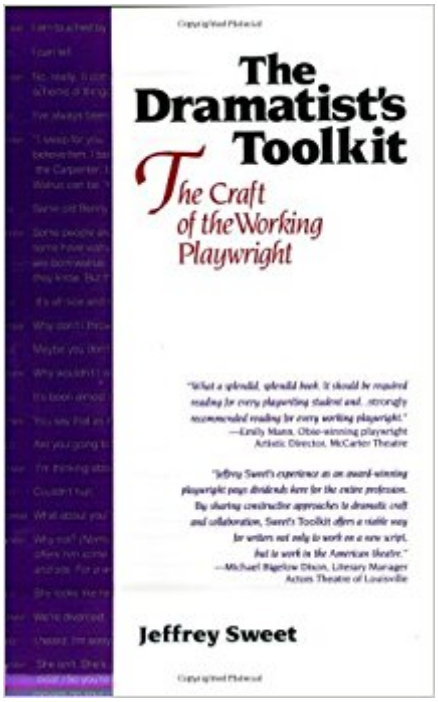
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Dramatists Toolkit,The Craft Of The Working Playwright



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Synopsis

In The Dramatist's Toolkit, playwright and Backstage columnist Jeff Sweet offers an intensive and practical guide to being a working playwright. In this informative guide, Sweet discusses such matters as: The building blocks of playwriting How characters relate to one another The differences and similarities between musicals and plays Screenwriting vs. playwriting and much more! Jeff Sweet offers guidance for the beginning playwright and advice for the seasoned professional.

Book Information

Paperback: 176 pages

Publisher: Heinemann Drama; Later Printing edition (November 1, 1993)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0435086294

ISBN-13: 978-0435086299

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.4 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 34 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #418,449 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #166 inÃ Â Books > Arts & Photography > Performing Arts > Theater > Playwriting #774 inÃ Â Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Performing Arts > Theater #2038 inÃ Â Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Literature > Creative Writing & Composition

Customer Reviews

Jeffrey Sweet's plays - including Porch, The Value of Names, and Routed - have been presented off-Broadway, internationally, and in a variety of regional and developmental theatres. His American Enterprises won the American Theatre Critics Association Award for play-writing. His book for the musical What About Luv? won the Outer Critics Circle Award, and he is the author of the book and co-author (with composer Melissa Manchester) of the lyrics for the musical I Sent a Letter to My Love. Sweet has written drama, sitcom, miniseries, and TV movies for ABC, NBC, and CBS. His work has won the Writers Guild of America Award and been nominated twice for the Emmy.A popular teacher and author of many newspaper and magazine articles, Sweet is also the proud father of Jonathan Sweet.

Just a quick note to rephrase my previous post on this book from September.Upon reconsideration,

I think my first review of this book (especially in light of how much I enjoyed it overall) was too harsh in its discussion and dissection of the first chapter, which I had then found so discouraging. I re-read Chapter One again the other day, and it’s not really as much of a downer as I made it out to be. While Sweet’s first chapter certainly doesn’t paint an easy picture of making the transition from straight fiction to scriptwriting, he does offer hope for those crossing formats with a discussion of the necessary skills which will be vital to doing so successfully.Besides, upon reflection, it seems to me that this is actually a better way to prepare people for the very real hurdles they will face in writing for the stage. Those who persevere anyway in spite of the knowledge that most playwrights are not driving Rolls-Royces, or who recognize the difficulties Sweet describes -- and then learn the new skills necessary to jump into writing for the theatre -- are the ones who probably then have the best shots at making a go of it.The rest of the book is just as excellent as I mentioned last time -- humorous, informative, conversational, and very easy to read.So -- just thought I should be fair and add these few additional thoughts to my previous rant! (I was having a bad day when I wrote the previous review, and I think I took that opening chapter a bit too personally!)

I had a divided reaction to this book. On the positive side (and most of my reaction was positive), Sweet offers some wonderful insights into the profession of the dramatist, as well as some very welcome discussions on how to avoid common traps and pitfalls. He also offers some excellent and often shrewdly humorous analyses of the mistakes made even by greats like Shakespeare, Miller, and Simon (And know what? He’s right). In addition, in the face of today’s too-common dismissal of musical theatre as inconsequential, it’s refreshing to hear Sweet’s enthusiastic defense of such Sondheim gems as "Sweeney Todd" and "Forum." The book is well-written in a light, conversational manner that makes it a lot of fun to read.On the down side, I was really, really disappointed in Sweet’s opening chapter, which still casts a pall over "Dramatist’s Toolkit" for me as a whole. It’s unfortunate that such an otherwise helpful book nevertheless opens with a blunt, narrow, and chapter-long definition of who should attempt the life of a playwright (the journalist) -- and who shouldn’t (the prose writer). As this is supposed to be a general "toolkit" to assist any attempting the art of the dramatist, Sweet’s dismissal of a huge number of writers who do not meet his criteria for success is doubly disappointing.I’m not knocking journalists (I am one), but Sweet’s starting-gate assumption that a versatile writer can’t straddle more than one genre surprised and disappointed me, especially in the face of such obvious successful exceptions as William Goldman, Larry McMurtry, W.B. Yeats, John Steinbeck, and many more.Only in a small closing paragraph to this chapter does Sweet offer any acknowledgment at all that -- perhaps -- the prose writer can use his

book to learn to overcome the built-in handicaps associated with his or her genre, and write a good play.Yet to be fair, overall this is an excellent book that should probably sit on the shelf of any working or aspiring playwright. Just don’t always expect to agree with him.

This book is being used for my Playwriting class and I’ve marked it up so much with notes and underlining so I have a good grasp on the class.

I had ordered this for my creative writing class and it helped me craft my writing style better.

I love this book. So helpful.

Great book, very helpful. I recommend it.

This is an excellent book for anyone trying to learn the craft. It exceeded by expectations and was a pleasure to read. It had easy to understand practical advice. It’s also a good read with interesting examples. I highly recommend.

Its brevity aside, the most striking feature of Jeffrey Sweet’s The Dramatist’s Toolkit is that it’s not written like most playwriting texts. Instead of ponderously essaying Aristotle (though if you want a good analysis of Poetics, I’d recommend Hatcher’s Art & Craft of Playwriting), Sweet cuts to the chase of negotiations and subtext. His is the only book on playwriting that I’ve ever seen to really get to the heart of creating scenes (and the better part of the book focuses on just this).Because of this emphasis, this is not going to be the book you should refer to for structure; again, Hatcher is strong there, as is Gordon Farrell’s Power of the Playwright’s Vision (the only text I’ve seen to give numerous structural breakdowns). However, Sweet’s advice - taken well, and with the usual pinch of salt - is very liberating to the writer who’s been struggling against formulaic playwriting texts.Sweet’s book is worth its cover price based solely on its discussions of negotiations, which really are eye-openers as to how subtext really works. His section on exposition, with a discussion on high and low contexts, is likewise strong. The book is great as a reference while doing your actual writing, just to remind you of things you can really make work.Now, Sweet’s a bit brief (but powerful) in this book, but makes up for it in the sequel, Solving Your Script. The latter is a reinforcement of the ideas from The Dramatist’s Toolkit, with enlightening, well annotated examples. Together, they make up a powerful combination addressing what is so rarely touched on in playwriting books: how

to actually write powerful, subtle scenes. Combine them with a couple of good structural books like Hatcher or Farrell, and you've got a much better basis than most of the formulaic texts.

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