The Art of Dramatic Writing Study Guide

The Art of Dramatic Writing by Lajos Egri

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

First published in 1942 under the title "How to Write a Play," The Art of Dramatic Writing became such a landmark in not only playwriting, but storytelling of any kind, that it was revised in 1946 and given the title it has today. Lajos Egri's book is a classic, deconstructing the pieces of a play, analyzing them all, then putting the pieces back together in the simplest way, writing in an exceptionally organized fashion without any nonsensical attitude. The confusing jargon that fills the spaces of most guides, is nonexistent here. It is completely straightforward.

Egri thinks writing should hold its ground on concepts present throughout the entirety of a play. The essentials, such as premise, transition, and character growth, are what he believes in. He is opposed to the idea that a play should center around singular facets, like exposition or an obligatory scene. Egri is a character man. Characters come first to him. This impression is evident toward the beginning of the book, and the remainder of it revolves around these beliefs, that plays should not revolve around individual scenes or ideas, but should work as a whole to accomplish something big the writer believes in.

The book is split into four sections, the first three representing the big ideas Egri wants his writers to attend to: Premise, Character, and Conflict. 'Premise' does not contain any chapters, but is a moderately lengthy fraction of the book detailing what the author will soon prove the most important aspect of a play's first stages.

In 'Character,' there are eleven chapters. Egri begins by picking apart a character, and what affects their decision-making and actions. This progresses to descriptions of the growth process and the strength of a character. Egri moves on to his opinion on plot being secondary to character. He discusses next the different types of characters, and ends the section with chapters on how they come together and conflict with one another.

Portions of what is learned in that section are used to further the points made in the ten chapters of 'Conflict.' This section begins by talking of how action originates, what causes it, and the effects from it. Then, the four different types of conflict are studied. The section is rounded out with the ever-important facet of transition, and an examination of how the three-step process of crisis, climax and resolution should work.

The fourth section is for general queries that do not fit into the above big categories. Many of the fourteen chapters here, however, contain very vital information, all with expert opinions by the author. Areas of focus include dialogue, experimenting, timeliness, entrances and exits, and television writing. Also, questions regarding what defines art, why bad plays are well-received, and what defines genius are examined here.

Book I: The Premise

Book I: The Premise Summary and Analysis

A premise is detailed as being what a writer sets out to prove with his story, and the author explains and exemplifies why it is of the utmost importance for one to be established. It is something that suggests character, conflict, and a conclusion. It will be a story's foundation, an essential the author believes any writer must figure out at some point in his story development in order to write a tale that will "show you the road."

The author takes a look at some noteworthy plays to find their premises, and demonstrates that often enough, one can be found in a story. However, he questions whether the authors themselves knew about it, which would explain why in some stories, there are certain events that stray from their premises. Therefore, the story may begin to feel confusing to the reader, preventing that play from being the great acheivement it could have been.

If one becomes inspired to write a play based on something unusual, or even extraordinary, that has happened to them, it still is not enough ground to write on. The author states, "No idea, and no situation, was ever strong enough to carry you through to its logical conclusion without a clear-cut premise." He does not want to disregard emotion, but he argues that it cannot truly suffice unless the reader is able to tell what is the point behind it, and what drives it. Later, he goes on to detail a method on using basic emotions to express the premise.

For the remainder of this argument, the author holds a questions and answers session. He uses an example to show how a writer can begin a play even without a premise, because whatever inspires him to write must unfold, and it needs to manifest into something efficient in order for it to be a satisfying story. "You have time to find your premise in the mass of material later. The important thing is to find it."

The author then takes the idea of love, wanting to use it in a play, and questions what kind of love he wants, demonstrating how simply a premise will be born from this process. Afterwards, he concludes most imperatively that a writer must actually believe in their premise with their own heart to truly prove that the story they have written is their own. If one tries too hard to stumble upon a premise through a random thinking process, they are likely not to be genuinely connected to it. He says, "A good premise represents the author."

Even when a writer bases a play about crime on an idea he thinks is terrific, the author explains how easy it will be for him to become upset if others are not as captivated as he is. The reason for this is because, sub-consciously, the listener knows there is no clear premise evident in this play, and it only revolves around that mere idea. He follows this up by discussing his accurate method of finding a crime play's premise. Then, the

play Tartuffe by comedic playwright Moliere is quoted to show how a story unfolds from its premise.

The chapter is closed with a very pivotal point—a premise does not need to be the universal truth. It is only what the writer believes in and what makes their story work. Lastly, the author makes it clear that, "Neither the premise nor any other part of the play has a separate life of its own. All must blend into an harmonious whole."

Book II: Character, Chapters 1 - 3

Book II: Character, Chapters 1 - 3 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 1: The Bone Structure

This chapter is a guide on how writers must, literally, know their characters. It is about the importance of knowing why they do the good or bad things that they do, and not just how they do them. The author realizes the first step to fleshing-out these characters is to focus on three different dimensions special to humans, and elaborates on what these are and the basic way to use them to make characters more real; he uses what he calls a "bone structure." The author believes this will make writing characters easier, now that the writer can figure out why they are so motivated.

After taking a look at each character quirk, that the author emphasizes must be built, in all three dimensions, he follows up with another question and answer session. This one further clarifies any doubts about what can be traced back to one of these dimensions. The author undoubtedly wants his characters to be there in order to express the premise, and knows that using the dimensions is essential in doing this naturally.

Chapter 2: Environment

Following the pattern begun in the previous chapter, chapter two discusses how a man's environment, health, and economic background will shape him into what he is. Therefore, it is another determining factor in what gives him his motivation and his quirks. A man's mind will react to something that affects him physically more so than his body. His health will grip his mind, and alter the way he judges and perceives things. Even if he tries to deny and act against it, the author believes he will unavoidably reflect what he really is. Therefore, a character must represent the influence his environment has had on him.

Chapter 3: The Dialectical Approach

The author talks about the process of contradiction. He wants to prove that contradiction causes motion, and motion is needed to keep life constantly moving. He explains what dialectical means, and how it can be used to decipher any mysterious way a person may act. To exemplify how dialectics can be used to perceive the contradictions that make life, he creates a fully-detailed bone structure for a fictional female character, a pure girl who turns to prostitution. It is the determining factor in why such a girl can go from right to wrong. It is essential that she logically be led to the path of sin, with no possible alternatives, because that is what the writer intends. It is the author's determination that if the writer shows any possibility of an alternative, the writer fails to properly craft his own story.

Book II: Character, Chapters 4 - 9

Book II: Character, Chapters 4 - 9 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 4: Character Growth

This chapter goes into detail about the way characters grow. According to the author, they must grow, for if a character is the same way in the beginning as he is in the end, the play is bad. Going back to the premise, he believes that if the writer has one, his characters will grow because it is their job to prove the premise. One example of character growth done terrifically is Henrik Ibsen's play A Doll's House. The author takes a few pages to examine the scene where a lead character in this play, a childlike and naive woman, receives a reality check, and Ibsen gives her everything she needs to become a mature adult.

The author proves that growth is a real character's reaction to his conflict, and that when a character grows, it proves the story's premise.

Chapter 5: Strength of Will in a Character

This chapter is about characters who need to fight for what they believe in, and whether or not they are ready to. Sometimes writers take a character who is not ready to fight at this time in their life, making them weak, the author says, pointing out that the writer has caught the character in a transitional period at best. This will make a character fail.

The author sets up a situation where a crime is committed with supposedly no motive involved. However, looking back at this criminal's life, he determines that the motive was decades in the making, that the criminal's life has been on a hidden downward spiral for years, and it all accumulated in one moment. If a writer wants his character to be ready for the conflict, he only has to search the person's past far enough back, and then catch him when he is ready to strike. Otherwise, if the character is forced into acting, it cannot be real.

Chapter 6: Plot or Character—Which?

In this chapter, the author emphasizes the under-appreciated factor of a story that is character, stating that it has a reigning power in the presence of a written piece of work. In his relentless view, action is shaped by characters. With this, he opposes Aristotle's belief that character is secondary to action. He takes another ancient Greek, Sophocles, and uses his story Oedipus Rex, analyzing situations that happen to the title character. From this, he is able to conclude that even the writing of Aristotle's time shows that when situations happen, they happen because of their characters. The author is set in believing that plot is created by character, and knows a great play cannot be written unless character is the greatest factor.

Chapter 7: Characters Plotting Their Own Play

Chapter seven begins immediately where the previous chapter left off. The author wants the writer to know that their characters should not be dependent on their pen, that if they have a premise that they really want to prove, the characters must be exceedingly developed so they can carry the story on their own. Yet again, the author takes an example from Henrik Ibsen's A Doll House, deeply examining two of its lead characters and how they make its plot possible.

Chapter 8: Pivotal Character

When focusing on exactly how the pivotal character will come to lead a cause, the author mainly explains that something is to be at stake for them. Something necessary, like one's honor or health, is put into jeopardy, and the pivotal character will go on to fight for it. He emphasizes that they do not decide their own fate.

Chapter 9: The Antagonist

A character who faces off against the pivotal character is the antagonist, and the author wants to make it very clear that this opposing force absolutely must be equal to the pivotal character in vigor and determination. This person is the reason for a story's crises, and as the author says, "A novel, play, or any type of writing, really is a crisis from beginning to end growing to its necessary conclusion."

Book II: Character, Chapters 10 - 11

Book II: Character, Chapters 10 - 11 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 10: Orchestration

When a writer has pivotal characters and antagonists, he must make certain they are indeed very different from one another. They cannot share the same attitude toward things, and need to have contrasting moods. If they are too similar in ways such as this, there is no conflict, and therefore no play, of course. The author takes a look at when a play's story moves from something like love to hate, and how, in order to have this, things need to be well-defined. To have well-defined characters, the writer should know what personality categories they fall under, and when he finds two differing personalities, the conflict can then present itself. The author certainly does not want the writer to forget about growth, which has to be maintained so the end of the play will differ from the beginning. He is adament about growth being the one key factor in obtaining conflict.

Chapter 11: Unity of Opposites

In regards to well-defined characters, the author expresses that they must be so much so, that when the reader looks at the pivotal character and the antagonist, they will see that it is impossible for their conflict to be put aside and forgiven. They absolutely cannot come to a compromise, so they must fight, which is where the story will lie. This is called the unity of opposites. To better define this term, the author creates a skit where an abandoned street dog makes friends with a man on his way to work, and causes sympathy in the man when he begs to be let into his home. However, the man lives with his wife, who hates the idea of stray animals.

Book III: Conflict, Chapters 1 -2

Book III: Conflict, Chapters 1 -2 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 1: Origin of Action

Further elaborating on why character comes before action, this chapter takes a look at the undeniable truth that every action has components that cause it to happen. Action can never simply be pulled out of thin air, but it is always present in a story because it is what the writer will get due to the conditions to which it is connected.

Chapter 2: Cause and Effect

To focus on how conflict comes into being, the author writes a short skit about a cordial twentysomething man who meets a girl. The man likes this girl and invites her to a concert, but later realizes that due to his financial problems and sorry situation at home, he cannot possibly afford dating a girl right now. He has to end the relationship before it can even begin. The author wants to prove that conflicts arise from environment and one's social situation. He uses a paper, written by a doctor, about a gene system, which says that genes act as a unit moreso than as individuals. Of course, the author relates this to humans; they are part of a society of other humans.

The author places conflict into four divisions: static, jumping, rising, and foreshadowing. He does some foreshadowing himself, for these divisions are focused on separately in the next several chapters. For now, he relates his skit to these divisions, and how the story would end up under each kind of conflict. His main focus here is to emphasize, once again, that character creates conflict, but now with the added knowledge that environment influences character.

Book III: Conflict, Chapters 3 - 7

Book III: Conflict, Chapters 3 - 7 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 3: Static

The first conflict the author examines, or the lack thereof, is static. Conflict is needed to create more conflict, but it cannot be sprung in the first place unless the story's characters have goals. They need to know what they want, how they are going to get it, and this will cause movement. The opposite of this is static, when characters are just too lethargic to do any decision making. If a writer concludes that he must only add emotion to his character in order to fix this problem, the author concludes that this will not suffice. The character's emotions are of the utmost importance; however, unless this person shows he is willing to fight for whatever he is emotional about, the emotions themselves are not compelling enough to stand on their own. As for dialogue, the author believes even when it is of the highest and wittiest caliber, it cannot move a play forward unless these speeches involve conflict that is growing and moving. When a writer can acheive this, he need not worry that his play is boring.

After looking at how static can occur, how a character's development begins to linger and how it goes back to the problem of a lacking premise, the author uses Robert E. Sherwood's play, Idiot's Delight, to show the reader what static really is. He is not afraid to be straightforward and calls this play a bad one, demonstrating why over the next several pages of the chapter. Through excerpts of one scene in particular, the author wants one to realize that the characters here are only designed to tell the reader about themselves. The author, Sherwood, did not write them to disharmonize with one another, they are simply just conversing. This is the opposite of drama.

The author also looks as Noel Coward's play Design for Living, and with this, shows the reader that the final lines of this scene coincide with its first lines. This scene in the play goes on for a number of pages without movement, it is static.

Chapter 4: Jumping

The chapter is begun with a handful of directions given by the author on how to avoid a jumping conflict. Many times a writer will feel his story's events are playing out so well, that it will go over his head whenever a character jumps from one place to an entirely opposite place. He will forget to write what happens in between a character's destination from Point A to Point B, and this is a jumping conflict; not surprisingly, the author deems this a major problem.

The authors asserts the significance of a writer giving his readers a chance to explore his characters' changes. The characters need enough air to reveal what is making them become what they are. To prove how important this is, the author takes the final scene

from Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House and shortens its length dramatically, leaving out everything Ibsen writes that shows how and why his characters are changing. Clearly, the author is able to prove with his own version that when written in this way, the play loses many things. So, he offers solutions. When a play jumps, the conflict lags, and if that happens, the trouble is directed back to not having a clear-cut premise. Referencing what was taught in earlier chapters, the author blames the possibilities of bad orchestration, meaning characters are too weak for their problems, and points to the unity of opposites as a result of the jumping.

For the remaining ten pages of the chapter, the reader is given the chance to view the real version of Ibsen's last scene in A Doll's House. Now that is it ten times the length of the author's edited version, one can see just how much a hefty dose of detail in character growth can explain the premise better while appearing better calculated, intelligent, and coherent.

Chapter 5: Rising

The author now comes to a type of conflict that works well, as opposed to the deficient conflicts focused on in the previous two chapters. The reason rising conflict occurs in a story is because almost everything is being done right. It is when characters have three dimensions and exhibit a unity, when they are orchestrated well against a finely-established premise. Paying another compliment to Henrik Ibsen, the author showcases his play Hedda Gabler. In the scene he choses, rising conflict is happening, and it happens indeed because of all the qualities stated above. It is easy to determine why the characters are in debate, since each of them takes a stand that proves them to be strong for their cause, and this all raises good questions as to what the outcome will turn out to be.

An excerpt is taken from another one of Ibsen's works, Ghosts. The author examines two of its bickering characters to show how a writer must act as an illusionist while the conflict is rising. In this case, Ibsen's readers are safe to assume that his characters have been arguing like this their entire lives, and he achieves this by writing only the essentials in their confrontation. The author also takes a look at the rising action in Moliere's play Tartuffe, when the character of Tartuffe is being plotted against by his family, who have bonded together to defeat him.

Evoking other chapters by talking of the importance of character once more, the author expresses the need for them to be three-dimensional in order to acheive the rise of conflict in a story. A story's readers must feel the character's motivation to achieve what he is fighting for, to see his growth. He feels the writer has the ability to make them so extraordinary that the reader wishes they were more than just fiction.

Chapter 6: Movement

In order to discuss movement as a whole, the author separates it into a big category and a small category, that every small movement must be important only in accordance with the bigger movement at hand. Needless to say, the big movement must be present

if smaller movements are occuring. To give an idea of how this is done the wrong way, the author takes a scene from Noel Coward's Hay Fever. In it, the four member family is trying to decide upon sleeping arrangements for the father, mother, and sister's guests. An argument ensues amongst them, and it ultimately leads to the son revealing he has also invited a guest. The author reasons why the writing in this scene is so inadequate, because several pages of dialogue are just making small movements, and are not being used in accordance with a big movement.

To have a compelling conflict that is moving somewhere, the author points out the necessity of attack and counterattack between the characters. Using Nora and Helmer again from Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House, he notes the way these characters do this exchange of back-and-forth between one another. When Helmer is displaying his aggression and his frustration with her through verbose passages, Nora's responses are short and more calm. Nora is resisting attacking in the same way as Helmer, and this is her counterattack. In response to this, the author wants the reader to know that, "Every conflict must be treated with regard to the characters and the situation involved."

Chapter 7: Foreshadowing Conflict

If an audience becomes bored, it may be from not being able to detect any foreshadowing in the play they are watching, so the author states at the beginning of this chapter. If conflict is to be the beat that keeps its story's heart thumping, it must be hinted at early on so to be fully effective later. What is deemed by the author to be a perfect example of the use of foreshadowing, is the film Thirty Seconds over Tokyo. In this story, air pilots during WWII are told they have been selected to man a secret bombing mission. For almost the entirety of the film, conflict is scarce, but the audience is captivated because the ending is foreshadowed so much, that by the film's final thirty seconds, they are satisfied.

The author reviews what is referred to as horse sense. When an audience simply knows that a play they are watching is bad, it is a psychological reaction, their horse sense. It is stressed that an author not forgo this basic capability of humans, which is why foreshadowing in any written piece of work is imperative. If a conflict does not exist without some foreshadowing to promise it, an audience will be able to tell.

Book III: Conflict, Chapters 8 - 10

Book III: Conflict, Chapters 8 - 10 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 8: Point of Attack

It should naturally be known by now that something in a character's life must be at stake, that he must be fighting for it. This is the attack, and in this chapter, the author focuses on when that attack should occur. He believes it must become the protagonist's problem at the very beginning of the play, and he gives examples of plays that have begun immediately with what is at stake for the protagonist.

The author conducts another question and answer session, where he imposes questions on himself to give information on subjects such as why a play must begin with the attack, how this gives the writer his best opportunity to get inside the characters. Also, he stresses that it is bad playwriting to create atmosphere and gather evidence of the problem before establishing the conflict itself right off the bat. It is only a waste to not get to the point, and to further this statement, he ends the question and answer session with a story. It is about a confused writer who thinks he has all the material he needs for his play, but realizes it lacks tension. As it turns out, the writer did not put anything at stake for any of the characters at the beginning, which is why his story drags and is not suspenseful. It proves this chapter to contain valid advice.

The chapter is ended with a disagreement on Aristotle's theory: "Every story must have a beginning, a middle, and an end." The author believes only the naive would take this advice. Since a play must open with the problem, the point of attack, it begins in the middle of this character's story. He believes the story is only possible because it has grown out of whatever built up before it even began.

Chapter 9: Transition

The author starts his description of transition with a look at an average human's life from birth to death. To examine how gradually a person moves from one of these poles to the other, he cites from one of Leonardo da Vinci's works which studies the peaceful death of a perfectly healthy old man. The death was a result of the man's arteries becoming blocked over time, his body gradually transitioning to death. The author simply wants to make it clear that with the emotions dealt with in a play, there cannot be a jump when a character moves from one to another. There will always be transition between the poles, just like with nature.

The writing in Henrik Ibsen's story Ghosts is used, for this one scene in particular is exemplary for demonstrating transition. One character is a liar and practically a psychologist, lying to a naive priest about wanting to make amends. The priest is angry and in doubt, but is a forgiving man. So, the transition was anger to forgiveness. This

scene is cited for the reader to view this, what the author considers, masterly transitioning.

Moliere's play Tartuffe is also shown for its good transition work. The scene excerpted here is one where the title character wants to exhibit his lust for one of the lead women, except he ordinarily passes himself off as a saint, and therefore must accomplish his illicit proposal while staying in character. The transition dealt with brings conflict as another male character steps in to oppose Tartuffe, to call him out. From this, tension builds, more emotions begin budding, the conflict keeps rising, and the natural, fluid transition throughout all of this makes everything here captivating.

The author simply insists on the art of transition, showcasing yet another exceptional scene, this one from the play Dinner at Eight where irritation transcends into full-on rage. Here, it plays out in a fairly short time, and even though the characters are not exactly aware of it, the author states that the writer absolutely must show that it is indeed there. If it is, the play will always be kept moving and the possibility of having jumps is eliminated. Also, transition has the power to connect two emotions that are seemingly not related.

This cannot be said for the opening scene of the play Stevedore. The author wants the reader to find where the conflict jumps in this short scene, which he cites here. In it, a married couple bickers. The characters' timing is filled with static, their actions are not believable, and they react to the wrong things, which all results in jumping. The author offers solutions for Stevedore's faults. Its overall fault is a serious lack of transition, which is exemplified once more with the play Black Pit. In the scene shown here, the author believes the reason for the movement from pole to pole is real, but the fact that the transition is not shown hurts the play very much. The reader now does not know what this character thinks, and on top of that, this scene is supposed to be the moment that explains the conduct he displays throughout the remainder of the play. This all goes back to the all-important facet of premise, which becomes all mixed-up when something like transition is not handled properly, or at all.

Chapter 10: Crisis, Climax, Resolution

As usual, the author takes excerpts from Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House to establish what exactly he wants to demonstrate with the topic of this chapter. He shows first where crisis, climax and resolution appear, and next concentrates on the factors that cause a crisis and climax. He examines the story and finds the unity of opposites to be in great form, and that this naturally guarantees crisis and climax. The crisis is bound to happen from the time the story begins, given the types of characters created. As for the climax, however, it is up to Ibsen at this point to ensure his characters do not lose their touch, their strength. The author believes the three-step process should be repeated for every scene in a play, and in a manner that ascends whatever came before it. He looks at the first scene of Ibsen's other play Ghosts to show how it is done.

Book IV: General, Chapters 1 - 8

Book IV: General, Chapters 1 - 8 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 1: Obligatory Scene

In order to find what is the most important part of a story, the author creates a brief biography of a fictional scientist. His goal is to disprove the theory of an obligatory scene, something he declares many are ill-informed about. He states here that there cannot be one scene that everything is led to because every scene is obligatory in a sense that each scene in a play is a result of the one before it. He blames the failure of an obligatory scene on the writer's concentration toward just that one moment. In cases like this, the writer can forget the premise's importance, and may not be making the audience wait for anything good. The author stresses, as well, that obligatory scenes cannot be treated as independent. Disagreeing with John Howard Lawson's statement that the obligatory scene "is the immediate goal toward which the play is driving," he makes it clear once again that premise is the true immediate goal.

Chapter 2: Exposition

With this chapter, the author attempts to disprove the all-too-common definition of the term exposition seen in most textbooks, which is that it is the establishment of mood, atmosphere, and background in the very beginning of a play. Going back to the importance of character, the author clarifies that this should be what is exposed. When a character is proving his premise, he is exposing the aforementioned details as well. Since this is the case, exposition therefore must be present throughout the entire play, not just at the beginning. If it disappears, the characters will no longer continue to grow, and neither will the play. The author ends the chapter stating why exposition is really conflict.

Chapter 3: Dialogue

For this chapter, the author decides to allow a particular student of his to offer her explanation; she does so in an essay on dialogue that the author deems clear and straight to the point. The student begins by affirming the importance of dialogue, how it moves conflict, reveals characters, and proves the premise. Clearly she shows she is a student of the author's teachings, making fine points about how rising conflict will result in first-rate dialogue. Also, she mentions that its contribution in revealing character must rely on the three dimensions.

She discusses how dialogue is a great way to deliver information, and also a way to state a message. However, the message should not be protested in speeches that are not of the character's nature, and uses Paul Green's play Hymn to the Rising Sun to

prove how messages can be put forth competently without force or illogical, out-of-character dialogue.

When looking at something the author has discussed in a previous chapter, character growth, the student explains how dialogue is an imperative aspect in making the character grow. She pays a compliment to Robert E. Sherwood's play Idiot's Delight by exemplifying how properly dialogue grew, and how it kept getting better, in one particular scene that she describes.

She concludes by briefly focusing on what the author demonstrates further in the following chapter, which is that such dialectical methods do not strip an author of his creativity, that there is plenty of space for him to incorporate his own imagination.

Chapter 4: Experimentation

The author runs a fairly brief question and answer session, which focuses on a writer's concern that all of these rules for writing seriously restrict their creativity, and eliminate any possibility to experiment. So, he uses Shakespeare as an example, and how even though he defies Aristotle's rules for writing, he still very much uses the most correct approaches, most likely without knowing it. A writer is wrong to think the rules covered in this book force everybody to write the same way, because "there are no two men who talk alike, think alike, speak alike. And there are no two men who write alike." The author does not want to impose strict rules on writing, and sees the freedom of experimentation as something from which one can learn. He merely suggests that said experimentation should occur under the learned principles.

Chapter 5: The Timeliness of a Play

Another question and answer session focuses on the worries of a writer, wondering whether he will get approval of his play if its subject does not come at the right time in history. The author believes the writer to be lost if he is spending his time worrying about what others will think. He wants them to just write their story if it sounds really desirable to them, and does not want them to see through another man's eyes when it comes to approval. The most important thing he wants writers like this to remember, is that it is the quality of the writing in the play that matters most. He emphasizes the three dimensions, and that this will create great characters who can make a play timeless.

Chapter 6: Entrances and Exits

When a writer has trouble entering and exiting his characters, the author believes he may not know them well enough. The writer has not blended them into the framework of the story enough to comfortably decide how they will come into a scene, and how they will leave. So, Henrik Ibsen's play Ghosts is used to demonstrate how this has been achieved. This segues into his belief that entrances and exits should never be random, something lazily convenient for the writer to add in. They must be necessary actions for the characters to make.

Chapter 7: Why Are Some Bad Plays Successful?

Working straight from the question asked in the chapter's title, the author briefly examines several inadequately-written plays to see why audiences respond to them so well. His conclusions state that people might relate to the very familiar characters and the matters to which they are subjected. With Erskine Caldwell's novel Tobacco Road, characters are static, meaning they do not grow. However, this is not a problem for audiences because the characters are so vicious that it is fascinating just for them to observe their ways. Noel Coward, oft-criticized by the author, is mentioned since Coward's plays did well, likely due to their timing. They came after World War II had just finished, and dealt with problems rather tame and different, compared to what people had just gone through with the war. It was a refreshing experience.

Despite bad writing, many plays garner fans because their subject material is unique. The author believes this explains Coward's success, given how his conflicts were a great contrast to what was occuring in world news at the time. If his plays were released at any time when war was not being fought, however, the author says they would be met with boredom.

The chapter ends with a note on why writers should not write for anybody besides themselves. They should write what they believe in, while of course, including tri-dimensional characters whose actions are guided by necessity.

Chapter 8: Melodrama

Melodrama is much different than what drama should be. A play is made to be a melodrama when its characters move too quickly, jumping from emotion to emotion because they are one-dimensional, and their actions make little sense. The whole play is overrun with conflict's prominence. Transitions in a melodrama either cease to exist, or are just poorly written. The ever-important tri-dimensional character, after all, is made believable through transitioning, and if that is not present, then the writer will be left instead with melodrama.

Book IV: General, Chapters 9 - 14

Book IV: General, Chapters 9 - 14 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 9: On Genius

The chapter begins with a look at some definitions on the idea of genuis. Osias L. Schwarz says, "The genius draws a maximum of conclusions from a minimum of observations." Nevertheless, the author questions if the genius must first succeed before this can hold true. He takes the idea of a potential genius, looks at some of his dimensions, his environment and his education, describing them all to create a smart, but slighty unprivileged man. Now referring to this person he has created, he argues that people who hold the aforementioned background attributes are only potential geniuses because they are not presented with any opportunity to succeed. He then describes some of Charles Darwin's unfortunate background, but also observes the opportunities the man was given to advance in his field of genius. Darwin's genius was able to be fully realized because of said opportunities.

The chapter ends with a look at the type of people who brag about their genius. The focus is on how they boast more often than they work, which contradicts the ability of a true genius: the ability to exert more time and patience than average on their field of interest.

Chapter 10: What is Art? — A Dialogue

A dialogue is held between the author and his fictional persona, somebody interested in the famous question asked in the chapter's title. The majority of the dialogue is used to compare such questions with science, how the human body works in correlation to how art is produced. He gathers that society is an atom of the universe, that when a writer creates a fine and bold character, he is reproducing man. Man represents society, so therefore, the writer's art in his creation of this character, reflects the universe. It is observed by the author that some writers' plays are not as full of life as they should be, even though their piece of work follows all the rules of writing. Then, there are others who incorporate all their knowledge of proper storytelling into their work as well, but they also keep it lifted with emotion; they take the necessary extra mile to inject emotions with their imagination and heart. The author may just believe this is what the art of writing is all about.

Chapter 11: When You Write a Play

Every unit learned thus far in this book, from premise to character to conflict, is basically summarized in less than a page at the beginning of this chapter. The author then goes on to criticize something said in the book The Theory of the Theatre, which contains a statement that plays can only properly be judged after they are seen performed with

real-life actors encompassing the body of work. The argument made by the author is that a play can very easily be judged just by reading it. From the premise and the characters growing out from it, being directed effortlessly into their rising conflicts and climaxes, the reader can tell on paper whether a play is good or not. Through merely reading, one can analyze a character's composition, their transition, and if that is noticeably poor, the production cannot be too good either. The author's asserts that this theory shows ignorance of playwriting's principles, the stuff of true craftsmanship.

Chapter 12: How to Get Ideas

The very important first step to getting ideas is through characters. A writer must have tri-dimensional characters who exhibit not just emotions, but advanced forms of emotion, complete with detail on why they are this way. To give an impression of what this can be like, the author lends a certain amount of detail to how several emotions can make characters act. He then gives the advice to take people from real life, and exaggerate them, since characters who overdo things typically are the ones that work best, especially for comedies. He explains the necessity of exaggeration further in a question and answer session.

The next several pages are dedicated to different types of characters, with several traits listed under each one that the author thinks fit the types best. The author emphasizes, however, that these characters are only worth putting into a play if they have just reached a turning point.

Chapter 13: Writing for Television

The similarities between playwriting and television writing are compared in the first paragraphs of this chapter. Although the book is over half-a-century old and the author describes television as being a "new and exciting medium," most of what is said about it still holds true in today's time. Back to the comparisons, he mentions how a television show must also begin with a strong point of attack to captivate viewers from the start. The principles of creating conflict are exactly the same, from rising conflict to foreshadowing, as well. The author also talks of a few differences, such as how many sets an episode of a television show will require over a one-act play, but how there will be generally fewer characters.

After stating what a television script does not need in comparison to that of a play's, the author excerpts the very beginning of a CBS-produced television script co-written by two of his students. The majority of what is written in the script is exemplary. However, it is out-of-date in its format and a little verbose for today's standards. The author follows this up with a page and a half worth of television vocabulary, almost all of them terms still used today.

Chapter 14: Conclusion

After nearly three-hundred pages worth of learning material, the author ends his guide with this half-page chapter. He stresses the perhaps hurtful truth that there are some professions for which people must be born with certain abilities to excel in, and writing is

one of them. With writing, the author believes imagination and common sense, or horse sense, are two necessary abilities; knowledge in the three dimensions is also a fine asset. He states that writing is one of the hardest professions in existence, and how shocked he becomes when he hears of someone who thinks they can nonchalantly pick-up the art. Studying the dialectical approach will greatly help even those with the natural abilities, he thinks, and guide beginners to achieve their ambitions.

Characters

Henrik Ibsen

Henrik Ibsen and his story A Doll's House consistently demonstrates the methods taught in many, many chapters of this book. From characters to plot, A Doll's House is used as an example more than any other written piece of work mentioned in the book. If redundancy were not a problem, the author might have used the fine play to show how everything is supposed to be done.

Exposition is handled smartly and naturally to introduce the play's two lead characters, Nora and Torvald Helmer. They are also used to exemplify how the unity of opposites is done correctly, and how perfectly-calculated the exchange is between their attack and counterattack segments. Also, to Aristotle's chagrin, the author explains how both of them make the plot of the entire story possible. He also spends a good deal of time explaining the incorporation of transition in a story, how it pieces together a character's growth. He compliments the ease with which Ibsen handles this, how the transitions are not rushed, but occur in a timely, smooth manner. He pays another compliment while criticizing the way a transition is handled in a certain non-Ibsen play, Black Pit, by showing how logically and simply Ibsen was able to write a very similar transition. In the chapter on character growth, the author describes A Doll's House as containing fine examples of this. As he gets into his discussion on jumping conflicts and how bad they are for a play, he dedicates ten pages to excerpt a scene from A Doll's House because he wants to really stress how well the characters change without needing to jump.

Practically the entirety of what the author wants to teach in his Crisis, Climax and Resolution chapter, uses A Doll's House to exemplify the essentials of this three-step process. He finds that, because Ibsen presents the unity of opposites clearly, crisis and climax are guaranteed. The characters are strong and Ibsen knows what he wants out of them from the beginning, which is why crisis and climax are, indeed, bound to happen.

It appears the author is a fan of Henrik Ibsen in general, as a writer. On numerous occasions he looks at Ibsen's other plays, Ghosts and Hedda Gabbler, and compliments them. In one instance, he uses both of these plays to demonstrate that most imperative goal of a writer—to achieve a rising conflict—and how these works do so. He looks at the very beginning of Ghosts to see how well-written the crisis, climax and resolution are in the scene.

William Shakespeare

When reading any guide on writing, one can surely expect the name William Shakespeare to make more than one appearance. References to the popular playwright in this book are primarily located in chapters about character. The author is a fan of the

people Shakespeare creates, mentioning that his plays Othello and King Lear are built on their characters. Hamlet is labelled a complete character. He is used to showcase what a three-dimensional character truly is, and for this reason works very well for a play. The character of Hamlet, along with Othello, are described as being "iron-willed characters," so much so that they are able to bring the play to its highest form. These pivotal characters are written the right way. When looking at character growth in one of the chapters, the author lists not just Hamlet and Othello as being good examples of how this is done, but acknowledges Merchant of Venice, Macbeth, and Romeo and Juliet to be fine representations as well, using Romeo for a lengthy period of time to discuss his well-written growth.

The author frequently criticizes ancient Greek principles on writing, and in one instance, uses Shakespeare as an example of when playwrights disregard those rules. Shakespeare defied such thinkers as Aristotle, but his work was well-received and excellent.

Moliere

The playwright Moliere used in this book to showcase his well-written, three-act comedy Tartuffe, the tale of a deceptive scoundrel who enters the home of a family under disguise and causes a number of problems for the well-off clan. It is one of the first plays used as an example, mentioned in the first section about the author's primary concern, premise. He uses Tartuffe so the reader understands how a story unfolds from its premise.

Later on, the author takes a look at how well Moliere handles rising conflict in a scene where Tartuffe himself is being planned against by the family. Moliere's writing is shown again to be exemplary in one excerpted scene where Tartuffe attempts to make a pass at the mistress of the house he is visiting. Another characters steps in and trouble brews. The author chooses this scene for its ability to captivate the audience with its fine transitional work, fluid and working toward more and more rising action.

Robert E. Sherwood

This playwright remains throughout the entire book a frequent target for the author's criticisms. Whenever the subject of a chapter is focused on, and there needs to be an example of how not to write something, the play Idiot's Delight by Robert E. Sherwood is often the example used. Even though it won Sherwood the Pulitzer Prize, the author thinks it is a lousy play.

Idiot's Delight receives the most disapproval in the chapter on static or stillness in a play. Static is not something a writer wants in his play. It is something he must always avoid. Yet the characters of Idiot's Delight suffer from it consistently. He excerpts from one particular scene, wanting the reader to notice that all the characters are doing is talking about themselves. Sherwood is writing exactly what drama is not: a group of

characters discussing something without any rise in conflict from the start of their conversation to the end of it. It is boring.

Sherwood does receive a small dose of respect in a later chapter, written by a guest author. This person points out how properly Sherwood's dialogue grows in an excerpted speech by a lead character in Idiot's Delight. They then, of course, label the play as "poor," regardless.

Noel Coward

Unfortunately, Noel Coward is only mentioned when one of his works is an example of what the author believes to be bad writing. From static conflict, to a lack of proper movement, the author does not seem to think Coward is a valuable playwright. Regarding static, a scene from Coward's play Design for Living is shown, for it moves from beginning to end in time, but not in action. The scene's final lines of dialogue are actually very much like the first lines spoken in the scene. Nothing really happens, so nothing moves, much like the scene he cites from Coward's play Hay Fever. In it, an argument takes place among a few family members, and it ends in an unsatisfying manner. He deems the end result to be an inadequate end to a scene already suffering from the lack of a big movement. All Coward is doing here is writing inch-by-inch movements, with nothing bigger to represent it.

Not even Noel Coward's success among audiences is safe from the author's honest critique. He claims Coward's plays only performed well due to their timing. Their subject matter dealt with things rather different from what was happening in real life, which was the war, mostly. So, even though the writing was not very good, these subject matters appealed to people. Understandably, they went to see it and Coward's plays then garnered fans. Be that as it may, it is the author's opinion that if these plays were initially released during a non-violent era, Coward would have gained no fanbase. The deficiencies of his plays would have outshone their uniqueness, and audiences would have found them monotonous.

Aristotle

Aristotle has two theories in particular that are focused on in separate chapters of this book. One is his idea that in a story, character is secondary to action. Action, simply, precedes in importance anything about a character. The second is the famous and widely-taught, "Every story must have a beginning, a middle, and an end." The author takes great opposition to these two theories.

With the first, 'character is secondary to action,' the author places great emphasis on characters, so it is only natural that he be opposed to Aristotle in this regard. He believes Aristotle is wrong because a writer must have knowledge in his characters in order to create action that is top-notch, not to mention sensical. His impressions are that this theory is simply careless, and he does not wish scholars to follow its precepts today.

When trying to figure out when the point of attack is, the author concludes that it is the very beginning of a story, because whatever problem occurs in a fictional world should be continued into its climax when the play begins. Therefore, the story begins with the middle, so this second theory of Aristotle's is also deemed wrong. It makes little sense, and once again, the author thinks it unfortunate that schools continue to teach it.

In short, the author gives the impression throughout the book that Aristotle and his praised teachings are a playwright's enemy.

John Howard Lawson

Looking at John Howard Lawson's book on writing, The Theory and Technique of Playwriting, the author finds he is in compliance with Aristotle's opinion that character is secondary to action, but then finds him contradicting this shared belief later on in his book. The author also disagrees with Lawson's idea that situations are tough to come by and that a great imagination is needed to strain out some good ones. Conversely, the author believes "situations are inherent in the character."

William Archer

William Archer's name is mentioned very briefly several times throughout the book, almost exclusively in the 'Character' section. He writes books similar to the author's and this guide, and excerpts from his works showcase a more pompous style. The author typically portrays him negatively. In response to his statement that one is only born with the ability to develop characters, the author calls this unscientific. He quotes Archer's book Playmaking, highlighting a section where Archer says a play can do without character, but not action. Then, he shows how Acher contradicts himself in the same book.

Eugene O'Neill

This book shows mixed feelings about the playwright Eugene O'Neill. His play Mourning Becomes Electra is used to demonstrate good character growth. In the chapter 'Strength of Will in a Character,' the author recognizes the suspense O'Neill builds as he proves the vitality of his characters. However, the author comments how the characters become distorted, that O'Neill misplaces their strengths.

A big compliment is paid to the play's rising conflict, how it rises higher and higher in incredible ways, and to its characters, who the author says are bigger than life. Unfortunately, the author detects a lack of motivation in the characters, saying O'Neill does not explain them in enough depth because he has no premise for the story.

Anton Chekhov

One name that meets with favor in multiple instances is Anton Chekhov. The author talks of the strong perseverance of his characters in the chapter 'Strength of Will in a Character.' His story The Bear is excerpted to exemplify great transitioning, and the author compliments his ability to write his small movements sharply, while fitting them to his characters very well.

Generally, he seems to be a writer who does things a bit differently with his storytelling, but the author says his plays will stand the test of time because his great characters are so adept at revealing themselves and the era in which they are living.

Objects/Places

Premise

The idea of premise is present throughout the entire book. Premise is basically the meaning behind a play, something the writer wants to prove. The author seemingly thinks it to be an ignored concept. Since it is often forgotten, many of the other lessons he teaches in the book will not be effective, or possible, without it.

Pivotal Character

A play will not work without a pivotal character; he is there as the leader of a cause. Whatever is at stake for this character is what drives the story.

Tridimensionality

To properly develop a character, the author wants the writer to flesh this person out, detailing his body and health, the people around him and his environment, and his mind. Respectively, these three dimensions are physiology, sociology, and psychology. The writer should concentrate on what his character's dimensions are like before he begins the writing process, and he will then be writing through the eyes of a very real, tridimensional person.

Orchestration

Orchestration is finding two differing bodies, making them the protagonist and antagonist, and making these characters so well-defined, that you are allowed to put them into a situation in which they are unable to make a compromise. This obviously will give the story its conflict.

Growth

Through many lessons in the book, the process of growth is deemed important throughout the entirety of the play. The author believes that characters who grow prove the premise.

Conflict

Without conflict, a play ceases to exist and is quite boring. Conflict is incorporated into many examples and lessons through the book.

Transition

Transition is imperative because it shows how a character can move from one emotion to another, but by showing each step in the movement. It will logically represent what happens in between two big emotions, like joy to angry. Transition will create characters who are believable, because the audience will see them evolve into new emotions, the way such evolutions occur in real life.

Jumping

Without transition, charaters jump from one emotion to another. In one line of dialogue, they will be delighted with their life, and two lines later, disturbingly mad. As with life, people cannot jump from one pole to the other; tiny emotions happen in between.

Static

Static is how one refers to a lack of conflict. When a scene ends the same way it begins, it is static, and therefore boring because it ignores drama.

Rising

Rising is the ideal type of conflict. It is when characters increasingly move toward their opposing goals, each scene being higher in the achievement than the last.

Themes

Growing characters ensure interesting storytelling

Character is the greatest factor in a play, in the opinion of the author. It is what can surely make a play great, and the plot emerges from it.

To start a character's growth, the author believes that at the very beginning, in the first moments of the play, the character must already be in a period of transition. The writer must look into his character's past, discover everything building inside of him, then catch him when he is ready to go. Ideally, the play begins with an attack, putting something at stake for the pivotal character. This character will now know what he wants and how he is going to obtain it. This causes movement, which is very important to keep a play from becoming boring. Since the author is quite adament about his characters, he believes a writer can make them jump off the page, so real that the audience can feel their motivation as they witness their growth.

The key to maintaining interest, is for a play to always present conflict. The author believes a story revolves around some sort of problem that grows from beginning to end until it reaches the conclusion that the premise permits. Therefore, the conflict can grow if the characters do as well, so that the problem becomes solved, and the end of the story is not exactly like the beginning. Growing characters prove the premise, creating drama. The author excerpts scenes from plays by Robert E. Sherwood and Noel Coward that demonstrate instances wherein nothing in a story changes, conflict never arises or changes, and how montonous it can be. A hefty scene from Henrik Ibsen's play A Doll's House is put on display in the chapter 'Jumping,' to see how an abundance of character growth can not only make the play appear competent, but fascinating to read and entertaining. Motion is needed to keep real life moving, all the time, and in many cases it moves through contradiction, which is exactly what Ibsen does.

Characters must be shown growing, to allow the audience to become acquainted with them. Transition is perfect for this. With transition, an audience will relate to characters they see them ease from one emotion to another, like in real life. The problem of jumping conflict is eliminated, and the play is always kept moving at a good and natural pace. Three-dimensional characters are not as believable as they can be without transition, and the writer risks creating phony, unreal drama referred to as melodrama.

A most important part of character growth is exposition, commonly thought of as something only needed in the beginning of a story to introduce things such as environment and background. However, the author wants to disprove that, wishing for it to be something that remains a part of the story from start to finish. When it disappears, so does character growth, and since that is so completely necessary, then the story stops growing as well. Everything stops being exposed, conflict stops, and tedium follows. He says exposition is actually what conflict is, and character growth, after all, is a real reaction to conflict.

Premise is the key to a great story

Since, according to the author, the premise is the meaning behind a story, then premise is what the story stands on; it is the foundation. When one is writing a story without a premise, although things may seem to be going well is that writer's perspective, the story may actually be confusing to an audience. This is because there is no distinct guidance. A play may run on emotions, which may seem strong enough to secure it as a well-written play, but if there is no clear-cut premise, then there is not much of a point behind the emotions. Premise can make strong emotions even more powerful.

Premise does not need to be a universal truth, an idea acknowledged by everyone. A good premise is one that represents the writer's beliefs, says the author. In order for his play to make sense, his heart has to be behind its meaning, or else the play may end up uneven and unsatisfying. If he has to strain his mind to find a premise to use, it is of the author's belief that he cannot be connected to it in a genuine way. So, it is best to come from the heart. This will result in more efficient and effective storytelling.

For expressing the premise, the story needs good characters. Fully-developed characters who embody all three dimensions have it in them to carry the story on their own. As they are written to prove the premise, they are helpfully, and naturally, exposing the play's mood and atmosphere

Premise helps smooth things out in the play long-term. In the chapter on static conflict, it is shown how a character's development can come to a halt. It lingers because it has nowhere to go, and that is because the story has no premise to lead it anywhere. With jumping conflict, the events of the story move around haphazardly, going from one place to another without much logic, because there is no clear-cut premise that can assure a straight path for the conflict. Transition must be evident in all stories, and having a definite premise will give the writer a better handle on properly writing it.

Certain thinkers believe a story must have something called an obligatory scene, just one scene to which the play should be immediately heading, the ultimate goal of the writer. The author, of course, believes premise is the immediate goal for every story. No obligatory scene, nor any part of a play, including premise, has a life separate of that of the play. Everything must blend together.

Write for yourself, not for others

In the chapter 'The Timeliness of a Play,' the author deals with timing, a familiar concern of writers. Writers may grow worried their story will not find success because it does not come at the right time, or it does not correspond well enough with whatever else is going on in the world. If this is the case, they may assume nobody will get behind the story to produce it into a play, robbing them of a chance to succeed.

These kind of writers are lost, according to the author. The concentration they should be exerting on their play is chiefly spent worrying about the acceptance of it, looking at it

through another person's eyes. A bad play evidently will be put into production if its subject material works well with the present day's happenings, as is detailed in the chapter, 'Why Are Some Bad Plays Successful?' However, what the author believes writers are forgetting, is that the quality of the play is what should matter above all.

If a write is fascinated enough with a story to creat a play, their writing should be motivated by their belief in the tale. Nevertheless, they must remember the principles of writing, especially when it comes to creating three-dimensional characters. These, if really developed, can make the play timeless.

Style

Perspective

As an author of films and plays, it is understandable that the author would write a book on the art of writing. He is also the founder of his own school of writing: The Egri School of Writing located in New York, New York.

The author has seen and read a lot in his life, and has noticed enough problems to fill the space of a book with better methods. Some playwrights simply do not know what they are doing, others, perhaps, are following the theories introduced by ancient thinkers such as Aristotle thousands of years ago. Many of the author's theories differ. However, he makes his intention clear: the book has a dialectical purpose. It will attempt to find a fair truth in the theories of drama. In the book's preface, he quotes some dramatists, getting their conflicting viewpoints on some issues of writing, such as the importance of plot and character. Which is more important? He also acknowledges both sides of the argument on theme. What is intended throughout the book is to logically discover what is the truth.

Through all of this, the author wants the reader to not only learn, but to gain respect. He declares in the preface that this book has not been written just for playwrights, but for the public, as well. He hopes playwrights that are professionals, amateurs, or beginners will learn, and hopes that the common people will too. Yet, he chooses to dedicate this book to more than just playwrights, because he hopes everybody will read and finally understand the oft-difficult and under-appreciated process of writing, and how much work really is needed for it. He would like to gain respect for writers, a uncoerced, natural respect.

Tone

Given the fact that writing is an art, there cannot truly be facts, or laws, on how one needs to write. So, naturally the author's tone is not objective at all. He is fair, offering the stances of philosophers such as Aristotle, and an abundance of excerpts from all kinds of plays throughout the entire book. However, all serve to demonstrate the different lessons the author teaches. These teachings are written in a non-pompous way, with a noble attitude, and humor spliced in for good measure. This tone conveys a sense of fact; thus his guidance is hard to reject, and harder to disagree with.

With a guide on something such as this, however, critiques are surely needed throughout the chapters to give the reader an idea on the types of things to avoid when practicing the art. The author is certainly not afraid to expose the faults of writers such as Robert E. Sherwood and Noel Coward. Many times he judges their works to be not well-constructed, sometimes taking pages to exhibit the flaws in specific scenes from their plays. He often openly criticizes these gentlemen, even though they are acclaimed,

and winners of awards. Nonetheless, if he thinks their writing to not be much good, he definitely shows and tells why, assuring readers of his own honest intentions.

Structure

The author knows exactly what he needs to focus on. Thus the book is split into four sections, the first three being Premise, Character, and Conflict, with the fourth, General, answering extra queries that need attention.

There cannot be much arguing against the structure. Each of these four sections deserve to lead the book because they are, indeed, much larger than any of the author's other concerns, or concerns regarding the art of writing as a whole. The chapters for each section are evenly spread, and none are too elongated in comparison with the others around it, making the progression from chapter to chapter exceptionally fluid. The author does, in fact, clearly know what he wants to clarify with this book, and does himself and the art of writing justice.

Quotes

"No idea, and no situation, was ever strong enough to carry you through to its logical conclusion without a clear-cut premise," p. 6.

"You have time to find your premise in the mass of material later. The important thing is to find it," p. 11.

"A good premise represents the author," p. 16.

"Neither the premise nor any other part of the play has a separate life of its own. All must blend into an harmonious whole," p. 30.

"The dramatist needs not only characters who are willing to put up a fight for their convictions. He needs characters who have the strength, the stamina, to carry this fight to its logical conclusion," p. 80.

"If we know that a character embodies in himself not only his environment, but his heredity, his likes and dislikes, even the climate of the town where he was born, we do not find it hard to think of situations," p. 94.

"A novel, play, or any type of writing, really is a crisis from beginning to end growing to its necessary conclusion," p. 117.

"If we try to isolate and examine conflict as an independent phenomenon, we are in danger of being led up a blind alley. There is nothing in existence which is out of touch with its surroundings or the social order in which is exists. Nothing lives for its own sake; everything is supplementary to every other thing," p. 138.

"Every conflict must be treated with regard to the characters and the situation involved," p. 187.

"Every tissue, every muscle and bone in our bodies, is rejuvenated every seven years. Our attitude and outlook on life, our hopes and dreams are also constantly changing. This transformation is so imperceptible that usually we are not even aware that it is taking place in our bodies and in our minds. This is transition: we are never, for any two successive moments, the same," p. 223.

"There is no beginning and no end. Everything in nature goes on and on. And so, in a play, the opening is not the beginning of a conflict, but the culmination of one. A decision was made, and the character experienced an inner climax. He acts upon his decision, starting a conflict which rises, changing as it goes, becoming a crisis and a climax," p. 240.

"There are no two men who talk alike, think alike, speak alike. And there are no two men who write alike," p. 262.

"In a bad play, people live as if they were self-sufficient, alone in the world. A comet is not self-sufficient, nor is a vagabond, who must beg, steal, or borrow to live. Everything in nature and in society is dependent on other things, whether it be an actor, the sun, or an insect," p. 263.

Topics for Discussion

Do you think it is possible for a writer to go through a lifetime writing works based on instinct rather than being educated in the rules of story?

Is character the ultimate factor in having a good play, or is a proper story structure more important?

What is the more important aspect, action, or character?

Is there any time when static conflict can work well?

Why is it best not to underestimate the power of an audience's subconscious?

Can a play truly be good if it depends on just one scene, the 'obligatory scene,' to give it merit, while making the importance of things such as premise and characters, secondary?

In what ways can a writer still show how creative he is when writing under the fundamental principles taught in this book?