

Is a play ever really finished, done, thrillingly able to live on its own forever without tinkering?

No.

Each of us could fix, rewrite, tinker, ad infinitum, ad nauseum, any script we have ever created. The perfect play does not exist.

A play will never be perfect. Just as a human being will never be perfect. But we can get as close as is humanly possible. There is always something, because the target of perfectionism is a moving one. A moving target is very difficult to hit at the very center each time. With every shot you take, the aim gets closer to the center, but there is always a stray round or two, because unlike your aim with a gun or bow and arrow, there is no skill that you can learn to make everything work every time you fashion a play. Each new play is fraught with the same questions of form, content, message, delivery. But no two plays turn out the same. Even sequels. Each play must stand on its own. There is no formula that exists to guarantee a perfect play. A good play, yes! A great play, even, of course.

But a play can never be finished. It is merely words on a page as it sits there, even after it is produced. It takes humans to breathe life into it at every performance. Imperfect humans. You can get it to a place where it works and works well, but it will never be perfectly finished. Instead, you get it to a point where it is producible, then where it meets an audience. If the audience understands, reacts with enthusiasm, your play is good enough to go on. A play may be even great, or fine, or brilliant -- but never perfect. It is as good as you can make it. That is good enough for it to deserve a life beyond your first production.

When there is more to be gained by starting a new project than 'finishing' an old one, it's time to move on. You must let go of your baby, now that it is a child walking and talking on its own, and let it go out into the world to live and grow. If people have loved it the first time, new audiences will love it, as well.

There is always another play, or musical, hiding in that ether ready and waiting just for you to pull it down, shape it, mould it, fashion it, be the playwright who will wrought it in the fire of the process mis-labeled writing. You bend, you shape, you twist, and the characters begin speaking, living onstage. You don't just put words on a page. You choose the most optimum risks for the most optimum outcomes. You give your child its sense of humour. You give your child its flaws, as well; those things that must be there to teach it. Your child grows with hopes and dreams—not all fulfilled.

Those are the things that an audience anticipates. That is what gets an audience to react to your play on both a visceral and spiritual level. That is why an audience will love and remember your child; because it had an influence on them, allowed them to understand something better, more completely -- but not perfectly. Crying is not perfect. Laughing is not perfect. Even love is not perfect – because we are human beings who are imperfect. Each action or reaction has its positives and negatives both for the character, the actor, and the member of the audience. Why do we cry? Why do we laugh? What leads us to understanding? What gives us the catharsis to move ahead? Your play with imperfect people, and words, and structure; one that is good enough to let your 'message' be felt and then understood, making all participants better—but not perfect.

While you are crafting your next play, send the previous one out to theatres. List it on NPX or other Theatre Callboards. Get it to friends -- friends you trust. Get a table reading. Get a staged reading. Find a theatre, or a

group of theatres, who produce plays like the one you have wrought. Get it in their hands. It is through the collaborative opinion and critique of others – actors, designers, directors, musicians, audiences – where you get to school and enhance your child, teaching it to be its best self. The work of perfection is merely the work of getting your play ready to live successfully in the world, not be perfect at doing so.

Getting a play ‘on its feet’ will allow you to make the play good enough to have a life of its own — apart from you. Those are the things you wish for your own child, and your child will never be perfect in this life. But they will grow up good enough to live a fulfilling life. So will your play. You have created it and own the rights, but it also becomes a part of the world—as we do not create for ourselves, we do it for an audience. Your play has touched and will touch many on its journey through life—long after you are gone. But first you have to reach the point where it is good enough—ready— and you can let it go!

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