

# A Playwriting Analysis for Mature Minds

**The Art of Dramatic Writing. By  
Lajos Egri Simon & Shuster.  
308 pp. \$3.**

**M**OST textbooks on creative writing are an insult to the intelligence. They start with the conviction that the hopeful young dramatist or novelist is a semi-literate novitiate who wouldn't know Ibsen from an ibex or William Archer from Robin Hood.

It is, therefore, with profound relief that I read and reread the successive revised and enlarged editions of Lajos Egri's masterpiece, "The Art of Dramatic Writing."

I know nothing about Mr. Egri's plays. But if he follows the advice of his own textbook he could scarcely fail to write sound scripts.

Starting with the importance of the premise or theme of the play, he quickly proceeds to the bone structure: character. Most plays and novels fail because the author knows far too little about each character and nothing at all about how this character will develop under the stresses and strains of conflict.

As Mr. Egri points out, one must know the physiology, sociology and psychology of every character, from such seemingly unimportant facts as height, health and color of eyes, to the profound matters of family, neighborhood and economic environment. Actually a thick dossier of information is needed or the character will never have flesh and blood and sinew.

Plot will come naturally out of the action of these characters and cannot be superimposed upon them. For instance, there is never a moment of uncertainty (though the inevitable is sometimes surprising) in the relationship between Nora and Helmer in Ibsen's "A Doll's House." Given these fully realized characters, their struggle was foreordained.

I think that Gilbert Miller is going a bit too far when he compares this book to such milestones in other fields as Veblen's "Theory of the Leisure Class." After all, there have been but a handful of minds in all history in a class with Veblen's.—S. N.