



The New York Public Library  
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

**Lajos Egri papers**

1895-1983 [bulk 1942-1966]

\*T-Mss 1985-007

Compiled by Weatherly Stephan, 2013

## Summary

**Creator:** Egri, Lajos

**Title:** Lajos Egri papers

**Date:** 1895-1983 [bulk 1942-1966]

**Size:** 4.28 linear feet (11 boxes)

**Source:** Gift of Ted Egri, 1985.

**Abstract:** Lajos Egri (1889-1967) was a Hungarian-American playwright and author of *The Art of Dramatic Writing*. The Lajos Egri papers date from 1895 to 1983 and document his work as a writer and teacher of writing with correspondence; scrapbooks; and manuscripts of plays, short stories, poetry, essays, and book chapters.

**Conditions Governing Use:** The author/creator retains copyright of materials. For information on obtaining permission to publish, contact the Theatre Division at [theatrediv@nypl.org](mailto:theatrediv@nypl.org).

**Preferred citation:** Lajos Egri papers, \*T-Mss 1985-007. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

**Processing note:** Compiled by Weatherly Stephan, 2013 Scrapbook pages were removed from binding.

## Creator History

Lajos Egri (1889-1967) was a Hungarian-American playwright and writing instructor. He immigrated to the United States in 1906 and worked as a tailor in New York City while learning English and writing plays. His first plays produced in New York City—including *Rapid Transit* (1927), *Believe Me or Not* (1930), and *There Will Be No Performance* (1932)—were performed in the original Hungarian or translated for English-speaking audiences. In 1942, Simon and Schuster published Egri's treatise *How to Write a Play*. In it, he argued the importance of well-rounded characters and a central premise to drive plot in dramatic works. The book was revised and reprinted in 1946 under its better known title, *The Art of Dramatic Writing*.

Beginning in 1935, Egri offered writing courses through one-day seminars and conferences as well as through the Egri School of Writing, based out of his home in Manhattan. In these courses, he provided commentary on students' works-in-progress and guided analysis of other dramatic works based on the principles set forth in his books. Throughout his private teaching career, Egri continued writing plays, poetry, short fiction, and essays on the fundamentals of dramatic writing, publishing *The Art of Creative Writing* in 1965. He relocated to Los Angeles in the mid-1960s and continued teaching classes from his home until his death in 1967.

Egri and his wife Ilona had three children: Charles, Ruth, and Ted.

## Scope and Content Note

The Lajos Egri papers date from 1895 to 1983 (bulk dates 1942 to 1966) and document Egri's work as a writer and teacher of writing with correspondence, manuscripts, and scrapbooks.

Correspondence in the collection is both personal and professional in nature. In addition to letters from Egri's friends Martin Frank and Thomas Collision, and letters from Egri School of Writing students, there is also family correspondence between Egri, his wife, and their children. Professional correspondence from agents and publishers discuss sales, promotion, and copyright matters for Egri's instructional writing books. Correspondence that dates after Egri's death is addressed to his wife Ilona.

Egri School of Writing files consist of notes for lectures, analysis assignments completed by Egri, and student evaluations and summaries of the courses. These files contain promotional materials for the school, such as brochures and letters from prominent students and writers.

Family papers include brief biographical excerpts written by Egri, his wife, and children; Egri's will; a datebook; drawings by Egri's son, Ted; and a journal recording the weekly activities of his family during the late 1920s.

Scrapbooks span Egri's career in the United States, beginning with reviews and programs from his plays produced in the 1920s. The Egri School of Writing is represented in the scrapbooks by advertisements, clippings, and brochures as well as photographs of and clippings about former students. Scrapbooks also feature reviews and other press regarding *How to Write a Play* and *The Art of Dramatic Writing*. Some clippings and programs are in Hungarian, particularly for early plays performed in Egri's native language.

Manuscripts include typed drafts of plays, short fiction, poetry, essays, and partial book chapters, and comprise the bulk of the collection. Many of the manuscripts are undated and untitled. Preceding the manuscripts is an index of titles and works likely represented within the collection. Playscripts begin with Egri's earliest work in America and include plays that were not produced. Most of the essays and book chapters discuss the principles of writing drama and fiction, and the critical analysis of creative writing. These essays and chapters relate thematically to Egri's books, though it is unclear as to whether the manuscripts are early drafts of his published work.

The collection contains two published books: a Persian translation of *The Art of Creative Writing*, and a 19th century volume of Sándor Petőfi's poetry owned by Egri.

**Arrangement:** The collection is arranged by document type or subject: Correspondence; Egri School of Writing; Family Papers; Manuscripts; Published Books; and Scrapbooks. A small number of

manuscripts are arranged by genre and title.

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

Drama -- Technique

Playwriting

Theater -- New York (State) -- New York

### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Manuscripts for publication

Scrapbooks

Scripts

### **Names**

Egri School of Writing

## Container List

- b. 1 f. 1-9 Correspondence 1931-1983
- b. 2 f. 1 Correspondence 1962-1967
- b. 2 f. 2-7 Egri School of Writing 1941-1964
- b. 3 f. 1-5 Family Papers 1925-1968
- Manuscripts
- b. 3 f. 6 Index
- b. 3 f. 7-11 By Title--C - M 1926
- b. 4 f. 1-7 By Title--M - T 1954-1966
- b. 4 f. 8 One Act Plays 1962
- b. 5 f. 1 Poetry 1952-1954
- b. 5 f. 2-8 1952, undated
- b. 9 f. 1 1954, undated
- b. 7 f. 1-7 1954-1961, undated
- b. 6 f. 1-6 1964-1966, undated
- b. 8 f. 1-7 Undated
- b. 9 f. 2-3 Published Books 1895, 1965
- b. 10 f. 1-3 Scrapbooks 1915-1958
- b. 9 f. 4-6 Scrapbooks 1915-1966
- b. 11 f. 1-3 Scrapbooks 1934-1962