



January 2023 Newsletter

Hi Folks!

As Nancy Harding, the president of our guild, said... "Winter is tricksie for us here in New York" (when she let everyone know that the December meeting was cancelled.) We hope everyone enjoyed the Holiday Season!



We're going to have a Zoom Meeting! We are thinking of January 15th at 1:30

Our usual meetings are the 3rd Sunday of the month at 1:30 so we decided to start with that date. **BUT!** Please let us know if other dates /or times work better for you! We are hoping you can attend VIRTUALLY and bring a puppet to show off and maybe a story to share, whatever interests you! And again, as Nancy has said, **"Most of all, we would love to see YOU!"**

We need your voice! One of the things we would like to do is **brainstorm** with folks on what we, as a guild, might do for a Day of Puppetry in the spring and planning our year in general... **Planning together increases the possibility that the event will inspire people to come.**

To that end, a copy of the PofA handbook for a day of puppetry is attached to this email. Feel free to take a look and see what ideas you would like to see included in our event and what you may have to share.

Please RSVP as soon as possible so we can get a clear idea of how many are planning to attend.



Playwriting 101

by

Robert Rogers

I'd like to pass on a lesson in playwriting that I learned many years ago. It's served me well and I know that if you put it into practice, it will help you, too. In fact, it will also add to your critical understanding of play structure in general, which is another way of improving your own writing skills.

Let's start with a concept that almost every beginning writer is taught: that a story should contain a beginning, a middle and an ending. Okay, but what exactly does that mean? Well, the beginning introduces a cast of characters, a setting and a situation; the middle develops the situation which usually involves some sort of conflict; and the ending brings about a resolution.

The truth is, the beginning, middle and ending are merely parts of the plot. Sure, they get the characters from A to Z, but the plot alone is not really what engages an audience's attention or

affections. The question then is, what does? What gives a play the ability to draw on people's emotions? How does it coerce them to root for the hero, boo the villain, and feel a certain satisfaction when the curtain comes down?

At the heart of every effective play is an issue that the playwright wants to explore and share. The Ancient Greek storyteller, Aesop, made it pretty clear as to why he wrote his fables by attaching to them moral lessons. To put it another way, he left nothing to chance. Most playwrights, however, are not so didactically minded to take that extra step. Instead, they incorporate their message, or better yet, weave it into the story. And often, they do so in such a way that the audience doesn't necessarily recognize it while the play is being performed, but certainly does upon reflection when it's over.

Sometimes, this technique is more planned and conscious, more clearly articulated than not. But in some way or another, every effective playwright does follow this strategy. It can be applied to any genre, period or style, and though it may not seem possible that (for example) Samuel Beckett, Nora Ephron and William Shakespeare have this in common, I assure you, they do.

Now, you may have read or heard some playwrights claim the contrary: that they never map out a plan, and that they don't know what direction their inspiration will take them. Still others imagine that their "characters write themselves." I subscribe to Edward Albee's theory that writers write from the subconscious; that somewhere deep in their minds, they really have thought things through.

But what exactly is the lesson that I want to share with you? It's this: Every play actually follows a course from its beginning all the way to two simultaneously occurring endings, and they are called the Ostensive and the Subliminal. The Ostensive Ending is the one that an audience observes; the Subliminal Ending is the one that an audience feels. In other words, the subliminal ending imparts the playwright's message, while the ostensive ending is merely the action that brings it about. A playwright "plants" clues as a story develops so that when the curtain comes down, not only has the plot come to an end, but the audience feels a sense of inevitability and emotional satisfaction, that "aha" moment.

Let's examine a simple, straightforward fairy tale (not originally a play, but one that's been adapted for the stage countless times) – *Cinderella*. Most people would describe it as being about a young girl who suffers under the authority of a cruel step-mother and two self-absorbed step-sisters, but who manages to magically meet and marry a prince, which changes her life for the better. Very good, but remember, that's just the plot. That's probably not what the author, Charles Perrault, had in mind when he thought it up in the first place.

Cinderella is really about love. Its subliminal message is that compassion and kindness will always triumph over cruelty and selfishness. And how is this message conveyed? By example after example of Cinderella's mistreatment and by her consistently self-effacing, obedient, and ultimately triumphant response. Time and again, it is demonstrated that the step-family members are bad and that Cinderella is good. And since we are inclined to sympathize with the kind and caring Cinderella, when the happy ending comes along, we believe that she is deserving. Every twist of the plot, every spoken line exists to illustrate the point of the story.

While it's one thing to craft a play based on completed material, it's another to start with a new idea. You may have seen or read about Bil Baird's original production of *Davy Jones' Locker*. He

once wrote that it began with the conception of a sea serpent and a pirate captain. He imagined that the fanciful serpent had shrunk in size because people no longer believed in him; and that the captain was so out of touch with his feelings, that he refused to smile because it hurt his face. From there, Baird went on to conceive of a colorful cast of characters, and worked with his collaborators to construct a story. But first, he had to examine those characters, identify what they represented, and ask himself what he wanted his play to express.

Davy Jones' Locker featured a young boy named Nick at the crossroads of childhood wishfulness and adult responsibility, who literally splashed into a conflict between the light of imagination and the darkness of close-mindedness. On one side there was an affectionate Mermaid named Miranda, the ghost of Davy Jones himself and that serpent. And on the other, the aforementioned Captain Scorn, accompanied by a bunch of pirates too clumsy and dumb to think for themselves. There was also the prized Fishbone Wishbone – the reward and key to happiness.

You can see how loaded with meaning this seemingly innocent and amusing musical play really was. While audiences probably left the theater with dizzying visions of Baird's strikingly designed marionettes still fresh in their minds, it was his heartfelt intentions that really won them over.

Similarly, consider the opening of Julie Taymor's play adaptation of the film, *The Lion King*. It opens with a much praised procession of puppets and costumed actors who march through the audience from the back of the theater to the front of the stage. But watch a video recording of the spectacle and turn off the sound. You'll notice that its emotional impact loses its punch. Why? Because what really drives that scene is the music of Elton John and the lyrics of Tim Rice. It's their inspiring song, *The Circle of Life*, and all that it communicates, that provides the subliminal, emotional message. The rest may be great, but it's just decoration.

If you talk to people who have seen a play, and ask them what they thought about it, most will say something like, "it was funny" or "it was too slow" or "I wasn't surprised." These are legitimate comments, of course, but they are not analytical. They are just expressions of people's feelings. I encourage you to be the kind of theatermaker, or even just theatergoer, who delves deeper in your thinking. Try to discern the purpose of a play, and then ask yourself what the playwright did to communicate that idea. Sometimes, of course, you will come across a play that is not entirely successful. Don't worry. In that case, recognizing someone else's mistakes and shortcomings is educational, too.

Apply this thought process to your own work. It doesn't matter whether you are creating a piece for pre-schoolers or a college crowd. Give your characters and story more depth and you will become a more effective artist.



Thanks, Robert!

It is a rare find to come across well-honed information that is both concise and pertinent. I feel this article is one which every puppeteer should read. Robert is sharing his slant on storytelling, theater making, the very heart of puppetry. Writing like this should be disseminated, digested and put to use. We are fortunate to have this submission!

A Hairy Article by Nancy Sander (Nancy took the photo of Iver she used in this article.)

For forty-two years I have written the “Eureka “ column for the journal. Now I am beginning to put some order to the submissions which I hope will eventually be a useful book. Here is a beginning:

NEAT AND CHEAP HAIR I got an e-mail from Anne Newman, from Paxton, IL. She writes, “I needed a quick hair change for a hand puppet. At the dollar store, they had scrunchies with attached hair for, yes, a dollar. They’re perfect puppet-size and with the elastic, they work for instant wig or beard. Just had to tell somebody!” Thanks, Anne. I wish everybody were like you! February 2011

READYMADE. I went into its website (www.readymademag.com) and found out how to...oh, no! How to remove warts with duct tape! 85% effective, they say. But what if the wart is on your nose...? In any case, she found a great way to make a wig, either puppet or costume. She says to get a plastic net onion bag and cut it to the desired shape. Stretch this over a balloon and tape it down. Then take your yarn, double the strands and loop them under the webbing of the onion net, tying them with an overhand knot. Work from the bottom up until the desired thickness is obtained. You can then trim and style it. November 2006

HAIR TEXTURE Joan Moesling, of Pickett, WI, said that she went to the St. Vincent de Paul shop and bought a macramé plant holder. She unknotted it and pulled it slightly apart to make magnificent hair that was full and kinky. Easily dyed, too. May 2002

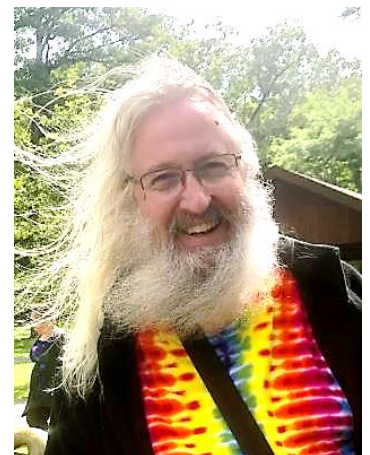
AWESOME HAIR When my kids were teens, they wouldn’t even get in the car with me on trash day but you should see the awesome “hair” I got off the bottom of an old sofa. It was the three inch twisted fringe, called “bullion (as I later found out) that all old sofas, chairs and drapes use to have. I used it for a witch and, being green, black and burgundy, it worked beautifully.

Now this twisted fringe has come back and you can buy it in the local upholstery shops. There is so many varieties of color, texture and lengths. Just yummy. May 2002

COLOR OF HAIR Many of the fringes have several colors in the weave. These are really excellent for your puppets. I remember Roger Dennis, of Holmes, FL, telling me that to make hair that really “carries,” never make it all of one color, but intersperse many shades of the same tones. This year, my Red Ridinghood is a true redhead, and I have people come up and tell me how brilliantly red her hair is—which is made up of brown, rust and mustard yarn! Remember to view your puppets from afar. What an enlightenment! May 2002

WHISKERS I heard from another longtime contributor, Lettie Schubert, of Mill Valley, CA. She says that when she buys new clothes with the price tags and cards attached to the garment on a plastic thread, she cuts the thread off, leaving as much of the thread attached to the “cross bar” as possible. She saves these, and when she needs whiskers that won’t come out, she pokes these stiff threads through from the inside and puts a dab of plastic glue on the crossbar inside to keep the whisker from working its way free. July 2002

WHISKERS I just completed my collection of twenty-six rats for my Pied Piper show. For my whiskers I used tan Foamie. For each side of the face I cut three thin one inch strips, leaving the base still attached so there would be a better gluing surface. I hot glued them on. They are wonderful, for they are very visible and don’t come off. Nor do they bend out of shape. May 2006



GREAT BEARD: Cut long strips of felt .Take small elastic and, after coloring it to match, start two or three stitches; Stretch it out as much as you can, holding the felt to keep the needle from breaking. Sew along the

stretched elastic. When the elastic is released it snaps back to its original length and creates very nice sausage curls in the felt.

GREAT HAIR: And speaking of hair, Jennifer Stroesser, of Columbus, OH, tipped me off on a great way to make curly hair. She cuts fleece into narrow strips. By pulling on these strips she gets a really neat twist. July 2005

KINKY HAIR Mary Henry, of Towaco, NJ, taught me this neat trick for really kinky. Either find a non-machine (preferably wool) knit sweater, or knit one yourself, and dunk it in hot water. After it is dry, unravel it. It makes very, very curly, kinky hair. July 2005

TROLL HAIR I was looking for something different for hair on my troll, and came up with a brand new look. I went to my thrift shop and purchased a pair of gray parachute nylon sweat pants. I cut one and a half inch circles from the material. Then, from the outer edge of each circle, I cut around the edges, in a spiral, toward the middle. When I picked up the end of the spiral, the material drops in a curly lock. A slight tug on both ends locks the spiral into a strand. I glued bunches of these strands together and the effect was a mass of bulky curls. Adding other colors and using different widths in the cutting gave dimension to the pelt. March 2003

FEATHER BOAS FOR HAIR What a pain! Have you ever tried to use feather boas for hair, attaching with a glue gun? Ugh! Or have you tried sewing feathers? Oie! Mark Segal, of Cheltenham, PA, has the ultimate answer to this problem. To make a wig of boa, Mark first covers the head with aluminum foil. Then, on top of this foil he tapes masking tape on all the parts that are to be part of the wig. He then carefully lifts off this cap of tape and he has his pattern. He then uses this pattern to mold a thermoplastic mesh cap. By the very nature of the material, he needs no darts or cuttings. Removing the tape pattern, he now attaches the boa by little wires. No sewing. He says it is so easy and looks great. He suggests that you attach the wig with a tacky glue so that it can be removed without cracking the mesh.

DREADED HAIR Donna Marbet, of Kittery, MA, took the time to send me a “wondrously simple” way to make great dread locks. She says that you should start out with “roving,” which is wool that has been carded and washed. This wool, which can be purchased by the pound (a half pound should do a family of puppets), is found on the Internet under “felting wool.” Roving comes in a fluffy rope. Pull off (do not blunt cut) twice as much (plus a few inches) roving as you need, for it will shrink. Standing at your sink, dunk the roving into warm water and gently squeeze. Laying this aside, squirt a drop of dish soap on your palms and rub your hands together. Then take up the roving and begin to rub it between your palms, very much like when you make a snake out of clay. The more you roll it in your palms, the more it will felt. Rinse, gently squeeze, and set aside to air dry. March 2009

Then she sews the locks to a fleece base, sewing them from the middle of the length so it will give her two strands of hair. She says that fleece works well for a wig base if you ever want to transfer it to another puppet. “One thing I really like about the hair,” says Donna, “Is that it is extremely light weight and it has bouncy movement. Watch out for moths.” Thanks, Donna.

MORE ABOUT HAIR And speaking of hair, Anne Schaefer, of Ware, MA sent me a bonanza about different ways of making hair. She wrote, “If you're looking for wispy movement ostrich and/or marabou feathers are great for puppet hair. Upholstery fringe also works well (for good hair movement), but you have to hunt for the longer lengths. I'm thinking of the "swingy" stuff you sometimes see on lampshades... Embroidery thread comes in a bazillion colors, so you can really mix the shades for a more natural look (For vibrant hair, don't make it all one color. Mixed complementary shades add zing...N). Pleated velvet - you sort of sculpt and pleat the velvet into the hairstyle you're going for, tacking as you go.

Suede fringes - lighter shades can be dyed for variation; you could probably also create your own fringes by slicing up suede or pseudo-suede or whatever that micro-fiber is...(I think you're thinking of fleece. If you cut that in strips and pull really hard, you get curls—N.) March 2009

AFRO-HAIR I was talking puppets with Nancy Henk, of Clinton Township, MI, and we were talking puppet hair. She mentioned that when she made a little African American boy she achieved a very nice effect by using black pompoms. May 2012

COLORFUL CREW CUTS Who doesn't love a trip to the thrift shop? Who can be a puppeteer if you don't? I always head for the bed and bath area, in quest of long shag toilet covers (Don't worry, I check the back!) You would be amazed at how many new long shag covers are donated. I guess most folks like only the rug part of the set. In any case, I cut them up into three inch squares. They are great for workshops and even for my own creations These make great tall and short crew cuts.

WIGGING BOARD: Elaine Haga, of Canton, OH, showed me her wiggling board and I immediately made one for myself. She took a three foot board (any width will do; mine was 3"). She nailed a four penny nail into the end, leaving most of the nail standing up. She then drew a pencil line across the center of the board. That's it: so simple! To make the wig, cut an eighteen inch piece of yarn (the same color of the yarn you will be using for the hair) and drape it across the pencil line. Then, taking the remainder of the yarn, tie one end onto the nail. Loop it over the other nail and bring it back to the first. Pick up the middle strand and tie an overhand knot. Make another loop. Tie. Make another loop. Tie. And keep going until you have the amount of hair you want. The knotted part is the part in the hair. Then you can cut the loops off each end and trim.

A VILLIAN'S SLICK LOCKS can be achieved by using black swiss straw. You can find this at any craft store.



POP! PUPPETRY: Online and in PRINT by Iver

Santa was good to me this year with three books under our tree...

Puppets: An Essay of Uncanny Life by Kenneth Gross (A University of Rochester teacher)

The Routledge Companion to Puppet and Material Performance, an academic compilation featuring articles from John Bell, Eric Bass, Robert Smythe, and a dozen others.

Critique is Creative by Liz Lerner This book was brought to my attention in Ithaca at a Cherry Theater critique. Next issue we'll have a summary of her four step review process.

The 2022 Great Lakes Regional LIVE & IN-PERSON Potlatch! FINALLY! The December 2022 issue of Puppet Patter (The official Publication of the Chicagoland Puppet Guild) was devoted to the first Live Potlatch since the arrival of covid in 2022. One of the reviews featured our Nancy Sander! Check it out at: https://www.chicagopuppetguild.org/files/ugd/9e1674_1e082cadcbe24ec58e7a7c62648d0496.pdf

The Puppetry of Hobey Ford by Hobey Ford, a book published by Lulu Press which covers his career as a puppeteer, was a Christmas present for Pam last year. Pam and I have known Hobey since 1980 and have seen many of his shows. He is an amazing innovator as well as a kind hearted individual.

Bonus! Here's a link with short segments on three artist. Hobey's is the third one and starts at 16:19. <https://www.pbs.org/video/muse-116-special-1-aapsdl/>



PRETTY PLEASE... If anyone knows how to get the documentary about Hobey Ford, please let us know! It would be great to share it for a PGUNY meeting.

PRETTY PLEASE... Send your info for PGUNY directory to pamandiver@juno.com and include:

Name Group Name if applicable Phone Address Email Picture? Brief bio? THANKS!