



Walter Kerr

July 8, 1913 - October 9, 1996

Dobbs Ferry, New York

Walter Kerr, the drama critic whose reviews could fill or empty a Broadway house for half a century, died of congestive heart failure at his home in Dobbs Ferry, New York, on October 9, 1996. He was eighty-three.

Walter Francis Kerr was born in Evanston, Illinois, on July 8, 1913. He was writing film reviews for a local paper while still a teenager, and he studied speech and drama at Northwestern University. He then taught drama for more than a decade at the Catholic University of America in Washington, where he also wrote and directed plays and revues, a few of which reached Broadway. In 1943 he married Jean Collins, one of his students, who would become the bestselling author of *Please Don't Eat the Daisies*, a comic account of their household of five boys and later a sixth child.

He became drama critic of the New York Herald Tribune in 1951 and held the job until the paper folded in 1966. He then moved to The New York Times, where for most of the next sixteen years he wrote reflective Sunday essays and, for a stretch, daily reviews. His prose was graceful, sometimes stern and almost always memorable; he could dismiss a play in a single line but preferred to explain how and why theater worked or failed.

He also wrote books, among them *How Not to Write a Play*, *Tragedy and Comedy*, and *The Silent Clowns*, a loving study of Chaplin, Keaton and the other comedians he had watched as a boy. He won the Pulitzer Prize for Criticism in 1978.

In 1990 the Ritz Theatre on West 48th Street was renamed the Walter Kerr Theatre, a rare honor for a critic. He was survived by Jean, who died in 2003, and their children.

Services

Died in Dobbs Ferry, New York, October 9, 1996, of congestive heart failure, aged 83. Drama critic for the New York Herald Tribune and The New York Times; 1978 Pulitzer Prize for Criticism. Broadway's Walter Kerr Theatre bears his name. Portrait: Michiganensian yearbook photograph (public domain), hosted by Notice Nearby.

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