THEATRE STUDIES

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Sidney Kingsley at work, 1930s. Courtesy of Sidney Kingsley.
SIDNEY KINGSLEY:
FIVE
PRIZEWINNING
PLAYS

With introductions by Sidney Kingsley
Edited by Nena Couch

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In Memoriam

SIDNEY KINGSLEY
22 October 1906–20 March 1995

Sidney Kingsley’s respect for life is reflected in his work—but this extended far beyond human life. He possessed a great reverence for all life—on the land, in the air, and in the sea. There are many instances, such as the time he rescued a little fawn that was floating down the Ramapo River on a chunk of ice. He waded out into the frigid water and carried the little animal to the warmth and safety of his furnace room.

Sidney and Madge had many dogs—they were their family. For his final resting place with Madge, Sidney chose a beautiful area at the foot of a waterfall near the bank of the Ramapo River, on the property he so dearly loved, with the ashes of their dogs scattered in a circle around them.

—DORIS DAVIS

The following reminiscences of Mr. Kingsley were shared by friends and colleagues at a gathering in his memory held at the Players Club, New York City, 19 May 1995.

Sidney was part of that extraordinary group of playwrights who came into being in the 30s and 40s, which heralded the arrival of the new American theatre and the new American drama. . . . Sidney was not only an influence through his plays, he was also kind and generous in helping young playwrights. . . . He applauded enthusiastically the success of each and every young playwright. And as president of the Dramatists Guild, Sidney guided us through the most difficult period of reorganization at the end of which we emerged as a separate and most effective guild. . . .

Sidney was a greatly gifted man, a witty man, a kind man, a good man. His plays excited us to become playwrights, his presence at our meetings encouraged us, and his leadership as president of the Dramatists Guild strengthened us. He was an important part of all our lives.

—ROBERT ANDERSON
My first meeting with Sidney was at the Dakota. Eli [Wallach] and I had gone to a Martha Graham concert and were invited to an after-theatre party being given for her and her company of modern dancers. I knew of Sidney Kingsley, successful Pulitzer Prize–winning author of Hollywood fame and Broadway’s plays *Dead End* and *Detective Story*. I didn’t know that he was on the board of the Martha Graham Dance Company, and that he was hosting the party. I was very impressed with that cultural side of him. As the years went by, I came to discover many more intriguing and different sides to him—his interests in architecture, painting, and sculpture—but his support of Martha and her modern dance company was the most surprising and endearing to me.

— ANNE JACKSON

I was Sidney’s stage manager for *Lunatics and Lovers*. . . . It was a great experience for me. Sidney Kingsley was a hero to me. After working with him while he was writing the play, we began rehearsals. . . . Sidney started to direct—he was very fast, knew exactly what he wanted—but as he directed, I was second-guessing him. . . . I said, “That’s not the way to do it, that’s not the thing to say to the actor, why should he do that?” And as I’m saying this underneath my breath, my assistant hands me a piece of paper. On it is something in code which says, “1 PP, 2 DCCA, 5007H, SMYOFB.” So I said, “What the hell is that?” He said, “One Pulitzer Prize, two Drama Critics Circle Awards, five out of seven hits, so mind your own f***ing business!”

— SAMUEL (BIFF) LIFF

Sidney Kingsley was a landmark playwright, and every playwright who followed is indebted to him, for he created the technique of “going behind the scenes” not only of hospitals and detective squad rooms but of our national and personal lives.

— JEROME LAWRENCE

After Madge [Evans] died, Sidney was occupied day and night with the work on the estate, and I had suggested to him that some accountants or lawyers could find a way to save some taxes and save part of the estate, and I said I would be willing to help in any way that I could. But Sidney looked at me and said, “But Jack, you don’t understand, I believe in the system.”

Later, I thought about that little incident, and it seemed to me a reflection of Sidney’s life and his work. . . . He was a revolutionary writer and it was Thomas Paine, Jefferson, and Madison that inspired him in his ideas and in his work. . . . His real contribution, which we will turn to over and over again, is his belief that up to this point the best system, or the best potential, for the realization of the dreams of man lie in the origins of this country.

— JACK GARFEIN