

FIERCE, FUNNY AND FAROUT

A PAPER WRITTEN FOR THE KIT KAT CLUB

APRIL 17, 1962

BY ROY H BOWEN

Although Jay promised you in the advance publicity for my paper, that I was to be wilder than Wilder, I think Thornton Wilder may very well qualify as an avant garde dramatist. Wilder was ahead of the procession in his first one-act plays in the 20's in which he rebelled against realistic conventions. In all his plays he attempted to capture not verisimilitude but reality. He had a firm conviction that an emphasis on place took away the vitality and excitement of the dramatic experience. He was convinced that when you emphasize place in the theatre, you drag down and limit and harness time to it. You thrust the action back into the past whereas it is precisely the glory of the stage that it is always "now" there. In his desire to break out of the box set to call constant attention to the theatre itself in his productions, and in his wish to make theatre attendance not a soothing experience for playgoers but rather one in which they would pay deeply from their heart's participation, Wilder was ahead of the procession.

He thinks that the theatre has lagged behind the other arts in finding new ways to express how men and women think and feel in our time. Although he does not consider himself one of the new dramatists we are looking for, he hopes that he has played a part in preparing the way for them. It is true now that the avant garde dramatists, particularly in Europe, give Wilder credit for preparing the way. Brecht, Ionesco, and Duerrenmatt have all acknowledged their debt to him and call him "that great and fanatical experimenter." Most of them, however, are definitely wilder than Wilder. Many are irritating, fragmentary and

SECRET, MAY 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

MAY 15, 1964

BY ROY W. BROWN

Although the Committee is in the advanced stages of its report, I was so busy with other work that I could not have done so. I am sorry that I cannot do so. I am sure that you will understand. I am sure that you will understand. I am sure that you will understand.

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SECRET

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incomprehensible. And none of them seem to have anything of the serenity or unmistakable wisdom which permeates the work of Thornton Wilder.

The phrase fierce, funny, and far out was first used by William Saroyan as a descriptive phrase for an Omnibus program dealing with the new drama. He used the adjective "fierce" because this drama frequently deals with terrifying subject and strikes a note of despair and hopelessness. "Funny" because this subject matter is treated frequently in a farcical manner on the basis that its dark insights into the modern world cannot be borne unless a comic framework is provided. "Far out" because these plays go beyond literal boundaries and attempt a wild kind of imaginative invention aimed at breaking the bonds of conventional realistic theatre and escaping from the prosaic to the extraordinary.

It should be noted at the outset that a survey of the origin and development of movements in the theatre is actually to a considerable degree a review of avant gardes. All playwrights who have attempted to break away from the established and popular norms of their day have represented avant garde. Such playwrights have generally won acceptance from the intelligentsia but have been accused by general public opinion on the grounds of unpleasant and unpalatable content and unnecessary obscurity in form. Certainly there has been vigorous opposition and ridicule directed toward the avant garde of today on the grounds of its strangeness and its preoccupation with the morbid, the dismal, and the neurotic. In order to have any perspective on the so-called theatre of the absurd of 1962, we should remember that Ibsen's Ghosts, O'Neill's Strange Interlude were once considered immoral and indecent and that Saroyan's The Time of Your Life was once considered terribly far out.

The young but knowing critic of the Saturday Review of Literature, Henry Hewes, calls the avant garde "nutty" drama. And this term is at least partially deserved when you consider that logic, consistent characterization, and reasonable recognition are generally thrown overboard. In the avant garde anything goes.

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REPUBLIC BOND

The bizarre is the norm. There is a heroine in Ionesco with three noses. Another in Genet's Balcony is a prancing prostitute with a pony tail. At Off-Broadway's "The Theatre of the Absurd" another is seen through a keyhole. She discards her clothes and then removes her cheeks, eyes, and the rest of her body down to her skeleton.

This sort of theatre has not been so widely practiced nor so much discussed as abstract art but there have been parallels between theatre and painting. There was a Dadaist movement for example, in theatre along with that in painting. Surrealism was a concept affecting playwrights and designers in the twenties particularly in France. In 1935 a man named Artaud, between bouts of mental

illness, founded what he called "The Theatre of Cruelty." Of it he said:

"The spectator who comes to us knows that he comes to submit to a veritable operation in which not only his spirit but his senses and his flesh are at stake. He will go henceforth to the theatre as he goes to the surgeon or the dentist. In the same state of mind, with evidently the thought that he will not die of it, but that it is a serious matter, and that he will not come out of it intact."

Artaud's stated aim may well explain why the movement never really caught on.

But now we can say that the avant garde, theatre of the absurd, or "nutty" drama has caught on. It has been presented not only in the small experimental theatres but in the big commercial theatre of Broadway and London's West End. It has been presented in many university theatres including Ohio State (where we presented three plays in this category in the current season) and occasionally in small college and community theatres. It has received considerable attention not only in scholarly journals but also in Life, Time, and Newsweek. It is part of the climate of our times. It is an attempt to face up to the challenge of man's purpose in the nuclear age.

The avant garde playwright may well follow whatever interests him at the moment without much regard for what has gone before. He writes what he feels as he wants to write it. Very much, perhaps, as the abstract painter may use

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RESEARCH REPORT

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whatever color his impulse tells him to splash on canvas. Neither is limited by any consideration of whether the colors or the words are life-like in any literal sense. Both aim toward revealing unconscious truths rather than logical or rational truths. Both hope to pierce deep within the mystery of human existence rather than present its surface appearance. Both are iconoclasts who are quite willing to throw overboard the established rules of dramatic structure or pictorial composition in the attempt to find a new intensity, excitement, and penetration which would lift communication to the realm of communion.

The theatre of the absurd does not mean that its plays are ridiculous. Rather the term is used in its musical context as being out of harmony, incongruous, unreasonable, and illogical. Ionesco, (who has written more about his own work than the other avant gardist) says, "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose. Cut off from his religions, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless."

This sense of anguish at the absurdity of the human condition is the theme of Beckett, Ionesco, ^{and} Genet, (and the other so-called absurd playwrights). There was also a strong indication of the senselessness of life in the work of dramatists like Giraudoux, Sartre, and Camus. But these latter men differ in a fundamental way in that they present their picture of the human condition in the form of highly lucid and logically constructed reasoning while the theatre of the absurd abandons rational techniques and tries to achieve in its form something of the same chaotic meaninglessness of its content. The theatre of the absurd has renounced arguing about the absurdity of the human condition; it attempts merely to present it in concrete stage images. And it is true that these plays almost always seem to play better than they read and that they in some cases have been more dramatic than the more literary work of Sartre and Camus which has motivated and consistent characters presented in well-constructed and polished plays.

Sartre's No Exit is, for instance, a skillful morality play of three people in Hell -- a coward, a Lesbian and a nymphomaniac doomed to torture each other for all eternity. We are shown the choices which led them to their damnation. We are given this existential pronouncement "You are nothing else but your life." But the whole thing is done in a Second Empire drawing room with a drawing room manner. The eternal triangle has not been forgotten; it has just gone underground. The play ends with the line "Well, let's get on with it." -- a line also announcing the end of another play ten years later, Waiting For Godot.

The plays of the "absurd" category following Sartre are also morality plays -- but without the implication that there is any comfort in the Sartrean idea that your life is what you make it. In spite of its fantastic flights and purposeful mystifications it is trying to make a searching criticism of the modern world and a religious quest for the meaning of man. This is the thesis of Martin Esslin's new book The Theatre of the Absurd to which this paper is heavily indebted.

The current avant garde movement was represented on Broadway in 1956 by Waiting For Godot by Samuel Beckett. This play has given a phrase to the French language -- J' attends Godot -- which means that what is now going on will continue to go on for an unidentifiable length of time. J' attends Godot is equivalent to saying that this is what it means to keep on living. The phrase has reached almost a popular usage but the play itself still remains something of an enigma. In fact, Bert Lahr, who played in the Broadway version admitted that it was an enigma to him. Tom Ewell dropped out of the cast between Miami and New York. It achieved a greater commercial success in France than in America but even the French still argue as to whether the play is a hoax or a masterpiece. At The Little Theatre De Babylone in Paris in 1953, Beckett scored a triumph and his play became one of the greatest successes of the post-war theatre. It ran for 400 performances and was later transferred to another Parisian theatre. Waiting

For Godot has been translated into more than 20 languages and has been performed in Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, Brazil, Mexico, and even in Beckett's native Dublin. Within five years after its original production it had been seen by more than a million spectators. A rather astonishing record for a play which is so exasperating and difficult and nonconformist. The plan of the play is simple to relate: two tramps are waiting by a sickly looking tree for the arrival of Monsieur Godot. They quarrel, make up, contemplate suicide, try to sleep, eat a carrot, and gnaw on some chicken bones. Two other characters appear -- a master and a slave who perform a grotesque play within the play. Then a young boy arrives to say that Monsieur Godot will not come today, but that he will come tomorrow. But he does not come and the two tramps resume their vigil by the tree -- which between the first and second day has sprouted a few leaves; the only symbol of a possible order in a thoroughly desolate world. Beckett was a great admirer of Chaplin and his two tramps are reminiscent of American vaudeville routines and burlesque comedy. The tramps indulge in antics with derby hats and tight shoes but their language has gravity, conciseness, and poetic beauty. As a whole the play makes a piercing comment on man's absurd hope; the insignificance of his life and the impossibility of communicating with his fellow man or God.

The play is almost classical in its adherence to the three unities -- the unity of place is a sort of muddy plateau with the tree looking like a gallows which invites the tramps to consider hanging themselves. This place is any place -- above all it is the place where Godot is not. The unity of time is two days but it might be any sequence of days in anyone's life. Time is simply equivalent to what is announced in the title -- the act of waiting. Time is really immobility -- the act of waiting is never over. The action of the play like much of the avant garde movement is circular. Nothing is completed and each day is a return to the beginning. The second act is almost a repetition of the first. The despair in the play comes from the fact that the two tramps

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can do nothing but wait for Godot; and the fact that Godot cannot come.

Although Beckett has refused to comment on the symbolism in his play, the general interpretation is that Godot is God. If Godot is God he does not have characteristics of the Christian God. Rather he is inscrutable and indifferent.

The people generally are lonely wanderers like the tramps in Waiting For Godot. Their mode of life is extremely odd. Instead of working for the most part they merely exist without any apparent occupation. While they are sometimes organized in family groups there are very few children produced and husbands and wives appear to be almost strangers. They talk and talk but they never communicate and comprehension of their meaning is difficult if not impossible. They have no church, no state and no economic system. They live in a limbo unrelated to any nation or social group. Yet they insist that their void is really the land of basic truth and that those of us on the outside looking in have allowed ourselves to be hypnotized into believing a vast number of lies and delusions.

The San Francisco Actor's Workshop in 1957 faced a problem probably as alarming as any ever faced by a group of actors. No live play had been performed at San Quentin Penitentiary since Sara Bernhardt appeared there in 1913. Now the play that had been chosen, partially because no women appeared in it, was Waiting For Godot. The apprehension of directors and actors is understandable when you consider that they were facing one of the toughest audiences in the world with a highly obscure and intellectual play that had at times produced near riots among sophisticated audiences. Hopefully the director asked the convicts to consider the play as something like jazz music and to listen to it for whatever they might find in it. Then an odd thing happened. The play began and was immediately grasped by the audience of convicts and Godot himself as well as phrases and characters in the play had become a permanent part of the private language of San Quentin. The leading article of the prison paper showed how

clearly the writer had understood the meaning of the play.

"It was an expression by an author who expected each member of his audience to draw his own conclusions, make his own errors. It forced no dramatized moral on the viewer. It held out no specific hope. We are still waiting for Godot and shall continue to wait. When the scenery gets too drab and the action too slow we will call each other names and swear to part forever. But then there is no place to go."

Why did this play make so deep an impact on an audience of convicts?

Perhaps because it confronted them with a situation analogous to their own.

Perhaps because they were unsophisticated enough to come to the theatre without preconceived notions. At any rate, the prisoners at San Quentin could not be suspected of intellectual snobbery for which many audiences of Waiting For Godot have been reproached. There was no reason for them to pretend to like a play which they didn't understand just to appear "in the know."

Esslin cites the successful production at San Quentin as an indication that these new plays do have something to say and can be understood.) He says that most of the bewilderment caused by new plays comes from the fact that they are part of a new and still developing stage convention that has not yet been generally understood and hardly defined. Inevitably he says plays written in this new convention will seem impertinent and outrageous impostors if judged by the standards and criteria of an earlier convention. [These plays are not constructed cleverly. They have no plot to speak of. They lack consistent characterization and motivation as well as fully explained scenes.] They do not attempt to hold the mirror up to nature but more often seem to be reflections of dreams and nightmares.] They do not form one definite unified or self-conscious movement. On the contrary, each of the writers in question is an individual who regards himself as a lone outsider isolated in his private world with his personal approach to both subject matter and form. What they hold in common may be considered as a reflection of the anxieties, tensions, and fears of today's confused world. Above all the impression I have received from listening to a

clearly the writer had no regard for the quality of the play. The fact is that the author who wrote each scene of this play was in a hurry to get his own contribution made to the production. It is not surprising that the scenes of the play are full of errors and that the scenes are full of errors. The scenes are full of errors and the scenes are full of errors. The scenes are full of errors and the scenes are full of errors.

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continued to write. They have no time to spare. The scenes are full of errors and the scenes are full of errors. The scenes are full of errors and the scenes are full of errors. The scenes are full of errors and the scenes are full of errors. The scenes are full of errors and the scenes are full of errors. The scenes are full of errors and the scenes are full of errors.

REPUBLICAN BOND

couple of panels of young avant garde playwrights in New York is they are determined not to be phony in revealing their subjective reactions to life.

While Samuel Beckett managed to be fiercely funny in the midst of anguish and despair a Roumanian named Ionesco, writing also in Paris, kept up a steady laughter of sorts throughout his plays. As his admirer, William Saroyan, points out it is a kind of hyena laughter unlike any laughter you have known before as a playgoer. You laugh but you don't forget what you have seen.

You laugh at the absurdity of the old couple in The Chairs who talk to a great number of empty chairs as if they were filled with people. You laugh at the ridiculous spectacle of an old man of 95 sitting on the lap of his 94 year old wife like a little boy and being comforted by her for his failure in life. You may also laugh, (but less heartily) when at the end of the play the orator who is to deliver the sum of the old man's wisdom to the assembled crowd is unable to utter a single meaningful sound and finally writes nonsense syllables on a blackboard. By this time the old man and woman have jumped to their death in the ocean below the old tower in which they live. The orator leaves and for the first time human noises seem to be coming from the invisible crowd. We in the audience are left with a strong feeling that human life is lacking in meaning and that human accomplishment is insignificant.

In our production of this play at University Theatre this winter, we found that audiences were remarkably attentive and willing to wait for the long, long pauses in the action which Ionesco calls for. Many of our patrons didn't hesitate to call it "an odd play" or "pretty far-out" but most of the people reporting to us considered the play a novel and thought-provoking experience. They may have been puzzled by details but they were held by the play as a whole.

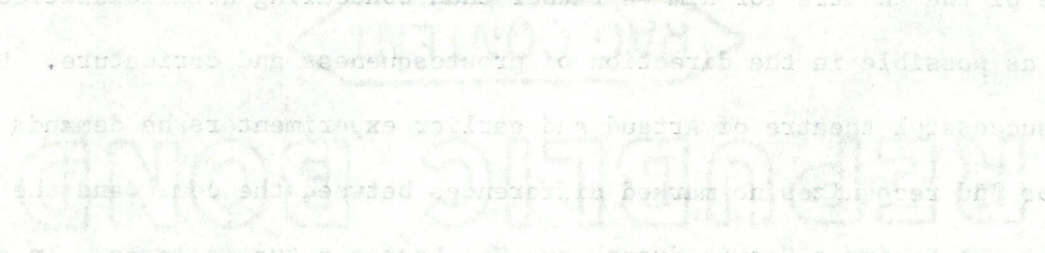
In Ionesco's Amedee we are shown a husband and wife who live together in bickering and bitterness. Amedee is a playwright, but in fifteen years he has

written only two speeches. His wife, Madeleine, a typist considers this a small output. Love is over between them and they experience a growing feeling of guilt. They are concerned with a presence of a corpse in their apartment. He fills up an adjoining room entirely and finally his great feet push into the room represented by the stage setting. The corpse now starts growing in rapid geometrical progression. Another source of discomfort is that mushrooms are growing everywhere. The subtitle of the play, incidentally, is "How To Get Rid Of It." Finally by super-human effort he manages to drag the corpse out into the street and it disappears into the air like a vast balloon. The production of the play would present some unusual staging problems (if one wanted to produce it).

In this play, which attempts to show the bitterness and agony which can grow between a man and woman when their love dies, Ionesco uses the same exaggeration of effects as in his other plays. In fact, this seems to be the essence of the theatre for him -- rather than concealing artificialities he goes as far as possible in the direction of grotesqueness and caricature. Unlike the unsuccessful theatre of Artaud and earlier experimenters he depends heavily on humor and recognizes no marked differences between the comic and the tragic. He calls The Chairs a "comic drama" and The Lesson a tragic farce. In all of his work the comic and tragic coexist -- each standing as a criticism of the other.

Life according to the "absurd" playwrights, is like that. Any act of life is futile and farcical since death is inevitable; there is the funny side of absurdity. Further the assumption which almost all of them make that "God is dead" then leads to a view of the universe as a whole as senseless and this is the tragic side of absurdity. The absurdists aim is to startle, shock and taunt an audience so that they wake up to a realization of life as a tragic farce.

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Rhinoceros, though far out in theme and techniques, succeeded in being genuinely funny to audiences in the theatre. It was given a handsome multi-set production and boasted stars of the calibre of Eli Wallach, Anne Jackson, and Zero Mostel. It provided one of the most entertaining evenings on Broadway primarily because of the second act scene in which Zero Mostel was transformed to a rhinoceros right before our eyes. (All of the characters turned into rhinoceroses except the weakling hero, Berenger, who alone hangs onto his human status even though he didn't quite know why.)

But the big scene is the second act transformation.) Zero Mostel begins to scrape his feet on the rug, starts to heave and snort like a locomotive going up hill in mortal pain, and peers at his friend, Eli Wallach, as though he might be a tasty morsel for dinner. The situation becomes even more alarming as Mostel seems to balloon five feet off the floor and dives to a crouch behind the cagelike bars of his own brass bedstead. Wallach decides to speak out. "John," he says, "you seem to be going through some moral crisis."

Everyone in the town goes through this same moral crisis and Berenger is left alone and he concludes that the human race is washed up. An indication of the meaning which Ionesco intended was revealed when he said:

"It's curious that anyone can become a rhinoceros -- people without culture as well as intellectuals... but the intellectuals were the first to become rhinoceroses in Nazi Germany. The intellectual produces reasons for his fanaticism which often conceal a profound irrationality. The possibility of the rhinoceros exists in each of us. I want the plays audiences to feel not that they are rhinoceroses but that, like Berenger, the hero, they can resist this collective malady."

Ionesco's intent is to satirize people with no inner life, people who are vulnerable to fanatical leaders. He says further:

"I'm not against ideologies but I'm against closed ideologies which keep men from thinking and preclude the possibilities of having ideas. For example, one knows that Hitler was Fascist and that Castro is Communist, but the essential thing is that the two men resemble one another

in that they fanaticize the world. Concepts of Right and Left mean nothing: it's the blind fanaticism that counts. It isn't what people think that is important but the reason they think what they think."

The man whom I would rank near the bottom of the new movement is Jean Genet but he is certainly one of the most astonishing. Abandoned by his mother soon after his birth in Paris in 1913 he was brought up by peasant foster parents. At the age of ten he says his laziness and daydreaming led him into a house of correction. He stayed there for about ten years, escaped, and joined the foreign legion to gain the signing up ~~honor~~. He says:

"After a few days in the Foreign Legion, I deserted, taking with me the suitcases of some Negro officers. For a time I loved stealing but prostitution appealed more to my easygoing ways. I was twenty. Abandoned by my mother and family, I found it natural to aggravate this fact by the love of males, and that love by stealing and stealing by crime or the complicity with crime. Thus I decisively repudiated a world that had repudiated me."

For the next ten years he lived the life of an ~~int~~ itinerant delinquent and did time in prisons all over Europe. He didn't like Berlin because even on unter den Linden he had a feeling of being in a camp organized by bandits. He couldn't feel that he was realizing himself in such a situation and therefore hastened on the Antwerp where the conventional moral code was still obeyed and an outlaw was properly enabled to feel himself outside the established order. During the German occupation he was imprisoned in France and in 1939 he started writing poetry, and stories, curious mixtures of lyrical beauty and the most sordid subject matter.

Genet presents in his plays a strange inverted, perverted, upside down world. They probably reflect ~~his~~ his erotic fantasies of his many years in prison. He says of the staging of his plays:

"They should unfold as in a dream. To me they seem more like nightmares in which every thought and image is shifted back and forth by reflecting mirrors until one is lost in a confused jumble of contradictions and conflicts."

That's just the effect you get from The Balcony and The Blacks, his two plays which have been presented in New York. They are baffling nightmares presenting the disordered images of a disordered mind. They represent journeys into lunacy which may have a certain zest but I find it impossible to repress the question "Was the trip necessary?"

The man whom I would rank near the top among today's playwrights is the Swiss Friedrich Duerrenmatt -- his reputation in America has come from his play The Visit which with the brilliant acting of the Lunts received praise from the critics and popularity with playgoers on Broadway and on tour. This play is avant garde but hardly can be classified as "absurd" drama in that it tells a complete action; it is a play with a beginning, a mounting suspense and a powerful and conclusive ending. The richest woman in the world, Clair Zachassian comes back to her home in Gullen, a dejected and poverty-stricken German village. She brings with her an odd assortment of things and people including a couple of eunuchs, a black panther and a coffin. In as chilling a scene as you are likely to find in modern drama she reveals to the assembled townpeople that she will pay a billion marks for the death of the villager storekeeper who had loved her and betrayed her in her youth. The ensuing corruption of the villagers despite their initial protestations that they are civilized citizens of Europe, not savages, is presented in horrifying and yet credible scenes which finally are climaxed with the execution which she desires and her departure with her victim in his coffin. She has already told him in a strange scene of love and hate in about equal proportions that she will put him in a beautiful ^a museum overlooking the Mediterranean. The villagers gather in their new clothes and the new red neon sign over the station casts a baleful hellish glow over them as they look silently after the departing train.

For many people this play has been the most gripping and dramatic indictment of materialism and false values which they have experienced in the theatre. It's a somber and frightening play. Like all of Duerrenmatt's plays it deals sardonically

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REPRODUCTION

and bitterly with death not as the last incident in life but as a futile and ridiculous kind of anti-climax. The other principle theme (also repeated in his other plays) is the corrosive effect of power. It is summed up in Lord Acton's pronouncement "Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely."

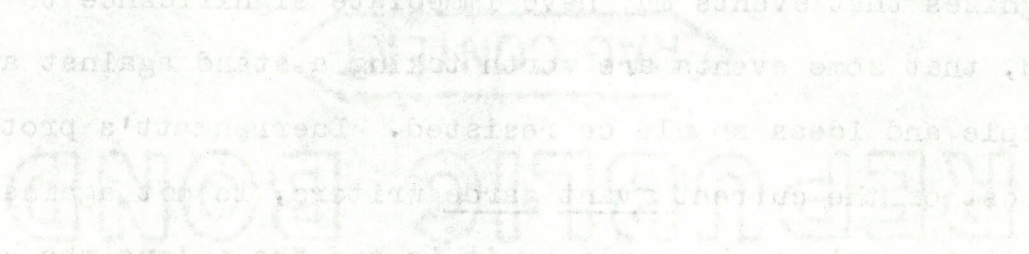
It's a harsh biting haunting play and in my opinion a great play. It has tragic force and holds the playgoers in the firm grip of a moving dramatic experience. It is a powerful corrective in that it exposes so nakedly the evil which can follow from the love of money.

Like Beckett and Ionesco, Duerrenmatt is disillusioned about human character. Like the other avant gardists he gives the impression that human problems are insoluble. What sets him apart from the others who feel that the events of life are basically meaningless to the point that they are completely flattened out and insignificant is that he recognizes that events may have immediate significance to those affected, that some events are worth taking a stand against and that some people and ideas should be resisted. Duerrenmatt's protest, unlike most of the current avant garde writers, is not against the cosmos; it is against the world as it is and the rulers who make it that way.

Besides Beckett the other Irish playwright who is writing in the avant garde is Brendan Behan. His The Hostage is now being revived in Greenwich Village and doing sell-out business. Probably some of the customers are hopeful that Mr. Behan will appear himself -- something which he does when he is in ^{his} cups. Behan, drunk, can put on a show which tops what he has written for his actors. Set in a Dublin brothel an interesting parade of prostitutes, pimps, and perverts parade across the stage in a story centering around a young British soldier who is being held as a hostage for a young Irishman who is

and differently with each other as the last incident in life but as a
 little and a different kind of anti-climax. The other principle
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 It has tragic force and holds the playgoers in the firm grip of a
 moving dramatic experience. It is a powerful corrective in that it
 exposes so readily the evil which can follow from the love of money.
 Also Beckett and Hesse, Macbeth as distinguished about
 human character. Like the other great plays he gives the audience
 the human problems are insoluble. What sets him apart from the others
 who deal with the events of life and especially man's fate to the
 point that they are completely finished out and insignificant in that
 no recognises that events are of immediate significance to those
 affected, that some events are worth looking at and others are not.
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 unlike the other great plays, is not against the
 world; it is against the world as it is and the rulers who make it
 that way.



Besides looking for other playwrights who are writing in the
 event genre is Thomas Mann. His novels is now being revised
 in German will be and being sold-out business. Probably some of
 the elements are typical that Mann will appear himself -- some-
 thing which he does with an idea of. Mann, Mann, can put on a
 show which does not have a written for his scores. Set in a world
 of an interesting parade of possibilities, things, and characters
 across the sea in a story concerning events a young man
 soldier who is held as a hostage for a young woman who is

about to be hanged for killing a British policeman. The action is frequently broken by community singing by the actors ~~and is even~~ when the young soldier is killed in a fight. But Behan has the victim immediately jump up and sing to the audience:

"The bell of Hell go ting-a-ling-a-ling for you
For you but not for me. Oh, Death where is thy
Sting-a-ling-aling or grave thy Victory?"

Edward Albee may not be the rising Elijah of mid-century America that he has been acclaimed but he is clearly a playwright with something to say and with a way of saying it with effectiveness.

He is the outstanding and almost the only young playwright whose work could be considered comparable to that of Ionesco and Beckett. Here is a young man still in his early 30's who only four years ago was a Western Union telegraph boy. He is convinced that Americans are not really successful but that a destructive current of almost hurricane proportions rages at the very center of their lives. His plays attempt to get to the eye of the hurricane and assess the region for the sub-human nature of too many American lives as they are lived. Unlike the European playwrights he does not paint a picture of complete futility but indicates that there may be some chance for these sub-human people to become human.

Albee objected to those critics who attacked the content rather than the form of The American Dream. His ~~answer~~ to those who found the play offensive was that he hoped it would be offensive because the notion that everything is peachy keen in this slipping land of ours needs to be ~~attacked~~. His work is breezier and faster than its European models but equally as savage in its portrayal of people leading empty lives.

The American Dream, while securing a majority of favorable and even rave reviews, was attacked by other critics as being immoral and

about to be handed for killing a British policeman. The action is
presently broken by a communitarian saying by the editor
when the young soldier is killed in a fight. But remember the victim

immediately jump up and sing to the audience:
"The ball is rolling a-rolling for you
For you put me down. Oh, death, where is thy
Sting-a-ling-a-ling or bravo my victory?"

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thing to say and with a way of saying it with effectiveness.
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work could be considered comparable to that of Ionesco and Brecht.
Here is a young man still in his early 30's who only four years ago
was a writer under a pseudonym. He is convinced that Americans
are not really successful but that a destructive current of almost
unfathomable proportions runs at the very center of their lives. His
play attempts to get to the eye of the hurricane and assess the region
for the sub-human nature of twentieth-century American lives as they are lived.
Unlike the other playwrights he does not have a picture of complete
intentional nihilism. There are some characters that are not

human people to become human.
Alice objected to those critics who attacked the content rather
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the notion that everything is being kept in this slipping land of
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European society and equally as savage in its portrayal of people
leading empty lives.

The American Dream, while securing a majority of favorable and
even rave reviews, was attacked by other critics as being immoral and

defeatist. Albee defended himself by saying:

"The play is an examination of The American scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in our society, a condemnation of complacency, cruelty, emasculation and vacuity; every honest work is a personal private yowl, a statement of one person's pleasure or pain; but I hope that The American Dream is something more than that. I hope that it transcends the personal and private and has something to do with the anguish of us all."

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The one consistent character in this play is Grandma -- an old lady who is biting and scratching at the tail end of her life and who finds the lives of her children without any dignity or meaning. She is hopeful that the young man who replaces the adopted grandson whom her children dismembered may turn out to be "The American Dream" but finds that he is only handsome shell incapable of feeling and willing to do anything for money.

So, she takes leave of it all and says "goodbye" to the world.

Although no one has pointed it out, Grandma's farewell speech is parallel to the famous passage in Our Town at which audiences have always wept. Emily, you remember, finds that life when you know the future, living where you also watch yourself living is too painful

to bear; resigned to the calm quiet of her grave she says:

"Wait! one more look. Good-bye world, Good-bye Grovers Conrers. Mama and Papa. Good-bye to clocks ticking and Mama's sunflowers. And food and coffee and new ironed dresses. And hot baths and sleeping and waking up. Oh, earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you."

What a contrast we find in the rueful departure which Grandma expresses before she walks from the apartment she loathes and has shared for so many years with a daughter whom she despises:

"I don't know why I bother to take these boxes with me. They don't have much in them . . . some old clothes. . . letters . . . a couple of regrets . . . Pekinese. . . blind at that. . . the television. . . my Sunday teeth. . . eighty-six years of living. . . some sounds. . . a few images. . . a little garbled by now. . . and well . . . you

know the things one accumulates."

Jack Gelber's production of The Connection at the Living Theatre at 14th Street and 6th Avenue has been running since 1959. It was the winner of the first Obie (off-Broadway) Award and has been saluted here and at an international festival in Paris, as one of the most creative contributions to the avant garde theatre. Perhaps its appeal comes partly from the jazz music which goes on as much as five minutes at a time frequently during the evening. Perhaps people are fascinated as well as repelled by the subject of dope addiction. Some people may be enticed by the prospect of hearing more four-letter words than ever appeared in any New York show or maybe its just that there is a universal appeal to the making of a connection with other men and a connection with God. The point is made in the play that our whole civilization needs a "fix." The critics of our contemporary theatre say the theatre needs a "fix." Certainly its content succeeds in making a real connection with audiences.

We see a group of shabby young men gathered in Leech's pad waiting nervously for the arrival of Cowboy, the man who can "fix" things for them. The whole first act is devoted like Waiting For Godot to this waiting. The producer at one point addresses the audience and apologizes for the fact that the play has never been finished and the actors must improvise. The playwright interrupts to say that the actors have not carrying out their dramatic assignments and the show lacks the elements of romance and sex which he intended. At the end of the act Cowboy is sighted in the street below and the glad news is spread that he is accompanied by a woman. During the intermission we are greeted by Sam, a tall handsome Negro who had attempted to entertain us with some stories that were not very funny. Now he asks us for money on the grounds that this is a lousy theatre management

and the title was "The Connection"

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say the theatre needs a "fix." Certainly the content succeeds in

THE CONNECTION

making a real connection with the audience.
A group of about a dozen young men gathered in a room and waiting
nervously for the arrival of a woman, the man who had been waiting
for her. The woman later on is devoted like William to the
cause. The producer at some point addresses the audience and
apologizes for the fact that the play has never been translated and
the actors that improvise. The playwright insists to say that
the actors are not carrying out their dramatic assignments and that
now faces the elements of romance and sex which he intended. At the
end of the act Cowley is slumped in the street below and the play
is spread that he is accompanied by a woman. During the production
as are greeted by a tall handsome negro who has appeared to
entertain as with the stated that were not very funny. Now he asks
us for money and the producer that this is a very funny moment.

which fails to pay its actors wages. Most of the people who are approached give him a coin or two with some degree of embarrassment.

When we return to the theatre the whole climate of the stage action has changed. The men are altered in personality as they come from the bathroom after receiving their fixes. Sam is in high spirits and addresses us again and says "Thank you for helping to make possible this joy which runs through my veins." The sense of our participation is further increased by the producers telling us that contrary to his earlier statement the men we are seeing are really addicts and their only payment is a very small shot of heroin nightly. The sex angle turns out rather dismally. The woman accompanying Cowboy is a sadly decayed specimen named Sister Salvation, about 65 years of age. She expresses motherly solicitude for the boys and is shocked because she finds a wine bottle in the bathroom. We in the audience are somewhat shocked to learn that she has become a hopeless addict in a recent trip to the hospital and she too goes into the bathroom to Cowboy for her fix.

Leech alone is unaffected. He is not turned on and demands a second dose. After several denials, Cowboy shrugs and says, "It's your own life." and gives him more heroin. This is the climax, if any, of the evening as Leech rips off his belt, straps it around his arm to bring up a vein and goes through all the preliminary business of measuring and sterilizing and then injects the drug in front of our eyes. At this point, people faint dead away at some performances or toddle out of the theatre in a shaken condition. No matter how experienced a playgoer may be, here is a play which becomes a gripping experience. There is no preaching, no real consideration of moral issues. The play merely presents the trapped lives of these heroin victims and shows us the hell in which they live. At the end we feel

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 this for which I am through by now." The sense of the performance
 is further increased by the producers telling us that contrary to
 his earlier assessment the man we are seeing is really adding and
 their only problem is a very small spot of nervous stability. The sex
 angle turns out rather dimly. The woman accompanying Cowley is a
 badly behaved woman named Miss Balfour, about 35 years of age.
 She expresses a hearty welcome for the boys and is shocked because
 she finds a nice bottle in the cellar. We find the audience are some-
 what shocked to learn that she has become a hopeless addict in a recent
 trip to the hospital and that the bathroom is Cowley's
 for the

REPUBLIC BOND

second base. They several details, go by signs and says "It's
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 issues. The play merely presents the trapped lives of these heroin
 victims and shows us the man in which they live. After the end of the

convinced that a repeated statement made by an actor in the audience "That's the way it is, man, that's the way it really is." is accurate.

(Having heard Judith Malina on several panels I am convinced that as artistic director of the Living Theatre she is devoted toward the establishment of a new kind of theatre experience amounting to communion between the playgoer and the spectator.) She is convinced that the playgoer should judge a play not by the question "Did I enjoy it?" but "What did the play do to me?" What The Connection does for its audiences amounts to a horrifying insight into the problem which supposedly afflicts 45,000 New Yorkers. Despite the absence of moral comment the play may still be considered a desirable moral influence if Brook Atkinson was right in saying that "anyone seeing this play will never take his first fix."

Arthur Kopit is a young man who was graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Harvard in 1959. Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You In The Closet and I'm Feeling So Sad was his eighth play produced in his undergraduate career. (It is his first play produced in New York.) Besides being a great boon to the theatre marque manufacturers it's turning out the largest success of the season of the Phoenix Theatre. (The Phoenix is something of a repertory operation which has distinguished director-producers, Ford Foundation money, and a more desirable theatre building than other off-Broadway operations.)

Oh Dad shows that Kopit has studied the continental avant garde well. He indicates a satirical slant by classifying his play as "A pseudo classical tragi-farce in a bastard French tradition." The story it tells is of a wealthy lady, Madame Rosepettle, who is made a real Lady Dracula by Jo VanFleet and her poor smothered and stuttering

... statement made by an actor in the audience
 "That's the way it is, was, that's the way it really is." It occurred
 Having heard Smith's remarks on several occasions I am convinced that
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 establishment of a new kind of theatre experienced according to
 communion between the director and the spectator. She is convinced
 that the physical and emotional play not by the occasion "Did I enjoy
 it?" but "What did the play do to me?" What the connection does for her
 evidence amounts to a horrifying picture into the problem which
 allegedly affects 48,000 new smokers. Despite the license of society
 content the play will be considered a desirable social institution
 it took place was right in saying that "anyone seeing this play
 will never take a first fix."

Arthur Kopit is a young man who was graduated from the
 first Harvard in 1939. Arthur Kopit's First Play
Close to the Heart was the first play produced in his
 under-graduate career. It is a play which is a love
 between a girl and a boy who are the main characters in the
 drama. It is the largest success of the season of the Lincoln Theatre.
 The theatre is something of a repertory operation which has distinguished
 character-producers, Ford conductors, and a fine dramatic theatre
 building from other off-broadway operations.

On the other hand Kopit has studied the emotional great stage
 well. He has called a social machine by classifying the play as a
 parade classical tragedy-verse in a bastard French tradition. The
 story is told in a really lady, Madame Lecocq, and in some
 a real lady French by the author and her poor mother and sister.

son, Jonathan, who come to a hotel in Port Royal (^{originally} ~~obviously~~ it is set in Havana but current history has changed that). A chorus of bellboys come in with mountains of luggage including ferocious-looking venus fly-traps, a large fish bowl from which a silver ~~peranka~~ fish jumps alarmingly and utters something like human sounds and that necessary accoutrement for a traveller in the avant garde, a coffin. This one is covered with ~~hotel~~ and steamship stickers which indicate that the passenger within has travelled to all the best places.

It takes Madame Rosepettle the whole first act to get completely settled. She pulls a cat's skeleton from Roschnda, the fish's bowl, with a pair of silver tongs which pull from her handbag and flies into a frenzy when informed by the head bellboy that it was not Siamese. She instructs her son to speak to the chef about getting only Siamese kittens and adds "Let's see if we can't get out cats on the American plan while we're at it," She breaks up most of the furniture and has new brought in. She issues a rapid fire series of instructions for draping her bedroom in inky black. Her son stammers pitifully in trying to relay her orders and she barks at him, "Can't you talk like a normal being without showering this room with your inarticulate spit?"

The other characters include a Commodore Roseabove and a young baby-sitter named Rosalie. Roseabove comes to Madame's suite for a champagne supper. Pink lights flicker through the translucent walls violins play (and Jonathan cowers beneath the threatening Venus fly-traps in the window alcove.) The Commodore is somewhat surprised when the chair imprisons him at the table and when the strength of Madame's sudden embrace forces him into an attack of asthma. None the less he continues to play the romantic game, kisses her hand and says, "
"Your husband must have been a wonderful man
to deserve a woman like you."

Madame R. (nonchalantly): "I would^{ym} like you to see him?"

... who was in a hotel in Fort...
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Madame... (nonchalant): "I would like you to see him."

Commodore: "A snapshot?"

Madame R: "No, my husband. He's inside in the closet. I had him stuffed. Wonderful taxidermist I know."

The Commodore now tries to escape in earnest but the chair will not give an inch and he is forced to listen to Madame's long, long recital of her husband's marital inadequacies and how she eventually did him in. This scene is a rather obvious parody of the long literary ~~and~~ias which Tennessee Williams heroines indulge in and probably motivated Williams in a recent interview to remark petulantly, "I wish Kopit would stop it!"

Rosalie who has been demure and coy heretofore, sheds these qualities along with her crinolines when she forcibly pulls Jonathan into his mother's forbidden bedroom -- and crosses her feet on the purple velvet head board. Her voice becomes urgent now and her passion is robust, not tender. "Take your pants off," she keeps saying. Father's corpse now falls out of the closet and while she is annoyed she merely stuffs him back in. When he falls over them the second time she sits on top of him and gestures with his waxen hand to the distraught Jonathan. The boy is ~~se~~unsettled and he throws Rosalie down and smothers her. Madame Rosepettle on her return is startled by the two corpses in her bed and grief-stricken by her ~~perant~~ fish on the floor. "Great Gods, my fish has lost her water," she says and kneels over it to administer artificial respiration.

Well, you can see why Norman Nadel called Oh Dad as "explosion in a fireworks factory." Audience laughter is really booming at times. I enjoyed it and was undisturbed that I failed to see any important symbolism. This play has little to reveal about the human condition. In fact it seems utterly insignificant but this doesn't distress ~~and~~ audience who finds it utterly daffy and delightful. It's surrealist with a vengeance and it is probably as irresponsible as a lot of surrealists were in their use of paint or canvas. So let's grant to the theatre the same privelege now and then. At least here is a play so inventive and high-spirited in both writing and production that it never comes within miles of despair.

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REPAIRED BOND

There isn't a better evening for having a good time than that provided by How To Succeed In Business Without Really Trying. However, if you want a more adventurous though less pleasant evening I think you should try off-Broadway and the avant garde. I'm sure that such shows as The Hostage, The Connection, Brecht on Brecht, The Fantasticks and The American Dream with Oh Dad Poor Dad will provide you with experiences which may stimulate you or shock you but will never bore you. You too may learn to accept with equanimity people who live in ashcans or are burried up to their necks in sandpiles along with talking ~~pirate~~ fish and ~~proliferating~~ mushrooms, and finally come to think of a room without a corpse as no room at all.

The "fierce, funny and far-out" playwrights have done a pretty good job in revealing the misery and absurdity of the human condition. What do they prescribe as remedies? Actually very little except to encourage us to laugh at our predicament. They may occasionally attempt a diagnostic or corrective function, but this is difficult since they are so involved and upset themselves, and since they insist that the form and structure of their plays have something of the same chaos and confusion of the life they reflect. I'm afraid that the conclusion must be that, despite the creation of a new kind of theatre excitement and the pushing-aside of some outworn conventions, the avant garde playwrights have so far failed to illuminate or instruct us, they have rather effectively taken the temperature of an ailing world but have resembled the sickness more than the cure. Perhaps this will come later. At this point they have succeeded in getting challenging and striking material on the experimental stages of many countries. They have given some new slants on the nature of reality but we can still complain we believe they represent a conspiracy to undermine reality itself. I think we have also a legitimate complaint against the playwrights who try to convince us that all human endeavor is destined to be meaningless and to finally end in despair. Or perhaps we should just take solace from the fact proven by history that all Avant Gardes have a way of turning into rear-guards.

That there is a good deal which is pointless nonsense or grotesque just for the sake of being grotesque shouldn't serve to damn a whole movement in the theatre to any great extent than it has similar trends in the other arts. Every art has a frontier or madness and the drama is no exception. However, I think we may have some confidence that the absurd playwrights will never persuade us that the entire human race is mad.

The avant garde to this point has failed to give us any characters with the tragic stature of Hamlet or Oedipus who show nobility or grandeur in going beyond despair. Neither do they reveal the redeeming effects of love nor the value of the commonplace in human life. Among my reactions to the interesting new approach in theatre is that our lives do not lie in some murky abstract design but in the trivia -- in the day to day occurrences of our lives which now and again become events -- Perhaps the thing that finally saves us is becoming involved in the trivia of existence -- even though it represents mediocrity. The appetite for life itself may be the thing which saves us even though we may often seem stupid and unperceptive in pursuing it. Again I must come back to Thornton Wilder who said that he was attempting in his work "to find a value above all price for the smallest events in our daily life." Again I am thankful to Wilder and playwrights like him who fully affirm the miracle of life itself which so many modern dramatists deny.