



PROJECT MUSE®

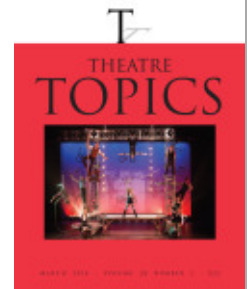
Playwriting: A Writers' and Artists' Companion by Fraser
Grace, Clare Bayley (review)

Kristin Perkins

Theatre Topics, Volume 28, Number 1, March 2018, pp. 86-87 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/tt.2018.0014>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/690017>

commendably chose artists who deeply attend to the whole actor and whose work integrates body, voice, mind, and emotions with equal concentration. This book is filled with discussions of awareness, listening, impulse, discovery, energy, and more; Morris asserts early in the book that rhythm is but one ingredient in the larger recipe of performance.

Rhythm in Acting and Performance is most appropriate for those at the graduate level and for working artists, instructors, and scholars who want to further their exploration of performance and the richness of its many facets. It will be a great addition to the conversations of acting instructors and artists in performance, but also for scholars looking to enrich the engagement of students in discussions of performance analysis.

J. ARIADNE CALVANO
University of Louisville

Playwriting: A Writers' and Artists' Companion. By Fraser Grace and Clare Bayley. *Writers' and Artists' Companions* series. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015; pp. 352.

Playwriting: A Writers' and Artists' Companion by Fraser Grace and Clare Bayley is a readable and mostly comprehensive introduction to writing for the stage for new playwrights (or students of playwriting as yet too unsure to claim the title). The book is divided into three parts: "Playwriting: The View from Above"; "Tips and Tales: Guest Contributions"; and "Write On: The View from the Ground." Between these three parts the authors offer advice for both effective writing and maintaining a career. For readers with some basic theatre training Grace and Bayley do not chart unknown territory, but they do present a detailed map of the current playwriting landscape. For true beginners this book would be an extremely helpful companion on their journey.

In part 1 the authors begin with personal reflections that introduce readers to them and provide some optimistic pep talk. This moves quickly into "Reflections on the History of Playwriting," which is divided into several sections: antiquity to roughly the end of the eighteenth century, and the nineteenth century onward. This is not the place to look for interesting historiographic work; Grace and Bayley outline the standard hegemonic story of Western theatre history. Grace justifies the choice early on by describing the project as a "pocked and pocket guide to the history of theatre in the English language" (15). Given that he spends considerable time with the Greeks and Romans, Grace's claim (and implicit justification) that the focus rests on the English-language is rendered a little suspect. Bayley further dilutes the claim, first by summarily dismissing English-language theatre of the nineteenth century by claiming that it was "not a distinguished time for theatre on either side of the Atlantic," and then introducing Chekhov, Artaud, and Brecht (43). As uninspiring as the historical reflections may be, they do address the role of the playwright in Western theatre. This section ends with some preliminary reflections on how to begin writing, which are divided into reflections

on source, scale, space, and genre. Here, the book makes its usefulness apparent, as it offers an update to some older playwriting texts. Information is offered on devising, as well as a useful overview of site-specific and immersive theatre.

In part 2, "Tips and Tales: Guest Contributions," established playwrights offer advice and encouragement. Each of these playwrights, including David Henry Hwang, Lynn Nottage, and Tom Stoppard, has a short biography of their work and a page or two of reflections. Some of these relate to the changing conditions in the field or offer practical advice on script writing, but most are motivational in nature. The fact that some of the contributors seem to contradict one another—for example, Dennis Kelly's playful jab at playwriting programs undermines several other contributors—is a benefit to the book. Neither of the authors are attempting to teach a "Grace method" or "Bayley method"; their more generous approach to the many genres and forms a new playwright can adopt is aided by the guest contributor's varied responses and diverse opinions. A fledgling playwright will have to navigate this section while determining what is truly useful to her/him, but the process itself will become an invaluable part of her/his emerging identity.

Finally, part 3, "Write On: The View from the Ground," presents more of the nitty-gritty of playwriting. Its longest chapter is on research and planning, for good reason. Grace and Bayley emphasize the importance of rigorous research regardless of form, but that is about as far as the authors go in prescribing methodology. Instead, they offer several tools and thoughts on researching scripts, dividing plays into acts and scenes, and redrafting. Interspersed throughout are shaded boxes for "Top Tips" and "Exercises." The latter do not occur frequently enough to operate as a workbook for a single play, but they offer useful training for key moments of drafting. The remainder of part 3 is devoted to "The Industry" and "Rehearsal and Production." Grace and Bayley remain cognizant of playwriting in relation to a broader industry throughout their book, but here they fully explore the field as a professional career. As in part 1, there are updates to older playwriting texts, in this case including Facebook groups to join and how to deal with the rise of the amateur online critic.

Grace and Bayley are both working playwrights based in the United Kingdom. Unsurprisingly given the authors' credentials, the book's prose is usually stylistically engaging and always lucid, surely a benefit to the intended audience. There are sections in which the method of coauthoring by dividing the book into chunks is less effective. Certain chapters, such as "Research and Planning," in which Grace and Bayley switch writing every two or three pages can be jarring, and some information gets repeated without comment, such as in Bayley's "Rehearsal Room Etiquette," which appears right after Grace's "Rights in Rehearsal." It should also be noted that *Playwriting* has a uniquely British focus throughout that manifests in various ways, from the British emphasis in the historical overview to the theatre-writing organizations the authors suggest that young playwrights join, and even in which playwrights get

mentioned by way of example. There are attempts to include information that will be useful to US playwrights, but it is apparent that neither Grace nor Bayley is as comfortable speaking about these organizations or labor trends. Still, with some supplementary research, most of the advice is transferable.

Playwriting is the ninth and last addition to the Bloomsbury Academic's Writers' and Artists' Companions series, a sturdy collection of manuals for how to write in

various forms and genres. It will likely be useful to the lone emerging playwright or in conjunction with an introduction to playwriting course. Grace and Bayley update some of the older playwriting texts and earnestly steer away from being overly prescriptive. For these reasons *Playwriting* is a useful addition to the bookshelf, if not a wholly original one.

KRISTIN PERKINS
University of Texas at Austin