HOW TO WRITE A GOOD PLAY

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649608850

How to Write a Good Play by Frank Archer

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd. Cover @ 2017

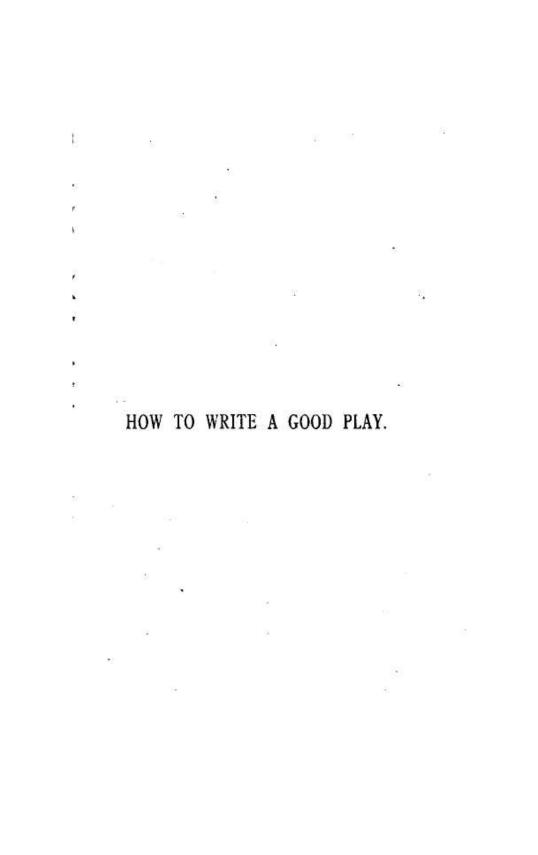
This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

FRANK ARCHER

HOW TO WRITE A GOOD PLAY





LONDON:

PRINTED BY GILBERT AND RIVINGTON, LIMITED, ST. JOHN'S HOUSE, CLERKENWELL, E.C.

HOW TO WRITE A GOOD PLAY

BY

FRANK ARCHER

"That's a question: how shall we try it?"

The Comedy of Errors, Act V., Scene 1.



LONDON

SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON & COMPANY

Limited

St. Bunstan's Mouse

FETTER LANE, FLEET STREET, E.C.

1892

[All rights reserved]

PN 1661

PREFACE.

FOR those who have had the good fortune to succeed in mastering the difficulties of which this volume treats, it may have but a limited interest; but the author believes that his views, as an actor of many years' experience, will not prove unacceptable to that large body of writers for whom the problem has a special attraction.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

· PLAY-WRITING AND THOSE WHO HAVE TRIED IT.

MAGR

Writing a successful play a great achievement—Ignorance as to what an acting drama really is—On the fascinations of the drama—Few great names of authors in belles lettres that have not attempted play-writing—Thirty dramatists whose eminence comes from other work—Side-issues and their importance in connection with acting plays—What they consist of—A rapid survey of the dramatic work of Cowley, Thomson, Johnson, Horace Walpole, Smollett, Hannah More, Frances Burney, Godwin, Joanna Baillie, Wordsworth, Scott, Coleridge, Lamb, Landor, Moore, Leigh Hunt, Byron, Miss Mitford, Procter, Shelley, Lord John Russell, Mrs. Hemans, Hood, Sir Henry Taylor, Horne, Richard Cobden, Disraeli, Thackeray, Dickens and Browning—Why many of these authors did not succeed in the theatre

CHAPTER II.

SUCCESSFUL PLAYS AND HOW TO ESTIMATE THEM.

What is a successful play? Four different views of it—A play made by the acting—Good plays that have failed on their first performance—A manager's difficulties and risks—The completeness of modern mise-en-scène—The author's risks—The ephemeral nature of theatrical entertainments—Recreation the purpose for which theatres are visited—The stress of modern life—Definition of a suc-

cessful play—Of sympathetic plays that are faulty in construction—Deficiency of story—Story not identical with plot—Farcical comedy—Its variety—The work which requires co-operation of the audience—Can one know beforehand whether a play will act well?—And whether a play will prove attractive?—Why actors are not fair judges—On dress rehearsals—On acting at rehearsals—Experts and their verdicts—Why plays that impress in the acting do not sometimes read well—On the dramatic "sense"—The "business" in a play and its importance—Actors and piece-work—New plays at matinées—Fine plays rarely lost—Dramatists successful only after perseverance—Value in unambitious efforts

40

CHAPTER III.

QUALITIES REQUIRED TO WRITE A PLAY.

The difference between writing a story and making a play-The form the difficulty-Comedy an exacting mistress-A formula by the author -Qualities required for a playwright-Invention-Englishmen not deficient in this quality-Higher encouragement required for the effort -The advantages of collaboration-Original invention resulting in ideas that are common property-Lord Tennyson's statement to the author about "Enoch Arden "-How "motifs" are evolved-The dénouement and its importance-Where the interest of a play should culminate-The difficulty to a novelist in unlearning-Rhetoric and its value in the theatre-Adaptation glanced at-Complications and invention-Characterization considered-How it affects plot-What is effective in character-Probability-Importance of the main motive of a play not being improbable-Harmony or consistent tone-Ethical balance and moral sense-Condensation-Literary plays and literature in the drama-A play not to be skipped-Sympathy, heart and humanity-Names of popular plays where it is found .

68

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE MECHANISM OF A PLAY.

PAGE

The scenario, and Wilkie Collins on its difficulty-Story as distinct from plot-Clearness in plot and story essential -Elements in the mechanism of a play-Equivoke-Its antiquity and importance-The consciousness of its value by Shakespeare and Molière-Its masterly management by Sheridan-" The Clandestine Marriage," and an example of equivoke examined-Goldsmith's want of skill in its treatment-Holcroft-Congreve and his contemporaries-Instance of lines in "The School for Scandal"-Real original motive rare in the theatre-Adapting or transferring and its popularity-The importance and charm of love-scenes-Filial affection and its power-The adjustment of caste-Its value and popularity-Quarrelling and scolding scenes-Imitations and imaginative pictures-A favourite satirical effect-Nature overcoming restraint-Trifles and absurdities the soul of humour-Shop-phrases-Eating and drinking on the stage-On the violation of propriety-High spirits in comedy-The wild despair of lovers-Soliloquies and asides

0

CHAPTER V.

TYPES OF CHARACTER AND DIALOGUE.

Types of character—Little that is new—Condensation in character painting—"Lines of business" enumerated—Advantages to an author—To an actor—Painting with breadth desirable—The "First old man"—"Character" parts—Dickens's works full of them—Shakespeare and his "character" parts—Falstaff, Shallow, Dr. Caius—The type sententious—Harsh and grim characters—Humbugs of all ages—The villain or evil genius—Young men and their varieties—The bashful type—The impudent type—Valets and servants—Their descent from