (13). These principles frame five fundamental elements embodied in playwriting.

1. Drama is action. Action is someone's wanting something.

2. Character is action. Character is someone's wanting something.
3. Actions and characters should both be expressed through vivid onstage visuals.
4. Actions and characters run into obstacles. Dramatic conflict begins when someone wants something but there is a strong resistance that gets in the way.
5. The greatness of any action depends on how much is at stake. (14)

In the next five chapters, Packard demonstrates the use of each element in dramatic writing. Chapter Three "Drama is Action" identifies nine types of action with a play example to illustrate each one. In a discovery action, a character moves from ignorance to knowledge about something. Packard uses The Miracle Worker as an example of a discovery action. In Chapter Four "Obstacles to Action," Packard distinguishes external obstacles from internal obstacles. As an example of an external action, he mentions the world of salesmanship as Willy Loman's obstacle.

Following the discussions on the five basic techniques of playwriting, Packard turns his attention to specifics: dialogue and motifs, expositions and titles, plots and conflicts, and the text itself. In each of these four

chapters, he continues the stylistic pattern of identifying the term and supplying examples to illustrate the term.

In "Plots and Conflicts," he submits five guidelines for plotting. These are: audience knowledge, parallel plotting, reversals, climax, and denouement (88-89). He adds that there are no formulas for plotting. Plots describe the major actions that proceed over the course of the entire play and will "arise naturally out of the interplay of the major actions of the characters in a play" (88).

The book shifts its emphasis in the next two chapters to the history of plays and contemporary playwrights. From ancient Greece to Artaud and Beckett to Norman, Packard briefly chronicles significant achievements in playwriting. The digression presumably provokes playwrights to know world theatre history and its practices. Packard thus encourages playwrights to read as many plays as they can and to see as many productions as possible.

In the last chapter, Packard returns to the process of playwriting: its process and play production. The chapter ends with a basic checklist of the principles outlined in the book.

1. Opening beat: Is this the best possible beginning?

2. Exposition: Do I have all the necessary background material?
3. Action: What is the major through-line of entire play?
4. Characters: What does each character want?
5. Obstacles: What are the obstacles to each character's getting what he wants?
6. Stakes: How badly does each character want what he says he wants?
7. Visuals: Are the dramatic actions of each character embodied in strong, clear visuals?
8. Dialogue: Does it advance the major action of the play?
9. Motifs: Do they express the underlying dramatic themes of the play?
10. Climax: Is there a turning point or a reversal or a major discovery?
11. Ending: Is this the best possible ending?
12. Title: Is this the best possible title?

(Packard 142)

He advises use of this checklist for revisions of a new work in progress.

In the Afterword, Packard addresses the other theatre collaborators: actors, director, scenic designer, lighting designer, costume designer, producer, audience, and

critics. The core issue revolves around script changes. Knowing the functions of the different professional areas attached to theatre may aid the playwright in handling such a situation.

Packard concludes each chapter with a brief summary paragraph, an advice to the playwrights section, suggested reading, and three exercises. In "Obstacles to Action," the summary section reiterates the chapter's point. "In every play, an action comes up against an obstacle and that creates dramatic tensions" (49). The advice for playwrights is to "train yourself to create strong obstacles for every major action in your play" (49). He suggests reading Playwrights on Playwriting by Toby Cole. One of the exercises asks the playwright to devise a scene that has a character facing a strong external obstacle which blocks the character's action (49).

Packard worries about the commercialism of theatre today. He supports Eugene O'Neill's idea of the "one true theatre" where playwrights communicate their interpretations of life to accepting audiences. "We're talking here about a theatre that is significant and enduring and relevant to our era" (xxii). Nurturing audiences is as important as teaching craftsmanship to playwrights. In order to accommodate the needs of both

aspects, the book presents an uncomplicated approach to the matters of playwriting.

Prevalent in the books from earlier decades is a central idea which separates one theory of playwriting from another. While each book in this chapter expresses an individual point of view, the key elements revolve around writing the play, not what constitutes a play. Catron insists on a credo as the fundamental building block. Pike considers the proper atmosphere as crucial. Dunn accounts for the often overlooked business half of playwriting. Longman places a play within a broad context of its space and devises a methodology for accommodating that aspect of its nature. By including the theatregoer, Packard emphasizes the precarious nature of theatre. The trend in this decade for playwriting books seems to be toward the play as product, rather than the process of writing.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Writing a play is difficult. As observed in the 14 playwriting texts presented in this study, playwriting involves numerous steps in the process of creating a play. Each book expounds an individual concept on how to write a play. Some propose specific guidelines and checklists to aid the playwright during the process of writing; others examine the principles of playwriting as seen in established written texts to demonstrate possibilities to begin, shape, and produce a play. No book claims to have all the answers. Instead, what they offer is a variety of choices for playwrights to consider while creating a drama.

A play is a constructed object. By dissecting plays and examining the parts which constitute them, a catalogue of principles and their applications become symbols of dramatic technique. The ability to facilitate the principles of playwriting indicates a playwright's level of craftsmanship. Because writing a play involves so many variables, however, it is impossible to determine the success or failure of a particular play based only on its use of playwriting principles. Success or failure depends on timeliness when presenting a play as its point of view

must be accepted by a given audience. Whether consciously acknowledged or not, all plays employ some playwriting principles in the creation and writing process. Identifying the principles used in playwriting lead to stronger plays. Playwriting books address themselves in part to the fundamental idea that using principles can help shape plays. The value of teaching dramatic technique is to stimulate writers to discover their own process.

The playwriting books examined in this study align their approaches as either intrinsic or extrinsic. In other words, the method of each book concentrates on the process of writing a play or the play as a product. Books assigned to arbitrary decades in this study generally follow a pattern of intrinsic and extrinsic purposes. The books of the decades of the 1920s and 1930s exhibit an intrinsic value, while the books of the 1940s and 1950s concern themselves with extrinsic purposes. The 1960s and 1970s see the books return to an intrinsic process of playwriting. The 1980s center their attention on the play as a result. While not every book explored in this study fits neatly into these categories, frequently the majority of the books in the assigned decades espouse a similar intrinsic or extrinsic purpose.

In Chapter Three of this study, George Pierce Baker, John Lawson, and Kenneth Thorpe Rowe involve themselves

with the process of writing a play. Once Baker establishes emotional response as the key element of a play, he devotes the rest of the book suggesting ways to create, select, heighten, control, and sustain it. He utilizes many examples from plays to illustrate different methods for a playwright to use when constructing a play. His main intent through the elaborate discourse is to show a playwright how a play gets written. His concerns are with completing the writing process; he spends little time discussing what to do with it after that.

Lawson organizes his methodology for writing plays around a core issue. He presents historical necessity as the basic building block for creating a play. For him, plays must have social significance in that they are aware of their time and place. While the idea of logical happenings following a given set of circumstances, or probability, is important, he centers his argument on crafting a story with a complex environment and characters. Writing plays then becomes easy once the environment has been solidly defined, shaped, and structured.

The play examples that Rowe employs in his book illustrate his approach to the writing of plays. By analyzing written texts, he extrapolates the qualities, or principles, that are effective. Reconstructing plays that are past successes is not his main objective.

Understanding how the principles of playwriting were utilized in proven texts aids playwrights when they attempt to write their own plays.

Chapter Four covers the books of Lajos Egri, Samuel Selden, Marian Gallaway, Kenneth Macgowan, and Roger M. Busfield, Jr. A tonal shift emerges in these books. From the process of playwriting seen in Chapter Three, the books in this chapter concern themselves with the shape of a play as an overall end product. Egri insists that a play have a premise, or proposition. The goal of a play is to discuss, resolve, and prove its premise. He notes the importance of character in establishing that premise. While he espouses on character as a key element in a play, his main concern is that a play meet its goal. He offers no prescribed method about how a play arrives at the point of proving its proposition.

Selden provides a straightforward accounting for play construction. He hopes that playwrights use his checklists as examples to create their own methodology for creating a play. His goal is extrinsic as his purpose lay outside the process of writing a play. The checklists and guidelines serve a dual function: they aid playwrights in accomplishing the original goal, and they illustrate strengths and weaknesses in structure, conception, and execution.

Similarly to Egri, Gallaway posits an overall goal that a play must contain. For her, a point of view determines the shape of a play. She insists playwrights have personal philosophies to use as starting points. Writing plays requires playwrights to know themselves. Gallaway believes that the basic structure of a play relies on a human counterpart. Humans, in reacting with each other, create conflict. Life is about restoring the harmony. Constructing a play revolves around this dynamic. Her And/But/Therefore principle diagrams the progression.

Macgowan submits that complications are his criteria for a play. The audience comes to worry and in order to satisfy them, playwrights devise complications to arouse curiosity and force an audience to care about the action of the characters. He also embellishes the notion of a central conflict. He thinks a play's construction is not as simple as A wants B but C stands in the way. He demonstrates how complications can be used to heighten suspense and interest an audience during the working out of the central conflict.

For Busfield, the audience comprises an important, and often overlooked, element in the life of a play. His approach includes the audience as an equal collaborative partner in the playwriting process. Because of the wider

scope, he tends to look at the dramatic values in a play rather than the ways of obtaining them.

Bernard Grebanier and Sam Smiley represent the 1960s and 1970s in Chapter Five. While each book handles the process of writing a play from a different perspective, they both engage in an intrinsic discourse. Grebanier examines previous play texts to ascertain playwriting principles that might prove useful for writers. The shape of a play proceeds in a triangular path. A character speaks or enacts an action to another character. The words or the action travel to the audience first before reaching the other actor. The presence of the audience aids in selecting and heightening the actions of a play. He includes various techniques, such as W. T. Price's proposition, to structure a play.

Smiley emphasizes that a play is a constructed object. Its construction implies an intrinsic process. He encases the process of writing a play within Aristotle's four causes of bringing something into being. He incorporates the six elements of drama to denote ways of creating a play, and asserts that all plays contain these six elements. In a form-matter progression, Smiley demonstrates how thought and character form plot, and conversely how plot and character are the material for thought. In this causal connection, the elements affect

and react to each other. Knowing the scale of the dramatic principles allows playwrights to choose what elements to heighten, strengthen, or shape in terms of the play as a whole. The process of writing a play begins with a creative compulsion and culminates in production; publication sometimes follows. While the post-production period and publication are not necessary for completing the process of playwriting, Smiley considers the production of a play vital to its completion of that process. His focus remains always on the play itself. He addresses each stage of writing a play as a means to an end. By stressing process, the book offers functional principles in the attempt to reinforce the craftsmanship of dramaturgy.

The playwriting books of the 1980s reflect the trend for developing new plays. At first glance, the interest in new plays connotes an intrinsic approach. But developing new plays translates to a process involved with audiences and theatres as much as with the writing process itself. The Playwright's Handbook by Frank Pike and Thomas G. Dunn illustrates the idea of product. Pike appropriates the image of a writers' workshop as a stimulating and supportive environment to a three-tiered process for finishing a play. He mentions no principles per se. The first section ends with Pike urging playwrights to submit

third drafts. He believes that playwrights learn their craft by practicing, yet he offers few options or ideas as how to improve their skills as craftsmen. Dunn points out what to do with the play after it is written. Clearly, this portion of the book concentrates on the product and how to garner the attention of artistic directors, literary agents, publishers, and agents.

Louis Catron's overall goal for a script is for it to be possible, plausible, and probable. He writes for an audience of writers who may not have much practical theatre experience. He progresses step by step to finishing a full-length script. He advises writers to begin with one-act plays, and includes checklists to maintain a play's credibility. To attain credibility Catron insists on a credo. Playwrights must know what they want to say before they can write a play. His method tends to encourage realistic plays because credibility is somehow easier to obtain in realism.

Stanley Longman places a play in a larger context which includes both process and product. Composing a drama encompasses a physical dimensionality that focussing on the text alone cannot provide. He posits that playwrights control the energy patterns in the physical space of a stage. Playwrights use words as composers use notes. Something coming into being is not the end result.

Constructing a play as an instrument for fulfilling an action that involves other considerations of time, space, bodies, and energies necessitates a broader scope which includes the play as an ends to a means.

William Packard includes playwrights and playgoers as his reading audience. The needs of both audiences seem to be different. But Packard combines those needs by using the principles of playwriting to nurture a playgoer's understanding. He devises guidelines and checklists for both playwrights and playgoers to evaluate plays as they are written or observed. The second half of the book denotes contemporary playwrights and includes a glossary of stage terms. The book ends with a quiz of its concepts.

Whether the tone is intrinsic or extrinsic, the playwriting books presented in this study share one belief: playwriting is an art. Acknowledging playwrights as artists categorize them as those who strive to tell the truth. The earnest exploration of personal values characterizes the process for the creation of art. A playwright shapes a play around a particular human truth. That truth's existence in reality is based on the artist's experiences. Even if an artist wishes to create the same truth in art object after art object, the circumstances for the truth change. As a result, the creation, or structure, changes. Experiences and the passage of time alter one's

truth. Most artists are adept at extracting from individual experiences examples which illustrate truths. To be valuable to the artist, a book on playwriting cannot dictate an exact method to be used to create every play. Instead, playwriting advice must emphasize the origins of the particular creativity inherent to plays. When playwrights express points of view in plays, they express their truth. Thus, having a point of view is a necessity for composing plays. Playwrights draw on personal moral codes in order to fortify their dramas.

Books which support the idea of internal truths as the basis of art aid the playwright at the inception of creation and thereby allow for the wondrous variety of plays. As long as a play demonstrates an internal truth conceived by the author, it is a play regardless of the number of conflicts, complications, character traits, and climaxes devised.

A good play, however, presents such an internal truth by means of sound craftsmanship. Established principles can help a playwright construct a play which illuminates the truth in the strongest theatrical light. The application of playwriting principles eases the apprenticeship period. Intuition initially provides a natural dramatic sense. One may know intuitively if a scene is actable or not. Implementing the principles of

playwriting helps determine whether a scene is actable. Books on playwriting which define principles of craftsmanship are useful to playwrights for shaping truths into dramatic stories.

Writing a play taxes the five physical senses, the mental senses of intellect and critical thinking, and the spiritual senses of intuition and morality. To coordinate those levels of awareness into a coherent structure requires craftsmanship, talent, and hard work. A play consists physically of words on a paper which represent a playwright's particular truth presented in a manner that interested others, such as actors, directors, designers, and audiences, readily understand. No universal truths emerge from the present exploration of 14 playwriting books on how to create such a multi-dimensional object. A play is a continuous process of becoming which manifests itself differently in time, space, rhythm, texture, structure, and idea every time it is conceived, written, rewritten, and performed.

Playwriting is a lonely art and a difficult one. But a playwright need not feel alone. Writing classes and playwrights' workshops provide companionship and support. Thousands of previous plays, which have been deemed successful for a host of reasons, offer excellent examples. Finally, the playwriting books discussed in the foregoing

chapters concisely demonstrate the essential principles of craftsmanship and act as a reminder of the variables a dramatist must control. Books on playwriting deserve applause for their expertise in wrestling with the process of creating a play.

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