INTRODUCTION

I must say at once, in all fairness to both Mr. Egri and to the rules he has helped annihilate in his book, The Art of Dramatic Writing, that it is far more than a manual on playwrighting.

It is difficult to catalogue this book in a sentence, just as it must have been difficult to say in a handful of words what, when they first came from the press, Veblen’s Theory of the Leisure Class was to sociology, what Parrington’s Main Currents in American Thought was to American literature. These books, in addition to casting floodlights into the hitherto dark corners of their respective fields, illuminate so much neighboring terrain, open up windows on so many other provinces of life, that they take some time in the evaluation. Time, I am certain, will deal handsomely with The Art of Dramatic Writing.

Being a play producer by profession, I am naturally most keenly interested in what Mr. Egri has to say to me directly, as a professional man. The theater is as studded with rules as is a baked ham with cloves. None is more rigid, none more unalteringly axiomatic, than the one that says nobody can possibly know what a good play looks like until it has been produced. This is quite obviously a rather expensive procedure. It leaves one with something less than a feeling of satisfaction when, as is all too often true, the ultimate result is so bad. It is no small thing, therefore, to be able to say of a book what I feel I can say of The Art of Dramatic Writing.
Here is the first book I have come across that can tell why a play is bad long before you have signed contracts with highly paid actors and commissioned various members of seven unions to proceed with the construction of a production that will cost as much as a Long Island mansion.

Mr. Egri writes with the solidity, the authority, the ease that, it seems to me, comes only from knowing more than one profession. He writes with the sort of hard, shining clarity that comes of surefootedness in all the nooks and crannies, all the mountains and valleys of life itself. This man, you feel, has been around a long time and in many places. He has understood much and learned more than most. Mr. Egri writes like a very wise man.

The best of the many things I can say for The Art of Dramatic Writing is that from now on the average person, including myself, will have no excuse for inarticulateness. Once you read Mr. Egri's book you will know why any novel, any movie, any play, any short story was boring, or, more important, why it was exciting.

I feel that this book will greatly influence the American theater and the public as well.

Gilbert Miller