

HOW LONG TO WRITE A DRAMA? (before word processing)

Sweden's foremost dramatist, August Strindberg, was born into poverty in the mid-nineteenth century. His parents were unmarried. Mother died when he was young. His father and his schoolmaster beat him. A physically frail adult, he suffered from paranoia, which contributed to three divorces. He wrote, "... fifty-six plays plus novels, history, poetry, treatises on chemistry and botany, with contributions to ethnology and philology. The standard edition of his writings in Swedish comprises fifty-five volumes. He achieved celebrity during his lifetime. Thirty thousand people attended his funeral, among them cabinet ministers and royalty, as well as students and laborers." (from *Great Abnormals*, by Vernon Grant)

Oscar Wilde wrote *The Importance of Being Earnest* in three weeks, mornings only. He wrote *Salome* while in Paris for two months doing other work (the first draft at a single sitting). *An Ideal Husband* was written by Wilde in two months.

On to the twentieth century: Arthur Miller wrote *Death of a Salesman* in six weeks; Thornton Wilder wrote the third act of *Our Town* one night after a walk.

Noel Coward could be speculatively connected to Leone McGregor Hellstedt via his wartime intelligence activities for William Stephenson ("Intrepid", "The Quiet Canadian") and his visits to Stockholm. Coward's autobiographies reveal a process which is common to many dramatists: having in mind certain characters and a plot, what the characters would say to one another flows naturally. His first play, *I'll Leave it to You*, was a commission which he completed in "a few weeks". For the *The Last Trick* Coward required one week "to put the words on paper". *Hay Fever* he wrote in three days; and the still-popular *Private Lives* in four days; *Blithe Spirit*, six days; *Present Laughter*, six days.

A new play by an obscure author, *Everybody Comes to Rick's*, was bought for \$20,000 by Warner Bros. on December 27, 1941. It was revised for the screen and *Casablanca* was filmed in 59 days, June 5-August 3, 1942.

John Cleese required six weeks, part-time, to write each episode of *Fawlty Towers*.

