

BROADWAY POSTSCRIPT

American Playwrights Self-Appraised

PLAYWRIGHT (Age)	WHAT WOULD YOU ADVISE SOMEONE WHO WANTS TO MAKE PLAYWRITING HIS PROFESSION?	WHAT STEPS MIGHT BE TAKEN TO ENCOURAGE THE WRITING OF BETTER PLAYS?
PERCY MACKAYE (80)	Self-advice excels advice of others. Ask "Have I a valid reason for being a writer?" and then act in accordance with your own answer.	The source of better plays is the will of the playwright. If he has the will society can aid him—and itself—by providing theatres from which the incentive of financial profit has been eradicated.
MAXWELL ANDERSON (67)	If you want to write, write, but do not talk about it. Be insanely certain of yourself and sanely critical of all you do.	An era of great plays seems to be something that happens in a country where that country believes itself to be on top of the world—as Athens felt after Marathon, and England felt after the defeat of the Armada; and Ireland after it began to believe it would be free.
ELMER RICE (63)	Write with integrity about something you understand and believe in. Remember that playwriting is an art and Broadway production is a business, and that there is no determinable relationship between artistic merit and commercial success. Be prepared for heartbreak. Inherit or marry money.	Establishment of world peace and effective world government.
PAUL GREEN (61)	Read and read plays, see and see plays—the best—and make the stay in Hollywood as short as possible. Act some, direct some, help paint scenery, etc. Soak up the backstage atmosphere and doings where the unions will allow. And write some every day.	More little-theatre groups, better and recognized courses in playwriting and drama appreciation in our colleges, repertory on Broadway and in the big cities, kinder critics who can encourage some rather than damn (damnation is likely to come anyway), and how about us all working for a department of fine arts in the Government?
THORNTON WILDER (58)	Work backstage—as actor, stage manager, stagehand. An hour working there is worth a hundred as a member of the audience.	Giving every support to the off-Broadway theatre.
F. HUGH HERBERT (58)	Fall in love with a theme, a few good situations, and with your protagonist. If she's a young girl fall madly in love with her. Then write about her, honestly, validly, with passion and compassion, always bearing in mind that there's a wide healthy streak of bitchiness in any female worth a damn.	1) Watch TV for a thousand "don'ts." 1) Watch TV when a Paddy Chayefsky play is telecast. 3) Go thou and do likewise.
JOHN VAN DRUTEN (54)	Read plays, see plays, think plays, talk plays: read all good dramatic criticism. Never stop being interested in and aware of the theatre.	A New York equivalent of the London Sunday-night producing societies and of the suburban repertory theatres, where not necessarily commercial plays can be well presented by distinguished casts.
PAUL OSBORN (54)	Read carefully, thoroughly, and with understanding Aristotle's "Poetics."	The more discriminating the public becomes, the more it will discourage "bad" plays—thus forcing the playwright to write "better" plays.
EDWARD CHODOROV (51)	Make sure that you have the knack of writing a play—it is a knack, like prestidigitation or acting—not an intellectual accomplishment. I know one fellow, a critic, who is trying to be a playwright via the "adaptation from the foreign" route. He has failed miserably, although he has chosen plays that were striking successes abroad. He simply cannot make even a literal translation come off because he is simply anti-theatre in his writing—and he is so intelligent and writes so beautifully about the theatre.	The influence of the critics of the New York newspapers and such periodicals as <i>The Saturday Review</i> and <i>The New Yorker</i> is great over the pre-writing thinking of playwrights. Most of us know that at least two important critics scream like infuriated stuck pigs at any play which tries to deal seriously with marriage or sex in general (not in the Tennessee Williams manner of mindless melodramatic drivel à la Grand Guignol—that sort of treatment is fashionably safe). Other critics are afflicted with other normal wretched neuroses. It's hard to keep track of them all, as poor Williams found out when he wrote a marvelous humanistic treatise called "Camino Real." Abolish the critics and let the bourgeoisie gamble with their money in buying theatre as they do when they buy shoes or food.
MOSS HART (51)	Plunge. There are no rules. Playwriting cannot be taught, it can only be practised professionally.	Subsidy. Either governmental or by the theatre itself. Let each hit set aside a fraction of the profits to its backers as well as a fraction of the author's and producer's share.
LILLIAN HELLMAN (50)	Read.	More production of the "unproducible" plays. More theatres in the sense that the Group Theatre was a theatre.
CLIFFORD ODETS (49)	Find out who, what, and where he is. Read and see all the plays he can. Discuss and open up these plays by himself and with a group. Be content with moderate returns, at least as a starter. Work on a stage.	An expansion of lower cost production. There is very little hope for better plays so long as economics of the theatre reduce playwriting, for all but a few, to the rank of a part-time profession.
ROBERT ARDREY (47)	Toughen the constitution by a three-year stay in the Arctic.	Steps to a typewriter. The thing to look into is the physical theatre, which is a piece of fiercely-guarded real estate. The producer who deals mainly in money, the Dramatists' Guild, which plays the game flawlessly on behalf of the money, the directing and performing theatrical talent which mistakes screaming and jumping up and down and mumbling and being systematically cute or intense for theatrical effectiveness—because it works, the theatregoer who should stay home until he is of age, and finally the critics, who have jobs to hold, and do, and do.
WILLIAM SAROYAN (47)	Don't do it. Because if he is a playwright he will anyhow, and if he isn't I will have saved him a lot of trouble.	Any steps that would increase audiences everywhere and take the severe financial risk out of producing. Also more encouragement from critics and audiences alike for writers who show unmistakable talent regardless of whether their plays quite come off.
WILLIAM INGE (42)	Write as much as you can, as well as you can, and get produced whenever you can. Also realize that it isn't humiliating to have to learn.	
TENNESSEE WILLIAMS (41)	I have turned down the chance to fill out this questionnaire because I feel that the loneliness and the privacy of any kind of own tiny squeal of protest against all efforts to interrogate, to pigeonhole, to classify and document a thing that depends on	Encourage playwrights as well as others to find out who they are. At same time wouldn't hurt to subsidize six or ten theatres devoted to art works, as a starter. Thus reduce prices to seventy-five cents, bring in the unwashed, who will demand new forms, new sense, new playwrights, and a new humane kind of energetic sophistication devoted to life and the discovery of reality. A good play should make more sense than even a budget report.
ARTHUR MILLER (39)	Don't. Stay away from the theatre. Stay away from actors. Avoid other jobs than writing jobs. Most important: cultivate a hard behind and of your work ask again and again if you truly believe it. When utterly exhausted abandon the play and submit it, and be joyously prepared to turn your back on it forever.	
ROBERT ANDERSON (38)	Enter the theatre with the same seriousness you would medicine or law. Be patient, work hard. Grow as a human being because talent is worthless unless there is a heart and mind and soul behind it.	Courses in playwriting and more theatrical activity in the universities. Perhaps playwriting cannot be taught, but it can be learned and there should be well-trained people to help the talented person. Too often colleges look down on playwriting but go to great lengths in the instruction of short-story and novel writing.
ARTHUR LAURENTS (37)	!!!	A sense of relative values in dramatic criticism. Under the present double standard casually extravagant praise is reserved for the murder mystery or the little comedy which runs two years; analytic and tempered comment is the fate of the more ambitious play, which winds up in the anthologies, and as a contender for the prize bestowed by the same critics.

SINCE the issue on British Writing (SR May 7) English playwrights have been waiting to see what their American confreres would say in a questionnaire similar to the one they answered. In general American playwrights seemed more nervous about being quoted. One American apologized by saying "It only makes for bad feelings among playwrights who are already antagonistic enough toward each other, if the truth were known." However, once they had resigned themselves to answering most of the American playwrights were highly cooperative. Perhaps Arthur Miller summed up the attitude of many of them when he added as a postscript to his remarks about the evils of the present-day theatre this message for questionnaire-makers, "Let me worry about the playwriting. You fix up the other stuff."

—HENRY HEWES.

FAVORITE OWN PLAY	FAVORITE PLAYWRIGHT	WHAT, IN YOUR OPINION, ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT TRENDS IN AMERICAN PLAYWRITING AND HOW DO YOU RELATE YOUR OWN WORK TO THESE TRENDS?
"A Garland to Sylvia."	Thornton Wilder and Christopher Fry.	In my opinion, with rare exceptions, outward trends in American playwriting are toward disintegration and chaos; inward trends are toward the opposite. I do not see my own work in relation to any trend. It is what it cannot help being.
I don't like any of mine after I've had to see them through rehearsals, tryouts, and first-nights.	Robert Sherwood.	I've never seen a trend and I doubt that I'd recognize one if I met it. Putting a play on Broadway is a good deal like shooting the Snake River rapids on a surfboard. Those who are crazy enough to do it are too crazy to take advice. When one of them gets through nobody knows how he did it, not even the man who rode the boards. Anyway, as Walter Kerr's book demonstrates, it's better to write your book on playwriting before you write your plays. You know so much more then.
"Judgment Day."	Any answer would be invidious.	The theatre usually reflects the temper of the times. The present trend toward plays dealing with sadism and violence, with children and the problems of childhood, and with sheer escapism are indicative of the world climate of destructiveness and despair, and of the unwillingness or inability of people to come to grips with adult problems. I have tried, quite unsuccessfully, to work against these trends. I'll probably go on trying.
"Hymn to the Rising Sun."	Sean O'Casey.	I try to write about the people and things I know. I feel others doing the same. In this sense of togetherness maybe there is a fellowship of relations—a trend, a concerted effort that strengthens rather than weakens the individual worker. Anyway, I think the future looks bright for a mighty theatre art in this country. Eugene O'Neill has been the inspiring pioneer for it. The summons now is for the bold young men to come on.
"The Happy Journey to Camden and Trenton."	Eduardo de Filippo.	Breaking down that box-set, abolishing that curtain, getting rid of that museum-visit that is suggested by the proscenium.
"For Keeps."	Noel Coward.	I'm slightly allergic to "trends" and "symbolism." I never detect the trend, and figuring out the symbolism gives me a slight headache.
"Somebody Knows" (an unsolved English murder case).	Tennessee Williams.	There seems to me to be a good breaking-down of the older forms of technical playwriting—a widening of its focus—a good enlargement. I try to take advantage of this as far as I am able to do so.
"Morning's at Seven."	Tennessee Williams.	The leaving behind of the purely "plot for plot's sake" play and delving into human relationships—although never forgetting the girders of plot that must be beneath it all. I'm trying.
"Common Ground."	The great, the only O'Casey.	The most important trends have been a kind of mindless violence—a predilection for the play not of ideas but of moody suggestive atmosphere and muddy suggestive childishness—which with some notable exceptions has dominated the scene since "Strange Interlude." The night "Mourning Becomes Electra" opened and I saw this nonsense hailed as an enduring work of genius I knew I had a long hard, rocky road ahead of me. It has been. My permanent hero is William Congreve, and that kind of brain, thinking, and attitude toward society is what I believe the theatre should mainly be about. Phoney tragedy and pretentious melodrama will always be in line for awards. The honest working playwright will avoid the psychotic as a focal point ("Streetscar"); he will avoid themes which present problems to be settled at the end by homicide or suicide—that is no solution at all; he will try to tell the truth as he sees it about the world in which he lives—and will try to be as humane, witty, and sophisticated about it all as he possibly can be, of course.
"Lady in the Dark."	Thornton Wilder.	There are no trends. Every play is basically an expression of the playwright's personality at that particular moment. As he changes, or as he changes in relation to his time, his plays change. If he ceases to change as a human being his plays cease to possess the breath of life and reality.
"The Autumn Garden."	O'Casey.	I don't know.
Each play when it was being written. The human mechanism fights for the child it is bearing.	Igor Stravinsky. Listen to his musical setting of "Oedipus Rex."	I do not discern any particular trends, except that most young writers try to find what is "marketable" and are both anxious and eager to trim their sails to these "trade winds." Idealism seems to me at a new low in our world; the grab for success is frightening. In the American theatre I know only two playwrights with a theme, Tennessee Williams and myself.
"Thunder Rock."	Thornton Wilder.	The theatre, from Aristophanes to Shaw, has been that medium of expression which most derives its vitality from the contemporary world about it. The most dangerous trend today is that of ignoring the world about us. I cannot relate my own work to such a trend and don't intend to.
No favorite, but if I have got to be pinned down, "An Imaginary Character Named Saroyan."	Again no favorite—real plays in general by anybody. As far as I know I write more real plays than any other playwright.	Money-making. My plays are related to the trend in that they have made money and could have made more if doing so hadn't bored me. "Success" not "failure" stops the whole business of the theatre, and the whole place is jumping with success. Playwrights who ought to be proudly in hock and hard at work are loaded with loot and busy being shyly famous. I write plays because writing is my work. I enjoy writing plays. I enjoy revising them after they are written. If nothing much happens to them after that it is as much because I prefer that as it is anything else.
Impossible for me to say. I'd like to rewrite them all.	Sean O'Casey and Jean Anouilh.	It seems to me that the trend is away from trends, that playwrights today work more individually than before. Consequently the scope of our drama expands. Whether I flatter myself or not, I do feel that my plays could not have been written by anyone else, and so relate to the main body of playwriting today in their unfamiliar treatment of the familiar.
of creative writing, even writing for such seclusion till its completion for its safety.		a public thing as the stage, must be defended with Quixotic ardor. You may interpret this as my
Each is part of my character, even the least of which I can't discriminate against. A good father does not play favorites.	Can't answer this for at least twenty years because we are all becoming. Besides I know a number of them personally. All playwrights are good.	The only movement worth noting, and it is not American, is represented by Berthold Brecht. The only materials for a possible new trend in the U.S. are new insights into social and psychological mechanisms; the next original interpenetration of these elements, one with the other, will establish a new form. I am not related to anything but these considerations and their most exact esthetic expression. In short, whenever a play mixes "I" with "we" in a significantly original way I am interested. I find little in the present that adds to already known mixtures. A seventy-five-cent ticket will revolutionize playwriting and put all of us on our mettle as never before. Great plays are written in response to great challenges, i.e., heterogeneous, robust, even rowdy audiences, not buyers in from out-of-town looking for a way to kill two hours. The most important trend in American playwriting at the present moment is that seats cost up to eight dollars each and the house is full of the bored.
"Tea and Sympathy."	The mind of one, the heart of another, and the skill of a third.	There has been a trend of formlessness which has just about played itself out. All the other arts have gone through revolutions in forms, but the drama is essentially an art requiring a basic form. There are thousands of different ways of telling a dramatic story, but the core must have the elements of drama which through all the innovations of the centuries have endured. I think we may be moving towards a more vigorous drama.
"A Clearing in the Woods," until the next one is completed.	Wilder, Williams, and Hellman.	The realization that the Ibsen era is over and that Chekhov was a genius not to be imitated. In the search for a new form recent plays have shown a tendency to be beautifully generous with character and mood but frugal with comment and stingy with plot. I myself hope that a more imaginative use of the stage, more, much more theatricality, and a more lyric quality will be forthcoming. But content must determine form.

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SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

Turnabout on Toes



Kelly, Dailey, and Kidd—"gritty characters who dance because they detest each other."

WHAT could be duller than having our musical-comedy characters behaving like cheerful knuckleheads who sing and dance only because the one they love is in love with (a) them, (b) somebody else? The crying cultural need of our day is clearly a group of morose, gritty characters who sing and dance because they detest (a) each other, (b) themselves. This gap has been filled by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, who wrote the lyrics and the story for the new musical film "It's Always Fair Weather" (M-G-M). No matter what else I say about it, this is a rather entertaining affair.

Betty Comden and Adolph Green will be remembered as the animators of the three carefree sailors in "On the Town." Although these three girl-hunters didn't have two guilt feelings to rub together, the three chaps in khaki who turn up in "Fair Weather" represent an altogether different breed of cat.

They emerge from the military cheerful enough to engage in a memorable mustering-out dance which involves diving through taxi-windows and tap-dancing with garbage-can covers on their feet. But once they shake hands all round and solemnly agree to meet ten years from date everything gets fairly grubby.

Gene Kelly, for example, is so depressed about getting a Dear John letter during the war that he turns into a crapshooting prizefighter manager of dubious morality.

Dan Dailey, once an aspiring artist, has become the creature of an advertising agency, with jargon on his lips, an acid golf-ball in his stomach, a cartoon commercial on his conscience, and a disappearing wife at the other end of the telephone line.

Michael Kidd (a brilliant dance director now turned actor) portrays the proprietor of a roadside hamburger joint who calls his place the Cordon Bleu, an example of pretension which points clearly to an advanced case of self-hate.

This trio of crumbs appear to have little to recommend them, but you will note that all of the members can dance. When they come back together after ten years apart, and discover they loathe one another to distraction, the writers have made this the occasion for much singing and dancing of a superior order.

Gene Kelly and Steve Donen did the numbers, and there are a couple of them which will be remembered by people who care about such things for as long as "Make Way for Tomorrow" in "Cover Girl" and "Foggy Day" in "Damsel in Distress." The CinemaScope screen has been used in these musical numbers with a flexibility and intimacy not before seen in the wide-screen musicals. Previously the gigantic mail-slot screen has inspired directors to create musical numbers in which eight actors marched arm-in-arm toward the camera, singing at the highest decibel level of stereophonic sound.

Now that they're not so self-conscious about the spectacular possibilities of the wide screen they've been able in this film to use such devices as splitting the screen in three, or blacking out the entire screen except for one man's head while the character does a soliloquy in tune with a restaurant orchestra.

"It's Always Fair Weather" has its problems because the characters have their problems, but it does have clever lyrics, inventive numbers, and Gene Kelly on skates. —LEO ROGOW.