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SCIENCE FICTION DRAMA:
THE PRESENT SEEN THROUGH THE FUTURE

By

Paul M. Frazier

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ABSTRACT

SCIENCE FICTION DRAMA:
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This study attempts to explore the science fiction genre as it appears in dramatic literature since World War II. Plays were selected for analysis based on their differing approaches to themes common in science fiction. The analysis focuses on both the literary merits of the plays as well as their production posibilities.

The themes of utopia and dystopia are represented by Solitaire by Robert Anderson and A Bunch of the Gods Were Sitting Around One Day by James Spencer. These plays are analyzed as differing views of family life, one in a dystopia and the other in a nascent utopia. Visions of a post-nuclear holocaust world are examined in To The Chicago Abyss by Ray Bradbury and The Tin Can Riots by Edward Bond. These plays define an optomistic/pessimistic spectrum of attitudes toward this possible future.

The last chapter analyzes the production problems of these four plays.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Since man started writing, the element of the fantastic has been a part of literature. We have been entertaining and educating ourselves with myths and legends since the earliest times. Eventually, these tales were written down, giving us such stories as Homer's Illyad and Odyssey. These myths told of heroes and their adventures in far-off lands, as well as teaching moral lessons and attempting to explain the world in which the writers lived.

In recent history, science fiction has taken the place of these myths and legends. Science fiction creates the same sense of wonderment that the ancient myths did. The worlds and peoples created by science fiction writers are strange and wonderful. They are sometimes dangerous, but always interesting. Much of the attraction of science fiction films is due to the special effects used in them. Audiences want to see what these other worlds and creatures look like. Science fiction also supplies some moral and ethical instruction. Many stories are of the "if this goes on" variety. These stories suggest that if some situation continues without change, something terrible will come of it. Also, many stories have stereotypical Good and Evil

characters who are in conflict. Good is usually rewarded, and Evil is usually punished, thus supplying a moral lesson.

In its beginnings, science fiction was a literature of technology. Each story was centered around a particular technological advance, and showed how the world could be made better (or worse) with its use. As more and better writers entered the field, the quality of the stories improved. Instead of focussing on the newest technology, the stories began to focus on the people effected by that technology. According to Asimov, this change occurred because the older type of science fiction story was overtaken by reality too quickly. The stories were becoming outdated before they were published because technology was advancing at an incredible rate and the fantastic new machines described in the stories written today were being sold in the stores tomorrow. So the writers turned from stories about the hardware of technology to stories about the software of human beings to avoid being overtaken. The changes in social structure brought about by changes in technology occurred much more slowly than the changes in technology themselves (103). As this change took place in science fiction literature, it became a genre of recognizable people in recognizable relationships living in a world different from our own, altered by technological change.

Because of this evolution of science fiction, developing a precise definition for the genre is difficult. Different critics have defined it in different ways to suit their own purposes. Millies offers what is perhaps the most all-encompassing definition. She defines science fiction as "a prose narrative that deals with a situation that could not happen in the world as we know it, but deals with it so that it appears scientifically plausible and realistic" (1).

Asimov defines science fiction by considering its social backgrounds. Both science fiction and fantasy deal with events played against social backgrounds that have not existed and do not exist today. Lumped into what he calls "surrealistic fiction" are such divers works as Gulliver's Travels, The Jungle Book, The Lord of the Rings, and The War of the Worlds (17). He further divides the two types of surrealistic fiction by defining science fiction as stories which have a surreal social background which could conceivably be derived from our own by appropriate changes in the level of science and technology. That change could be an advance, such as colonies on Mars, or a decline, such as the destruction of our civilization by nuclear disaster. By a liberal application of this rule, we can include such things as time travel, faster than light velocities, etc. in science fiction. Fantasy, on the other hand, includes those social backgrounds that cannot reasonably be supposed from our own by any change in the level of science and technology (17-18).

Stories of magicians and fairies, which cannot generally be explained by any alteration of the level of technology in our world, would fit into this division of surrealistic fiction.

Asimov goes on to say that what is crucial about science fiction is its perception of change through technology. It is not that science fiction predicts one specific change or another, it is that it predicts change in general (19-20). If there is one thing about our world today that is constant, it is that it is always changing. In nearly every field of endeavor, new discoveries and advancements are being made daily, and the general populace is often hard-pressed to keep up with the changes in their own field of interest, much less in every other field as well. Science fiction writers explore the effects of change on our society and ourselves. This is the purpose of their predictions. They are not harbingers of what <u>will</u> be, but of what <u>might</u> be.

Both Millies and Asimov were writing about science fiction stories, i.e., narrative literature. But what of dramatic literature? If we replace "prose narrative" with "drama" in Millies's definition, we have not significantly altered its meaning or applicability. Also, Asimov's discussion of surrealistic social backgrounds does not preclude a dramatic presentation. All that Asimov requires for science fiction is a social background that can be achieved by a reasonable and explained change from today's, and a perception of that change as a part of the literature.

For the purposes of this study, I will use a definition of science fiction very similar to Asimov's: science fiction is any literary work set in a world that differs from the real world in a way that is, or can be, plausibly explained. This explanation will be deemed plausible if it is primarily based on a change in technology (either an advance or decline) from that of the Earth in 1987. As in Asimov's definition, what is important is not that the change has occurred, but that the change, and the social situations it has brought about, are fundamental to the plot.

By this definition, A Bunch of the Gods Were Sitting Around One Day is science fiction because it is set on spacecraft that left the Earth to colonize another planet. Our current technology allows us to build vessels that can travel in space to other planets, (i.e., the Moon) but we are not yet able to travel faster than the speed of light. The ability to build vessels that can travel faster than the speed of light is fundamental to the plot of that play. Also, the situation that the characters find themselves in is brought about by this technological advance. They are trapped inside the ship when it is in "hyperspace," and must live with the very strict rationing of resources this captivity forces upon them. Therefore the play is science fiction by the above definition because it postulates nothing more than a change of technology from our world; and the plot

centers around the effects of this technology when it has gone awry.

The world of Solitaire is a world not very advanced beyond our own, but the society depicted in the play has taken their technology and created a world more suited to its machines than its people. People live in sterile cubicles that are completely controlled by computers. The problem with the world is that the computers rarely work properly, and the people have no recourse to the decisions made by the computers. They are considered infallible.

To the Chicago Abyss is set in a world devastated by war. The abyss of the title refers to the bomb crater that is where Chicago used to be. In the aftermath of the war, and the decline in technology that accompanied it, a totalitarian state has arisen which forbids any connection to the better days of the past, including remembering it.

The Tin Can Riots occurs in a world nearly sterilized by nuclear war. The last survivors try to preserve their own lives in a world where the only food comes from the canned food that was not destroyed by the bombs. This preservation goes on, even at the cost of the lives of other survivors.

The second criterion used in this study was that the plays focus on identifiable characters and relationships.

Sam, the main character in Solitaire, is an old man alone in this world of rampant computerization. He remembers

the past, before the System came into being, and is unable to adjust to the new ways of the world. This refusal to adjust to new technologies and the social structures that surround them is widespread today. One need only look at the large number of people who are "computer-phobic," or frightened of computers and therefore refuse to use them, to identify Sam's connection with the real world.

A Bunch of the Gods Were Sitting Around One Day focuses on the members of a family who love each other so much that they would die for each other, and love each other too much to allow another member to die for them. In the ideal family that we all wish we had, this sort of selfless love is the norm. Most real families come close to this kind of love. Perhaps we don't think about giving up our lives for our loved ones, but in times of crisis, we often risk our own lives for them. In many cases, people do lose their lives trying to save their children or spouses.

To the Chicago Abyss shows us an old man who remembers the "good old days" and tries to tell his younger contemporaries about them. Everyone has or knows of an elderly person who tirelessly talks about the days "when I was young." Such characters are so common that they have become a stereotype.

The Tin Can Riots shows how fear and prejudice can grow out of control in an atmosphere of ignorance. One need only

look at South Africa today or the American South of a few years back to see real world examples of this situation.

The last criterion for inclusion in the study was that the plays present a spectrum of themes common in science fiction.

The Dystopia, a world where social and humanistic values have been subordinated to mechanistic or scientific ones (Aldridge ix), is one of the cornerstones of science fiction, particularly since the 1960s. This period in science fiction is frequently called the New Wave, and is characterized by a mood of deep pessimism (Asimov 104). These tales tell of a world, originally designed to be "perfect" for its inhabitants, gone awry. Solitaire is such a play, wherein the computerized environment, intended to make life perfect for all mankind, instead makes life impossible for some men.

The quest for a perfect world, or for Utopia, is also a common theme in science fiction. These stories blossomed during the Golden Age of science fiction, the 1920s and 30s, when it seemed as if technology could solve any problem that faced the world (Asimov 102). A Bunch of Gods Were Sitting Around One Day tells the story of a group of people trying to find the perfect world to colonize, one better than the Earth that their ancestors left hundreds of years before.

The Atomic Bomb has existed in science fiction since H.G. Wells first wrote about it (Asimov 100). Fears of a

world devastated by nuclear war have flourished since the bombs were first used against Hiroshima and Nagasaki. To the Chicago Abyss shows us a world changed by a devastating war, perhaps nuclear, perhaps not, but shows it with a sense of optimism. We might actually survive such a war if its aftermath were as Bradbury depicts it. The Tin Can Riots shows us the aftermath of a nuclear war as bad as most modern scientists have predicted. Bond's world is a world that will probably be spared the burden of human life a few years after the play's end.

In Aquino's discussion of science fiction as literature, he dismisses science fiction dramatic literature because of an argument made by Tolkien. He quotes Tolkien as saying that science fiction drama cannot exist because drama attempts to create an illusionary world by its very nature, even though this world is based on our own. To introduce into this illusory world another level of illusion, that of the science fiction or fantasy world, would strain the magic of the theatre to the breaking point; it would be a world too much (13).

Tolkein's argument is not without its merits, but it breaks down when one considers such plays as Brecht's The Threepenny Opera or Weiss's Marat/Sade. These plays have both worked on the stage with great success, and also have multiple layers of worlds or illusions. These and many other plays show that audiences are quite capable of accepting very

complex layerings of illusion; much more complex than those called for in plays examined in this study.

This study attempts to fill a void in the study of science fiction literature. Since 1980, there have been 21 doctoral dissertations and two master's theses written on some aspect of science fiction literature, according to Dissertation Abstracts International and Masters Abstracts. Not one of them considered the genre as it appears in dramatic literature, not even those which focused on the work of authors who have written science fiction plays. For example, Bradbury has written science fiction plays, one of which is examined in this study. But the dissertations on his work do not consider them at all. There is no scholarly writing dealing with the genre of science fiction as it exists in dramatic literature.

Yet science fiction plays have had an effect on our language and history. For example, the word "robot" was coined by Capec for his play R.U.R. The word is based on the Czechoslovakian word for "worker" (Elrick 217). Also, Orson Welles's radio broadcast of War of the Worlds and the panic it caused is a part of the history of radio drama, as well as of our cultural consciousness.

Another important aspect of science fiction drama is its tremendous box office potential. Films such as Star Wars have drawn record audiences to the movie houses which have

shown them. Theatres wishing to capitalize on this tide of popularity should be made aware of the extant plays, and be given some method for judging their merit. The selection criteria for this thesis were chosen with that idea in mind. I do not suggest that my criteria are the only ones, or the best ones. They simply are a reasonable method for evaluating these scripts.

Lastly, science fiction plays present their own unique set of challenges for the theatrical artist. A costume designer cannot research a period that is yet to be. What does the interior of a starship look like, and how can a set designer realize it on stage? What kinds of motivations does a robot have? These challenges are exciting, and theatrical artists should be made aware of them, and have the opportunity to face them. In fact, the plays examined in this thesis have simple technical requirements, and provide no major obstacles to their production because of impossible sets or costumes. Rather, they would allow designers to indulge themselves (within the confines of the scripts) and create the worlds of the plays quite freely based on their own artistic senses.

In conclusion, highly imaginative elements have been a part of literature in general, and dramatic literature specifically, since Man began writing. Man's early writings had a strong mythical element, and this element provided a sense of wonderment and frequently supplied some moral

teachings as well. Since the explosion of technology in recent history, science fiction has taken the place of mythology in our society. Science fiction creates the same sense of wonderment that the ancient myths did, and also supplies some moral and ethical instruction. These stories are often cautionary tales, warning us that if some situation continues, dire results are likely. In addition, in many stories good behavior is rewarded and bad behavior punished. In both these cases, a moral lesson is being taught. Plays from this new "mythology" are being written, and theatrical artists should be made aware of the artistic challenges and the box office potential that they hold.

CHAPTER II

Dystopia and Utopia:

Solitaire and A Bunch of the Gods Were Sitting Around One Day

One of the significant genres of modern science fiction is the Utopia. Ruppert, in his Preface, describes these stories as often telling of a one-dimensional dreamworld, showing unearthly visions of peace and perfect harmony, homogeneous in order, precision and happiness, which seem to provide us with comforting reassurance (ix). In this process, they appear to ignore difference, to reduce multiplicity and diversity, and to exclude choice, conflict, complexity and history. Therefore the easy solutions they offer are false, they are only escapist dreams that oversimplify the way things really are (ix).

Ruppert goes on to say that in spite of their simplification and their devotion to unity and order, utopias leave us with a productive sense of uneasiness and ambivalence. The very sites that utopias construct so meticulously to maintain their visions of order are unreal and unreachable: they are fictional places reachable only by fictional roads. But these fictional roads are built from the discarded bricks of our quite real social constructs.

In the twentieth century a new variation of the Utopian genre has arisen: the Dystopia. Aldridge describes the dystopia as not being simply a utopia in reverse, but a specific category growing from our contemporary attitudes towards utopia (ix). While it can be said that utopias are an effort to restructure society in a scientific and analytical way, the dystopia always aims to critique and ridicule that world view for its elevation of functional and collective ends over humanistic and individual ends. The dystopia is not anti-science or anti-technology in the sense that it represents machine phobia. Instead its writers are warning of the intrusion of scientific values, such as objectivity and neutrality, into our social values. They criticize the replacement of a humanistic ethic with a scientific or technological one: they assail the scientizing of a society (ix).

Robert Anderson's play Solitaire is an example of the Dystopia play.

Solitaire was written in 1969, and produced for the first time at the Long Wharf Theater in New Haven starting on 12 February 1971. The company traveled with it to the 1971 Edinburgh International Festival, opening on 6 September 1971. It opened on Broadway at the John Golden Theater on 30 September 1971 (Anderson viii).

As the play begins, we see a cell-like room. Sam enters and begins to settle into his Servocell for the

night. A computer voice asks him to register, and with this we begin to see the problems in this Dystopia. This place is controlled by rampant computerization and automation, and little of it functions properly.

Sam tries to comply with the computer's command, but the computer does not recognize his voice because he has a slight cold. He developed the cold from staying in a Servocell the night before where the heat didn't work. Not only does the heat operate imperfectly in the Servocells, which are supposedly designed for every convenience, but the computer registrar is unable to recognize someone if they have a cold.

After identifying himself with a Lifetime Identification Card, Sam starts to arrange his possessions around the room. This includes displaying a picture of his wife on a projection screen.

He tries to cool the cell down by adjusting the temperature controls, which don't work. The television doesn't work. He is requested to pay an outstanding bill at the store which he has paid, and has sent numerous tapes confirming the payment to the computer. The only thing which works is the liquor dispenser, which reminds him that his liquor quotient is used up for the week.

The idea of marriage no longer exists. It is taboo. Families are outlawed, and children are conceived through artificial insemination of women, who then give their

children up at birth. Their method of child-rearing is not described, but it is implied that children found unsatisfactory in some way are done away with. All males with an "Intelligence Quotient-Sperm Qualification Count" of 200 or better must leave weekly sperm samples to facilitate the production of satisfactory children.

To satisfy the need for family life, there are Marriage-Minus-One tapes, which are recordings of one half of a conversation between spouses, with pauses for the appropriate responses from the listener, intended to comfort the listener by providing a simulated familial experience.

As Sam enters the cell, we see that he is depressed. He tries to contact the doctors at Central Counselling in order to ease his depression, but they are all busy, so the computer plays for him a selection from the Marriage-Minus-One tapes called "Husband Comes Home":

WIFELY VOICE: Is that you, Honey? (SAM has heard this a hundred times and just lies there) Did you have a good day? (He snorts at this) Dinner's almost ready. It was a lovely day, wasn't it? (There is, of course, a pause between the questions for the other half of the conversation. But SAM does not respond.) The man came to fix the television set but he said it couldn't be fixed. We'll have to get a new one. You'd better get yourself a drink or smoke a little grass before I tell you some of the other things that happened. . . . Oh, anything at all. Get

your feet up and enjoy your drink. I'll be in in a few minutes. (Anderson 6-7)

This placebo only depresses him more, and he turns to the picture of his wife and plays a tape of a conversation that they had before she "chose early self-disposal":

FLORENCE (on tape): Hello, darling. Are you home?

SAM (on tape): Yes, I'm here.

FLORENCE: Did you shop for dinner?

SAM: Yes. I knew you'd be late. . . How are you?

FLORENCE (Kissing and snuggling): Mmmm. I Hate it when they keep me late at the office. Get out of the kitchen. I don't want you in here.

SAM: I don't mind. I like to cook.

FLORENCE: But I mind. I'm getting fat on your cooking. Nothing but cream sauces.

SAM: You taught me how to make it.

FLORENCE: Well, I wish I hadn't. Now come on, get out. I'm going to make dinner.

SAM (Seductive): Why don't we let dinner wait?

FLORENCE: Aren't you hungry?

SAM: Yes. (He makes it clear it's a different kind of hunger)

FLORENCE (Laughing): Oh, you're impossible.

SAM: You love it, and you know it. (Anderson 9-10)

There is a clear contrast between these two versions of family life. The conversation between Sam and Florence has an intimate quality to it, as if the people speaking knew and cared for each other. There is also an implied history. Sam's lines, "I knew you'd be late", "You taught me how to make it", and "You love it, and you know it", and Florence's line "Well, I wish I hadn't" all refer to past aspects of or events in a continuing relationship.

Both intimacy and history are missing in the Marriage-Minus-One tape. The only reference to the past in the tape is that of the television repair man, but that is a reference to another person outside the relationship and an object. Neither of them concern the relationship between the listener and his taped companion. The only attempt at intimacy is the line "Get your feet up and enjoy your drink", which, coming from the computer which controls Sam's life, is more of an order than an expression of affection.

Listening to his taped conversation with his wife has made him more depressed instead of comforting him. So that he might make it through the night, he flirts with early self-disposal. He goes through the sequence of buttons until the last, irrevocable, step and then stops, saying, "This moment always excites me, Florence. . . It's the only moment of the day when I really feel alive" (Anderson 11).

After toying with the last button, he places a phone call to a "Call Family." The Madam of a Call Family

arranges for a family of the client's description to act out a particular scenario of family life for the client. There are some restrictions, however. There can be no sex, also no physical expressions of affection such as touching or kissing. Should the Call Family House be raided, however, the only way for the customer and the Madam to avoid trouble with the law is for the customer to remove his clothes and make love to his wife.

After Sam receives his last instructions, his playlet with the Family begins. He has requested that they act out Father's Day. The Daughter greets him as he enters the kitchen with more of the meaningless chit-chat that we saw in the Marriage-Minus-One tapes:

> DAUGHTER: Let me take your jacket. Did you have a good day?
>
> SAM: Actually, I had a terrible day. The moving sidewalks broke down, and this evening the monorail stopped at the rush hour.
>
> DAUGHTER: Oh what a shame. Poor Daddy.
>
> SAM: And the union man caught me working today. I wasn't supposed to be working. But I went to the library and took out this book I'm taping and went way back in the stacks. . . but he caught me. . .
>
> DAUGHTER: They shouldn't treat our nice Daddy that way. Did you bring me anything from your trip? (Anderson 17)

Soon the Son enters, and Sam is startled by the Son's resemblance to himself at that age. He is convinced that the Son is <u>really</u> his son, sired from the weekly sperm donation Sam is required to give. This idea is unnerving for both Sam and the Son, for Sam because of his longing to make some connection with his family, and for the Son because it is taboo to know one's own parents. The System has been set up to make such things impossible. The Son calls the Madam into the room to straighten Sam out, and she tells Sam to think what he wants, but to obey the rules.

The Wife comes in and enacts <u>her</u> stereotypes. She claims that she needs the help of a "strong man" to open a jar, which Sam opens with ridiculous ease. She then presents him with an eggbeater which is broken, and he makes the simple repair with the screwdriver that she has handy. She inspects his clothing and finds a loose button and a spot on his lapel. She gives these items to the Daughter for her to fix.

After this comes an almost obligatory scene:

SON: Dad, can I have the car tonight?

SAM: Well, uh . . .

DAUGHTER: (into their routine) You had it last night.

SON: But only for an hour.

DAUGHTER: But you had it! I never get to use it.

SON: Never! Ha-ha.

DAUGHTER: Never! And I always have to buy the gas.

SON: You buy the gas. What a laugh.

WIFE: Children. . . children.

SAM: (A broad smile of appreciation on his face) No. . . no. . . Let them. . . It's lovely.

SON: I spend all my allowance on gas.

DAUGHTER: You leave the tank absolutely empty. You must push the car into the garage.

WIFE: That's enough now! It's time for dinner. Sister, help serve. (Anderson 23-24)

After this scene, and a scene where Sam's "Father" is brought in for display, smoking a cigar and saying nothing, Sam succombs to the warm sentimentality of it all. The warmth is, of course, supplied by his imagination, not by the specious family he has hired to live out his fantasy of family life. Sam is so moved by everything that occurs that he proposes marriage to the woman playing his wife. At that moment the Madam interrupts to say that his time is up, and he must leave immediately so that they can prepare for the next customer. As they are wrapping up their business, a police Captain enters, wanting his usual scenario, to play trains with the Son from Sam's Family. The Madam reveals that the Son has left for good, disgusted by Sam's emotional excesses. We see the power of self-suggestion that motivates this world of Call Families from the Captain's reaction towards the Son. The Captain says, "But he was my

son. He looked like me. He talked like me. . . " (Anderson 30). Both of these older men, who cling to the ways of the past (before the System took hold), are unconsciously trying to make some connection with their sons in a world which forbids it.

In response to the Son's leaving the Call Family, the Madam throws Sam out, and forbids him to return. Being denied this tenuous grip on his past, Sam returns to his Servocell, and prepares to commit suicide in earnest. He leaves his slide and tapes of his wife to posterity, leaves his last words ("I just don't like it here anymore" (Anderson 32)), and presses the final button, with which he has only flirted in the past.

The computer presents him with a pill and a glass of water and is told to take the pill and lay down on the cot in the cell. Sam looks at them and is terrified. He tries to return the pill so that he can stay alive, but the computer tells him: "We are sorry. You were warned the last step was irrevocable. Someone else is already breathing your air" (Anderson 33).

Anderson's Solitaire is a play about the relationships between a man and his family. In the first scenes we see a comparison between a real, imperfect, man and wife and a sterile representation of them which we can assume is "perfect" in the view of the System, which created the Marriage-Minus-One tapes for the well being of its citizens.

Instead of an unpredictable and anarchistic relationship between man and wife, we have an assembly line version in the Marriage-Minus-One tapes. There are a number of different scenarios depicted on the tapes, but each one is a fixed recording. It cannot react to the responses given by the human listener. Even the pauses are of fixed length, thereby defining the acceptable responses to some degree. Also, once a tape is heard, it is known. It cannot be varied. It is predictable.

This is Aldridge's scientizing within a Dystopian society, where science tries to restructure the unacceptable aspects of a society in an analytical way. The unpredictable passions of family life are replaced with a passionless, and predictable, substitute.

This substitute is characterized by a lack of genuine communication. For example, the girl playing the Daughter is pregnant, presumably by their artificial insemination program. Sam is told that he may not mention it, and to pretend that it does not exist. When Sam sugests that she play his Wife, and that his Wife <u>be</u> pregnant, the Madam is repulsed. Relationships can be fulfilling only when both parties communicate with each other. That is the point of this play. We are shown relationships that contain no communication, in fact, honest communication is impossible in this situation. We can see how unsatisfying they are to the people involved. We are also shown a contrasting

relationship that has communication and that fulfilled its partners. By making this contrast, we see how communication of any sort is necessary, and therefore how valuable intimacy is.

At the other end of the Utopia -- Dystopia spectrum is James Spencer's play, A Bunch of the Gods Were Sitting Around One Day. It deals with a group of people trying to create a utopian society. This play is not set in Ruppert's dreamworld, but its characters are looking for the road to it.

Gods was first presented on 3 through 22 December 1973 at the American Conservatory Theatre of San Francisco (Spencer 268).

In contrast to Anderson's vision of the future, Spencer shows us a family desperately trying to communicate with and love one another. In this play there are seven people trapped in a malfunctioning starship which has been travelling faster than the speed of light (in "hyperspace") for 182 years. Because Sri, the ship's primary computer which controls their engines, is not working, they are unable to slow down and find a planet to colonize. Because the life-support systems are not operating properly, they only have enough food, air, etc. for seven people to live indefinitely. Should there be a larger crew, their supplies would be exhausted, and they would all eventually die. Therefore, when the time comes for them to have a child, so

that the mission can carry on, one of the crew members must be chosen to end his life to make room for the child, thereby keeping the crew limited to seven members. This has been going on for seven generations, so by this time they are all at least cousins to one another. This is the fulcrum on which the plot balances.

As the play opens, the seven crew members are meditating in the control room of the ship. As they arise and go about their duties, we see the tension in their relationships. It is Christmas Day, and while some wish to relax and celebrate, others press on with their work:

> BETH: (softly) Kelly.
>
> KELLY: (without looking up) I have work to do.
>
> BETH: On Christmas Day?
>
> KELLY: Can we afford to waste one day?
>
> BETH: It's only day of year we celebrate.
>
> KELLY: Let's celebrate when we have reason. (He returns to the command console and sits, peering into the dome. Action gets up.) Action, would you bring tector? Something funny here. (Action goes to the backup console and looks into the dome.)
>
> ACTION: Hm. Theta shell? (He goes to the door, stage right and exits. . . .)
>
> BETH: Isn't this reason? Seven people, alive in immensity of universe? (Spencer 212)

Ling is the last one to arise from meditation. She is wrenched from her trance by a vision of the death of one of the men in the crew. Action uses the moment to bring up the topic that they all have been avoiding on this day of celebration, that some man in the crew must in fact die to make room for the next child to be born into the crew. Since there are only three women in the crew and they need three women to keep as broad a gene pool as possible, none of them can be the one to die until a girl child is born. Action announces that he will call a council for the next day to vote for someone to die. Ever since they had to limit the crew to seven 182 years ago, they have held such councils. The vote to choose someone to die must be unanimous.

Sasha tries to convince them that he should be the one to be killed for the good of the crew, and in fact they will eventually vote for him anyway:

> SASHA: (scoffing) Action, are we going to kill woman? Destroy genetic base? You? Only one of us who can land ship without Sri's help? (Going to Kelly and touching his shoulder) Our genius engineer? (Going toward Ram) Our yogi, zoologist, botanist, biochemist, astronomer and Sri knows what else? Are we? We're going to pick me. Scientific dabbler. Curator of museum. Poet. (gesturing toward the bubble harp) Builder of bubbles! I knew this day would come. We all did. (looking around at them) I'm not

complaining! Why should you? Cheer up! (He grins, and picks up the goblet and the urn-shaped wine pitcher.) What do I have to do. . . campaign? (waving the goblet, expansive) How about . . . Vote for Sasha! If elected, he will not bore you with speeches? How's that? Or what about. . . (brightly, holding up the pitcher) Candidate who urns his keep! Hah hah! Get it? (Spencer 219)

Kelly tries to convince Sasha that he can get the ship functional in another year, and therefore Sasha should not die, nor should anyone else, but Sasha does not believe him. As a rebellious attitude begins to grow among the crew members, who say that no one should have to die to make room for someone else, Action shows them old tapes of the Earth, and reminds them of their mission, and the beauty that they are searching for, by looking for a planet to colonize. He tries to inspire them to continue their search for a suitable planet, but they only remember the unsatisfactory places that were found before they became trapped in hyperspace. Action tries to convince them with great rhetorical fervor, but even he has doubts:

BETH: It's been seven generations since anyone on ship saw stars. Does it matter?

ACTION: (with deep conviction) Beth, I tell you, we shall see them. We shall repair ship. We shall find

planet, and human race will live again as meant to live.

BETH: (shaking her head, sorrowfully) I wish I had your faith.

ACTION: So do I. (Spencer 223)

In the next scene, Sasha has gotten a gun and intends to kill himself, but is unable to find the courage. Ling finds him and begs him not to do it. She claims that because of her love for him, she would die of sorrow if he died. She resorts to aiming the gun at her own head to get him to reconsider. Sasha responds, "Ling, stop it! How long do you think I'd live if anything happened to you?" (Spencer 226). Ram, their yogi adept, enters the room and decides to end the argument of who is to die by using his abilities to kill himself. He argues that since he is the oldest, it should be he who is to die. He also reminds them that there is no way that they could stop him if they wanted to, since his yogic powers are greater than any of theirs. He tells them that he will do this in seven days. He chooses to wait a week so that his memories and knowledge can be stored in the computers for the rest of them to call upon if needed after he is dead. Action bargains with him: if they find some hope of repairing the ship and Sri within the seven days, Ram will not kill himself. Ram agrees to this.

As the rest of the men try in vain to find some evidence to convince Ram not to kill himself, Beth tries to rally the women to stop all the killing. Beth proposes that the women threaten to kill themselves, one woman for one man, until all the killing stops permanently. Tia and Ling refuse to join with her. They see the mission as outweighing individual concerns. Since they won't join with her, Beth decides to do something on her own.

Sasha overhears this conversation, and again decides to take matters into his own hands. He convinces Kelly to release one of the suicide pills that is used when a vote is taken. These pills provide a merciful death, without pain. Normally it requires a touch command from every member of the crew to release one, but since Kelly is the engineer, he can get one without such a command. Sasha says that since he and Kelly both love Ram, and since the only way to stop Ram from killing himself is if there is no need for him to die, Kelly should help him get a pill so that Sasha can die in his place. Sasha threatens that he will find some way to kill himself, and asks Kelly to give him a merciful death with the pill.

While Kelly fetches the pill for Sasha, Action tries to stop Ram from killing himself by forcing a council vote:

ACTION: We're going to choose, Ram. What we vote is law. If you disobey, it's mutiny.

RAM: (getting to his feet, a bit angry) <u>Is</u> it?

TIA: Ram. . .

RAM: (raising his hand to quiet her) Another killing will destroy us. (pause) Action, you and I voted at council that chose Beth's father. Remember what it felt like after he died? Remember what Beth was like? (to Beth) It's a miracle you healed enough to love us again. (Spencer 241)

Ram refuses to change his plans. He feels that by continuing to elect someone to die for them, the idea of killing would become so impersonal and natural that they would eventually be able to kill without any feeling of guilt whatsoever.

As the rest of the crew leaves the control room, Ram prays to Sri that it might find a way for them all to live. Tia enters quietly and observes him. As soon as he finishes his prayer, the alarms go off, indicating a "Class A Emergency," which requires all seven of them to deal with. As the curtain falls for the end of Act I, they are frantically working to repair the damage to the ship which brought on the emergency.

Act II takes place twelve hours later, after they have gotten the emergency under control. During the emergency, Sasha saved Kelly's life and was injured in the attempt. Sasha regains consciousness after seeing a vision of all of the crew living on an earth-like planet. The key elements

of this vision are that no member of the crew was missing, and that there was a young child with them.

Kelly listens to this, and while treating Sasha for his injuries, explains the transcendent experience he had during the emergency:

> KELLY: I learned lesson, Sasha. I never lost consciousness. I had about two seconds left when you knocked me out of the field and took full force of it. I could feel myself dying. I had flashbacks, just like they say. My mother, holding me in her arms. My first tour of power cell. First time I made love. Thousand memories. I saw it all slipping away. . . my life. . . fading like a flicker of smoke into eternity. And I wasn't ready. I wasn't ready. (brief pause) Yesterday expedition came before anything else. Today. . . today I care nothing about expedition. All I care about is six people. Whenever I look into their faces I'm so glad to see them I feel like falling on my knees, thanking them for existing. I thank you for that. (Spencer 252)

After telling Sasha this, he demands that Sasha give the suicide pill back to him. Kelly cannot ask anyone to die so that he might live after his experience. Sasha refuses to return the pill, and Kelly swears that he will keep him from using it.

In the next scene, the council has been called so that the crew can vote for someone to die. For nine ballots, every member of the crew except Action has voted for himself. Action has voted for Sasha. Action argues that if the stalemate goes on, Ram will kill himself, and without his leadership and knowledge the mission would be doomed. Action calls for a tenth ballot, and the same results occur.

Ram takes this as an indication that he must kill himself, because there will be no consensus. Kelly interrupts to reveal that he obtained a suicide pill for Sasha, who has hidden it. Because of this new revelation, Ram decides to move the time of his death to tomorrow, so that Sasha cannot use the pill. He instructs them to watch Sasha very closely until he is dead.

In an effort to dissuade Ram from his suicide, Tia relates the coincidence of Ram's prayer and the emergency. She claims that it was engineered by Sri, who is somehow not inactive, but is in fact controlling the ship in some way.

As the rest of the crew debates the possibility of this, Sasha goes to the bubble harp, where he has hidden the suicide pill, and tries to swallow it. Ling spots him and stops him. Action takes possession of the pill, and decides that he should have been the one to die from the very beginning, since he is the captain. Kelly responds with the clearest statement of the underlying motivations involved in all three volunteers:

KELLY: (with a lunatic glint in his eye) That's all we needed! Three heroes! Shall we make it four? Anyone else? Ling? Tia? Why don't we just blow up ship? (Spencer 260)

Every one of the men has volunteered to die for the good of the mission and refused to let anyone else die. Each has claimed that he loves the others too much to watch them die on his behalf. This is clearly true in all cases, but it also seems true that each of the men wants to die as a martyr or hero for the mission. The mission has been elevated to some sort of sacred quest. In their passion to fulfill the plan of the Builders, they have lost sight of their own needs and wishes.

Beth sees this insanity going on to its dreadful conclusion. She decides that this is the time to act, or it will be too late. She takes from the control console a metal rod attached to a cable, and plugs the cable into the ship's main power conduit. She tells them that the moment one of them commits suicide, she will touch the rod and kill herself, whether someone does it now or at some time in the future. Action tells her that without limiting the crew size to seven, they will soon all die, which would mean the end of the human race, since they believe themselves to be the only humans alive. Beth responds:

BETH: Who will miss us? Who will cry? Who will search for us? (looking around) I know nothing of

future. Or past. I know only what's here. Right now! Us! That's all that matters! (Spencer 262)

The men eventually promise not to kill themselves, or anyone else, ever again. As soon as this occurs, Sri lights up and tells them to prepare for landing. Sri had in fact been observing them for all these years, waiting for the members of the crew to mature beyond the need to kill. Sri reveals that they have been orbiting a suitable planet for sixty four years. Sri was holding them in quarantine until they would no longer kill for any reason whatsoever. The play ends as the crew begins the landing procedures to take them to their new home.

Spencer's Gods is a play about communication within a family group. In this case, the group is faced with a critical decision: do they continue to follow the plans of the Builders, who died many years before, or do they live as themselves and for themselves. If they throw out the plans of the Builders, they negate the reasons for their existance, and in fact risk their own deaths, and the death of their race. If they follow the plans, they will destroy their family, and will have nothing to give to their descendants who might colonize a planet some time in the future. As the plot unfolds, they work their way to their decision: they must live for themselves, rather than for some people who are long dead.

The characters in this play communicate with each other in an imperfect, but effective way. On many occasions, one character or another intends to commit suicide, and is dissuaded by the others in the family. Even though the people who are talked out of suicide often return to that option, eventually the greater and greater risks taken by the other members of the family group convince them all to eschew killing for good. This transcendant decision is the one that they need to make to solve their dilemma, and it brings them to "paradise."

These two plays deal with a number of similar ideas. The most obvious commonality is suicide. In both plays, the characters desire to live in a world that is better than the one in which they live. Sam wants to live in the world he remembers from before the System's takeover. He longs to know his children, he wants to live with his wife again, he wants to do meaningful work. Since none of these things are possible, he wants at least to share his grief with someone who understands. As long as the Call Families are available to him, he can believe that someone is listening and cares about his pain and longing. Once they are taken from him, he has no method to cope with the world as it is, and he ends his life. Of course, he changes his mind at the last minute, but the world rejects him just as the Call Families rejected him moments before.

All the characters in Gods are striving to find the "perfect" place to live as well. Their quest is aimed towards creating the future instead of remembering the past, but they are trying to find something that they can only imagine, just as Sam is. They have pictures of the Earth and the other planets that they found before they were trapped in hyperspace, and they look at these a number of times in the play. These images help them visualize what a planet is like, since they have never set foot on one, but they really have no idea of what they are going to find when they land, or even if they will land. The main difference is that they have a family group to help bear the stresses of their quest, where Sam has none. Eventually the family support saves them all from death, both physical and moral.

Another common theme is the use and effects of communication. In Solitaire, we are shown how a lack of communication can lead to tragedy. Sam is slowly stripped of his ability to communicate with others. First, before the play begins, his wife kills herself, leaving him alone with the Marriage-Minus-One tapes for company. He resorts to using the Call Families to sate his hunger for communication. They offer him enough to get by on, but it is obvious how specious their communication is. It is rife with stereotypes and trivialities. There is no genuine feeling backing up the words being said. As he tries to make the communication carry more emotional value, he

alienates the 'prostitutes' and is stripped of that outlet for communication as well. As he despairs of ever communicating with anyone again, he attempts to kill himself. At the last minute, he clutches at the hope of communication with the computer, telling it not to kill him. The irony of this play is that the only time the computer honestly communicates with him is when it tells him he is going to die regardless of what he does.

Gods shows how reasonably honest communication can avoid disaster, and in fact bring the communicators all that they hope for. The characters have strong beliefs about who should die for the good of the others, and why some other person should not die. Each character is vocal about their feelings, and willing to listen to the feelings of the others, at least to some extent. By keeping these lines of communication open, they are able to discover who they are and what they really want from life and from each other. The message of Spencer's play is that this is the path to a good society. Spencer shows the flip side of the message shown in Anderson's play: that without communication, we must eventually die.

By looking at these two plays, we can see that the playwrights are examining the same ideas from two different points of view. In Solitaire, we see a man who is completely overcome by the circumstances in which he finds himself. He is unable to reach out to some support group,

in this case a family group, bound together by love. Without this support group, he is swallowed up and destroyed by the troubles with which he is faced. As long as he has some support, no matter how slight, he is able to continue with his life. His life is not perfect, but he is alive. When the last of these supports is gone, he is lost. In Gods, we see a group of people who are working with each other to achieve a common goal, and to keep each other happy and healthy. As much as they are working at cross purposes, and are trying to manipulate each other into doing what they want, they manage to achieve the goals that they set out to achieve, even though they don't know it at the time. Regardless of what they do to and for each other, as long as they support each other, the eventual outcome is positive. Even though these plays are different in tone, Solitaire is pessimistic and Gods is optomistic, they both have the same message: without good communication, any relationship is of little value to those involved.

The characters in both of these plays are recognizable people with problems that we can understand, even if the specific situations are foreign to us. Sam, from Solitaire, is an older man looking for a life that no longer exists, and will never return. He misses his dead wife, and wishes that the life that they once had could happen again. His decision to attempt suicide, even though he tries to abort it while it is happening, stems from his despair. He

realizes that he cannot fit into the world around him. Sasha, from Gods, is a man who realizes that he must give up his life to save his family. In an ideal family, everyone would feel this way. If they were called upon to sacrifice themselves for the rest of their family, they would do it. At the same time, the others in the family would not want the sacrifice to occur, if they could prevent it. Both of these men, seperated from their environments, are familiar to us. We know people just like them.

By the same token, their situations are familiar to us. Neither of them has happened, but given reasonable changes in technology and society, they are both possible.

Sam's society has outlawed the family. In our society, there are people who have no families, or who have become estranged from their families for some reason. There are also social subgroups in which there is no affection for one's family members. Almost everyone longs for more affection than they are getting.

Sasha's family is isolated in hyperspace. We don't have the technology to travel faster than the speed of light, but we all have experienced isolation at some point in our lives. Few of us have had to face the choice of dying to save our families, but many people have considered the possibility. Both this world and Sam's are strange places made up of common things.

Neither of these plays present production problems beyond the capability of modern stagecraft. Sam's Servocell is mostly flashing lights and push buttons. There is a projection screen for the picture of his wife and a cot which can slide into and out of the wall. The kitchen in the Call Family House is simply a dirty kitchen. In fact, the kitchen could be suggested by some chairs and a table stacked with dishes. The control room for the ship in hyperspace is somewhat more complex. Most of the effects are lighting problems: lights on the control domes shine on the faces of the characters who are operating the controls and the landing control domes are lit from inside when they are activated. The most interesting set piece is Sri, the computer. It is described as a fairly large mobile made up of colored rings of glass. It occupies the upstage center position on stage.

There is a peculiar costume element in Gods. Each of the characters wears a 'third eye.' It is a headband with a circle of lights on their forehead. When the characters meditate, the lights flash; otherwise they are dark.

When these plays are stripped of their science fiction trappings, they have a message that applies to here and now. We all have families and we all need support at some time in our lives. We all long for a life that is different in some way from the one we are now living. We can cope with the bad times with the help of our support groups. This is the

value of these plays to the here and now. They show us the need that we all have for some sort of meaningful communication, and how we suffer if we cannot communicate with someone.

CHAPTER III

After the Holocaust: To the Chicago Abyss and The Tin Can People

Every religion has its myths concerning the "End of the World," and fables of what life will be like at that time. Today, that end seems very possible, given the advent of nuclear weapons. Many stories are being told today of what a nuclear war would do to the Earth, from Carl Sagan's Nuclear Winter to predictions of the Second Coming of Christ. This is one of the more common themes in modern science fiction: what would life be like after a nuclear holocaust?

Ray Bradbury, in his play To the Chicago Abyss, paints a picture of the United States after some sort of war has wreaked its havoc on it. Bradbury spends little time discussing the war; why and how it occurred are not important to the plot. What he focuses on is the effect it has on the survivors.

As the curtain rises, we see a park. On one bench, a woman is unweaving a sweater and balling up the yarn so that she can use it to knit something else. On the other bench, we see a young man intently drawing in the

dirt with a stick. The Old Man enters, searching for something.

THE OLD MAN: Coffee! (The woman gasps and stiffens, she ceases work, but does not look at him. Eyes still shut, he goes on.) Twist the key! Hissss! Bright red, yellow-letter can! Compressed air. Ssssst! Like a snake, a snake! Psssss! (The woman snaps her head about as if slapped, to stare in dreadful fascination at the old man's moving tongue, his hands tumbling in pantomime on his lap.) The odor, the scent, the smell, the aroma of rich dark wondrous Brazilian beans, fresh ground! (The woman leaps up, reeling as if gunshot, steadying herself on the back of the bench. Her yarn ball falls to the ground. The old man, feeling her leap, opens his eyes. Perhaps he hopes to make her sit back now, just by talking her down.) (sniffs) The first sniff. Ah, like the warm air rising off the dusky earth in hot summer twilight. Coffee. Coffee. . . (That does it. She breaks to run, remembers her yarn, turns, is afraid to reach for it.) No, don't. . . please. . . (She scrabbles for it. He hands it to her. She grabs it and bolts off.) Please, I didn't mean. You needn't -- (resigned)

Gone. (Which indeed she is, clutching her goods, looking back at him as if he were insane.)

(Bradbury 130-131)

As the play unfolds, we see the reason for her behavior. It is illegal to remember the past, before the war. There are Special Police who have the job of tracking down people who do such things and locking them up. It is implied that mere association with such people is also unlawful. Again, the reasons are left unexplained in the text.

After watching her leave, he spies the Young Man on the other bench. By this time the Young Man is rolling a cigarette out of a piece of old newsprint and some dried grass. The Old Man watches with fascination, and then begins to remember cigarettes with the same passion he has for coffee.

In these remembrances he is not really talking to anyone but himself: he is not performing, just remembering for the sheer pleasure of it.

The Young Man hears his monologue, and yells at him to be quiet. He tries to bring the Old Man into the real world by discussion, and then by argument, and finally he becomes so angry that he resorts to beating the Old Man:

THE YOUNG MAN: Why don't I just blast the living Jesus out of you. I ain't hurt no one in <u>so long</u>.

> . . (He shoves the old man, which gives him the idea to pummel, which in turn gives him the idea to punch and then rain blows upon the old man's shoulders, arms, chest. The old man tries to fend off this rain of assault.) Candies, damn it, smokes, damn you! Kents! Kools! Baby Ruths, Butterfingers! Kents Kools Butterfingers! Butterfingers! (Bradbury 135-136)

The Young Man realizes what he is doing, and turns away, weeping. The Old Man understands that the Young Man wasn't striking him, but was trying to strike out at the world at large, and he just got in the way. He tries to comfort the Young Man, but the Young Man responds, "You. . . . you can't go around making people unhappy. I'll find someone to fix you. I'll find . . . someone! (exits) Someone!" (Bradbury 136-137).

As the Young Man runs off, shouting for the Special Police, the Stranger enters and quietly calls the Old Man a fool. He tells the Old Man that he is taking him to his home. The Stranger reveals that he has been looking for the Old Man for some time, and that the Old Man is very precious to him. As they hear sirens approaching, they run out.

When they get to the Stranger's home, they are greeted by his Wife. She gives the Old Man some wine,

and they sit down to dinner together. The Wife puts a plate of food before the Old Man, and he begins to examine it:

> THE OLD MAN: 17, 18, 19 strands of spaghetti. 25, 26, 27, 28, 29 green peas. (glances up) Forgive me. But I shall pray over these like a fine rosary! 19 strings of spaghetti, 29 peas, and -- no -- one meat ball! What a still life! How fine! (The others pull up their chairs.) But, madame, you have only 28 peas, and you, sir, 27! It's not fair I have 29.
>
> THE WIFE: You are the guest.
>
> THE OLD MAN: So I am, and most grateful (Bradbury 141).

Bradbury's post-Holocaust world is one of great poverty. There is little food, so little that one would count one's peas if one were a guest, and so little that one would give the extra pea to one's guest as a gesture of hospitality. From the Young Man's grass cigarette and his beating the Old Man over the memory of candy bars, we can see the deprivation of this world.

As the Old Man tries to entertain his hosts with a joke, there is a loud knocking at the door. The Special Police have come. The Stranger and his Wife give the Old Man his plate and fork and hide him behind a

sliding panel. This panel is made of scrim, so that we are able to see the silouette of the Old Man, and hear his asides in the next scene.

It turns out that the Special Police are looking for the Old Man. They are offering a reward for him consisting of a week's rations, plus a bonus of tens cans of vegetable soup and five cans of beans. The Old Man overhears the offer, which is tempting his benefactors almost too much, and says to himself:

> THE OLD MAN: Real tin cans, it must be, real cans with brignt red labels. Cans that flash like silver meteors, oh I can see them even in the dark. What a fine reward. Not $10,000 for the old talking man, no, no, not $20,000, but. . . something that counts, that really means something. . . ten incredible cans of real not imitation soup, and five, count them, five brilliant circus-colored cans of exotic beans. Think of it. Think! (Bradbury 145)

As tempted as they are, they do not turn in the Old Man, and the Policeman leaves, going down the hall of their building, knocking on other doors looking for the Old Man. As his voice fades down the hall, the couple open the panel behind which the Old Man is hiding. He asks them why they did not turn him in, admitting that he was almost tempted to turn himself in for the

reward. The Stranger rushes to the table and begins to cram food into his mouth to stave off his fears, needs and appetite. With some anger in his voice, he sends his Wife out to get the other people in the apartment house.

The Old Man starts in fear, but the Stranger speaks to him:

> STRANGER: Old man, look, if you're going to run risks, shoot off your mouth, why not do it in the aggregate, one fell blow? Why waste your breath on one or two people if -- (There are noises of people now approaching, murmuring, a shuffling of feet, and many shadows. The old man looks around as if the room were filling.)
>
> THE OLD MAN: Yes, but what shall I <u>tell</u> them?
>
> STRANGER: What <u>won't</u> you tell them! Isn't it better than taking a chance in the open?
>
> (Bradbury 148)

The Old Man begins to eat, and the combined effects of a full belly, the presense of the crowd, and the urging of the Stranger start the Old Man remembering. The crowd around him reminds him of movie-houses, and sitting in the balcony, and popcorn and gum and soda pop, and he remembers these for them. And then the Old Man tells them why he started to remember in the first

place. He saw a ruined world around him, and asked himself what he could do to make it a better place:

> THE OLD MAN: What did I have to offer a world that was forgetting? My memory! How could my memory help? By offering comparisons! By telling the young what once was. By considering our losses! I found the more I remembered, the more I could remember! Millions of things. (Bradbury 151-152)

He begins a long monologue, explaining that he was never good at remembering the great things in life. He could remember only the mediocre from the old world, but that was enough for him. "Mediocre must be, so most-excellent fine can bloom" (Bradbury 154). The crowd is moved by his speech, but is ambivalent, "not knowing whether to applaud the poetry or damn the sad upheaval of old memory" (Bradbury 155).

The Stranger shares this ambivalent attitude. In his pity for the Old Man, he gives him a one-way train ticket to the Chicago Abyss. This is the inhabited area around the bomb crater where Chicago used to be. He urges the Old Man to continue west from there, and never to remember to anyone again. As he leaves, the Old Man's only concern is whether the people who listened to him heard and understood him.

The next scene takes place on the train to the Chicago Abyss. The train is filled with huddled people wearing ragged clothing. The Old Man looks around at this strange environment, and starts to remember, but stops himself. A boy begins to stare at the Old Man, a look of lonliness in his eyes. The Old Man is tempted to speak to the boy. He argues with himself, looking at and then away from the boy. At last, he gives in, and asks the boy his name. The boy responds:

> THE BOY: Joseph. (The train sways and creaks, snow light falls down in a silent blizzard of Time around them.)
>
> THE OLD MAN: Joseph. . .? (he nods) Ah. . . (He looks around one last time and leans further forward toward that pale face, those great round bright waiting eyes.) Well, Joseph. . . (The old man lifts his fingers softly on the air.) . . . once upon a time. . . (All freezes in tableau. The lights dim.) (Bradbury 160-161)

and the play ends.

This play has many elements to it. It is a nostalgia piece. It reminds us of the joys of younger days, and the things we enjoyed then. It is Bradbury's enshrinement of his childhood. Another point he wishes to make is that we should enjoy <u>all</u> the things which make up our lives. He says in his Introduction, "<u>To</u>

the Chicago Abyss says: Enjoy! If we took all of the junk out of life, our juices would dry up, the sap would go dead in the trees, we would occupy an intellectual graveyard and read each other's headstones" (xiii). Another element is his wish for us to see that there is nothing wrong with mediocrity. It does not hurt us or make us less able to achieve greatness. In fact, greatness would not exist without mediocrity to hold it up. Things that happen every day are just as important as things which happen once in a lifetime.

This play shows how mediocrities can elevate a man above himself and what surrounds him. The Old Man abhors the world as it is, and therefore denies it in favor of the world of his memories. The world around him denies the world of his memories for the good of the people around him. The real world is one of deprivation and oppression. There is little for anyone. In order to knit herself a sweater to keep herself warm, a woman must cannibalize an older sweater, which has become useless, for the yarn of which it is made. The only amusement a young man has is to draw pictures in the dirt, and he has only grass cuttings and newspaper to make a cigarette. A weeks rations and fifteen additonal cans of food is a large

reward, reserved for those Most Wanted by the Secret Police.

All of these things will keep the body alive, but none of them can keep the spirit alive. This is the value of the Old Man's memories. They keep him spiritually alive. Without hope and the knowledge that things have been better, things cannot become better again. The Old Man rises above the real world by remembering what a former real world was like, against the wishes of those now in power. For whatever reason, those in power feel threatened by the legacy kept alive by people like the Old Man. What they do not realize is that there are poeple like the Stranger who are old enough to remember, if reminded, and young enough to do something about it. Oppressed people will find some means to revolt, even if it is only in small ways. This play says that a world like that which the Old Man remembers must rise again, not like Phoenix from its ashes, but like a flower pushing its way through the pavement. This sense of hope is the power of Bradbury's play.

In contrast there is little sense of hope in Edward Bond's play The Tin Can People. This is the second play in a trilogy of one-act plays called The War Plays, dealing with the effects of nuclear war.

This play opens with a chorus describing the immediate effects of the blasts as they saw them:

> I thought the explosions had thrown strange sea creatures onto the bridge whose ancestors had long ago retreated under the ocean. (You see how confused I was.) These fish-shaped, fin-footed creatures stood on one spot and waved. Green seaweed hung from their walrus heads. If in hell there are zoos, they would have been shown in them. Then I saw that they were people whose skin hung down in knotted strips. I told them to die. (Bond 33)

The first section of the play is called "Paradise in Hell." In its first scene we see the First Man wandering around and speaking to himself in a semicoherent manner. Through this monologue, we see the deprivation in which he is living: "I steal grass from skeleton's teeth. All I eat is bitter. My body poisons my food. My shit has more goodness in it than food" (Bond 33). Then he stumbles upon a tin can of food on the ground. While he is cautiously examining it, the First Woman approaches him. She is glad to see another living human, and offers him a can opener so that he may eat. He suspects that it is a trap of some kind, perhaps poison, perhaps something else. She

In the second scene, the Second Man and the Second and Third Women enter carrying a stretcher bearing a dead body. It is one of the men who has been living with the group for some time, and they are taking him to be buried. They pause on the road to have a burial service for him. They talk about his death, and about the things that they saw together since the war, and it becomes a funeral service for the world:

> THIRD WOMAN: How can you talk about the destruction of the world and be normal? My parents talk to me in my sleep: they don't know they're dead: I feel guilty as if I'm keeping the secret from them. (To the SECOND WOMAN) You haven't suffered more that the rest of us. . . . Please interrupt me: I can't stop speaking. Of course babies suckled their dead mothers and mothers tried to give milk to their dead babies. But these things have been going on since the earliest times -- put in books -- I saw something I shouldn't have seen -- because no human being should ever be in the world where it happened because they could never be at home there -- when I came to a part of town I didn't know -- where there was a great white square I hadn't seen before -- no doubt it had been made by a bomb -- and I walked over it -- the heat had turned the

ground to glass. And dotted across it were dark shapes -- long black brown bundles -- melted -- gluey -- I didn't know what they were -- brown -- streaked with red and yellow - and I thought they were giant's turds -- the simplest explanation was that a giant had walked over the square and shat -- and as there were bones in the turds I saw they were bodies. So I said die, die, die. I walked over the square saying die as if I were saying good morning because that's what I'd heard other people say -- in fact it had become the greeting in that city. I told everything I saw to die. (Bond 35-36)

After this, the First Man and First Woman enter. The group on stage is ecstatic that another person is alive and has come to join them. They fire questions at him and the First Woman, and eventually they let him speak. At first he speaks in gibberish, and then begins to make sense as he becomes used to them:

FIRST WOMAN: He's been on his own for years -- that's why he talks like that.

FIRST MAN: Seventeen. I konw you're people because you're corpse-shaped. (He goes to the stretcher and looks at the covered body.)

SECOND MAN: He's dead.

FIRST MAN: (ponders) When there are people, they cover the dead. Why? Yes -- they can't feel the cold. (He points.) You are women -- and men. (Bond 36)

And then he lays down and falls asleep.

While he sleeps, secure in the company of newfound survivors, they try to puzzle him out by examining his body and the behaviors he has shown since they met him. The Second Man shows some signs of suspicion, and says that the First Woman should have questioned him about himself before he had time to make up a false story. In general, however, they are overwhelmed by excitement over finding a new man in their midst.

The First Man awakens from a nightmare, and they calm him by telling him of their prosperity. They are prosperous, after a fashion, because they found an enormous warehouse full of canned food that was untouched by the war. The First Man responds with the story of his seventeen grueling years in the desert, with no one to keep him company but the rocks and decaying corpses. And then he says about these people:

FIRST MAN: Now you people . . . as if stones could speak. Let me stay with you and my journey will've been a green track over the desert. Fetch your water -- open your tins. All I want is -- look at your faces -- and speak. (Bond 38)

As soon as he finishes his speech, the Third Woman falls to the ground, dead. They struggle to bring her back to life, but to no avail. The Third Man comes in and tries to pull the First Man from the body of the Third Woman. He is trying to resuscitate her, but the Third Man thinks that he has attacked and killed her. Eventually they decide that the Third Woman did not die from radiation, since they all know the symptoms, but that the First Man has brought some hew disease with him, and is contagious. For safety's sake, they send him down the road to a garage, where he can wait in quarantine. They promise to bring him food and blankets.

They all leave in fear, leaving the First Man on stage with the corpse of the Third Woman. He says:

> FIRST MAN: Dead: seen it so often when I was with the bones . . . (He turns to face the THIRD WOMAN) Three causes of death in her face. Legs -- like a child's playing dead. Breast -- empty paper bag -- rummaged clean by a starving man. She's got a broken jar for a mouth. Hair moves -- wind isn't interested in death -- moves like a dog searching for its dead master. She counted on those fingers. Ruined houses throwing bricks at each other. Carry her till she's cold. (The

FIRST MAN picks up the THIRD WOMAN and carries her out.) (Bond 40)

All of the characters in the play are profoundly effected by the death around them, but each in his own way. In general, all the other characters react from fear, but the First Man reacts with a sense of respect and dignity. He clearly fears death, but is not willing to let his fears overtake his humanity. The others left the body of the Third Woman to rot where it lay, even though they had known her for years. The First Man carries her until she has completely gone. This is an act of respect and caring, and he would probably bury her if he could. Her friends treat her as if she is another empty tin can to be left where it fell.

The second section of the play, "The Tin Can Riots," begins with another chorus reading. It describes more sights from after the war was over:

> The world was made into a crucible for an experiment. The effects couldn't have been forseen. We called them the voice of the bomb. It spoke everywhere: we don't know how its orders were put into effect. The tornados whirled like gambling wheels: where they stopped, someone might live. I saw one man who had stood by an iron railing when the bombs fell. From the waist

> up the bars had been wrapped around him and knotted so that he walked with his trunk and head in a cage: his head nodded like a bird. It was chance. (Bond 40-41)

In the next scene, the First and Second Women and the Second Man argue whether they should kill the First Man, and how they should do it. The First Woman is trying to be the voice of reason in the argument, saying that they can't kill him because they don't know for sure that it was he who caused the death of the Third Woman. She suggests that they build him a depot of food and shelter in the desert, and wait to see if he dies from the disease. In the mean time they have not killed the only new person that they have seen in years, and they won't be harmed by a disease that he may be carrying. Eventually the machismo of the Second Man and the panic of the Second Woman win out. They decide to kill the First Man with a spear that the Second Man has fashioned out of an old piece of iron. The Second Man decides that he cannot return after his killing because he might become infected with the disease that the First Man carries. He says:

> SECOND MAN: He could have carried the disease for seventeen years -- and it could be the same for me. I can't come back. Don't try to change my mind. We have to make certain he dies: I'll

(As the SECOND WOMAN speaks, the SECOND MAN picks up the spear and holds it in the war-memorial pose of a soldier preparing to go into battle.)

SECOND WOMAN: When you're gone, we won't forget you. (Bond 43)

It seems clear that the significant motivations for the Second Man are heroism and the desire to become a martyr. He is reviving the motivations and spirits that destroyed the world in the first place. He apparently has not learned anything from the death and destruction which surrounds him. This is another indication of the lack of respect that they have for life, unlike the First Man. He has seen death, and has growm from the experience. These people are ready to kill again and again.

The First Woman tries to get the Second Man to agree to the drawing of lots to see who will kill the First Man. This seems to be an effort to circumvent the killing, but it is short-lived, because the Second Man drops dead in the middle of his next speech. Panic begins to grab them, when the Fourth Woman runs on to report another unexplained death, just like the others. At this moment, they all panic.

They try, in their panic, to analyze the disease and why some people have caught it and others have not. They first decide that they can only die if they are

standing still, therefore they must keep moving at all times. Then they decide that all the deaths occurred when they were doing things having to do with death, so they decide to have nothing to do with it, even to the point of turning their backs on the corpses. And they must also eat continuously, since that is a sign of life, and always have food on their persons.

They decide that this was all a test to see who could survive, perhaps so that they could be used to colonize another planet, or repopulate this one with a better stock of people. They decide that the reason that the bombs were dropped was to eliminate the destructive and undesirable elements from the population. The Second Woman looks at the corpse of the Second Man and tells how he found the good shirt he is wearinmg, and how she could have had it in the first place if he had not tricked her. She removes the shirt from his body, and begins to kick his body around the stage. She is joined by the rest of them in expressing her righteous indignation. As the scene ends, they decide to burn his house with his corpse in it.

In the choral reading that follows, they talk of the inevitability of the war. They speak of the inherent madness of the world before the war:
Before the bombs dropped these people lived in the cold shadows at the feet of stone idols. How could they

know what is true when the oracles amd newspapers and radios lied? The lake doesn't sparkle when you fill it with wrecked cars. You wouldn't ask them to swim oceans or put out volcanos with bare hands. Yet you asked them to practice virtue when they worked for thieves. Be philosophers when they lived in noisy blocks where no one could think. Learn the arts of peace when each must fight his neighbors for work. Or be generous when they must beg for the state handout. And be restrained when the leaders arm themselves for terror. . . . Wonder that not until the bombs were dropped did these people run mad. (Bond 46- 47)

In the next scene, the First Man describes the riots which he has witnessed. He saw the group opening cans and wasting the food, smearing it on themselves. They gorged themselves and set fire to that which they couldn't eat. A man fell into the burning food, and they ate him with the food without noticing. The First Man ran and hid. He found a dark room and discovered a woman laying in the corner. As he gets to this part of the monologue, be begins to speak in fragments, as he did in the beginning of the play. He is reverting to his speech patterns from when he was alone and fearful.

The Second Woman comes on bearing the spear. She blames him for the riots: he had the disease that started the panic which caused the riots. In response

to her threat, the First Man pulls a knife, but says, "I don't want to kill or hurt you" (Bond 48). She calls for help, not because she feels threatened, but because she wants the others to see her kill him. The First Woman and Third Man arrive. The First Woman tries to talk the Second Woman out of the killing. Because of all the fires, the disease may have been burned out, she says. The Fourth Woman enters and decides that if they pretend to be dead, the disease won't get them. She starts to walk about slowly, and pretends to be dead. The Third Man reasons that the First Man must be killed, regardless of his having the disease:

> THIRD MAN: He's real -- we're in a dream: we can't suddenly eat real food -- or lose real blood. We can't let anything be real after the bombs. If it's beautiful -- makes you happy -- kill it. The dead can't bear to be with the living: we only ask to be buried. With or without his disease he has to be killed. (Bond 49)

The Second Woman lunges at the First Man with the spear. The First Woman joins the struggle, and gets the spear away from the Second Woman and puts her arms around the First Man. She decides to sleep with him, in the hopes that they will be able to bear children.

The group has not been able to bear children among themselves, but they cannot tell why this is. The First Man reveals that he had sex with the woman he found in the dark room during the riots, and that it was the First Woman. After this revelation, the Third Man throws the spear at the First Man and wounds him. The First Woman gets the spear and orders them to take the First Man to the first aid area, which they do.

Section Three, "The Young Sages," starts with another chorus section. It starts by asking the question: "Why were the bombs dropped?" (Bond 50). They try to answer the question with Zen-like obfuscations, for example: "Suppose we said bombs were better food on one plate than on another?" (Bond 50). From these statements they go on to talk about justice and injustice. Injustice is harmful when it is seen: when it's unseen the disaster is terrible. To justify injustice, words, beliefs, opinions, faiths, passions -- all are corrupted. Soon people need an interpreter to understand the words that come from their own mouth and would have to be someone else to know the passions in their own breast! (Bond 50)

The balance of the choral speech makes the point that we must learn to create justice, instead of injustice, which is the spawning ground for the bombs.

After the choral speech, the First Man and the First and Fourth Women enter and sit. The Fourth Woman speaks:

> FOURTH WOMAN: We don't learn from other people's mistakes -- not even from most of our own. But knowledge is collected and tools handed on. We can't go back to the beginning, but we can change the future. (Bond 51)

To do this, they have decided to use only what they make, and eat only what they grow. This will mean a life much harder that their life in paradise, but at least they will own everything that they have, and will therefore be in control of it. If they use the things left for them and not the things created by them, they feel that they are owned by the objects and are not their owners. That is the reason for the insanity of the tin can riots. They did not own the food, it was owned by someone else, and so they were also owned by the same people.

They talk about the generations to come returning to this place and seeing the first field that they grew food on, and their library of things that they remember from before the war. The First Woman looks forward and sees their descendants living in justice:

> FIRST WOMAN: They'll look back at us and say we lived in prisons. They'll live in justice.

> Justice is a stone woman sitting in a stone room trying to make human gestures. If our children live she'll learn to make them -- and then the stone will be as human as these hands which open tins. (Bond 51)

As they leave the stage, they are greeted by the others who are carrying a light in the darkness.

This play presents a much bleaker, and perhaps more realistic, picture of the effects of nuclear war. It is filled with powerful descriptions of it's after effects as seen by those who survived. And worst of all, it shows how little we are likely to learn from such an experience. No sooner does something unexplained occur, but they decide that the stranger is the cause, and he must be killed so that it won't happen again. This is the same thought process that drove the Salem witch trials. If someone behaves in a strange way, and strange things happen, they must be a witch and must be killed. There is no room for rational thought, no room for justice, in this mind set.

Everything that happens in the world of the play concerns the ideas of justice and injustice. The bombs, the riots, the attempted murder of the First Man, all of these things are unjust and irrational. This play says that as long as we react from panic and fear, we will be unjust to ourselves and our neighbors.

But the play offers some hope at the end. They can try to rebuild their world. They must start from scratch, and remember all the things that they did wrong, so that they will not be repeated. They can build paradise with their own hands. The last image of the group walking "into the light," is clearly meant to give us that hopeful message. But it is an ambivalent message at best. Throughout the play we are shown the power of human stupidity, and are reminded not to underestimate it. The group of survivors fear, mistrust, hate and envy each other as much as we do today, if not more. There is little reason to believe that these traits will be removed from human beings just because a few more people have died. Billions had died, and the survivors still do the same things, how can the deaths of a few more make any difference?

This play offers sentimental imagery in the guise of hope. In reality, it suggests that the riots will go on until we all die. The reaction to the arrival of the First Man is elation. They finally have an indication that there are other survivors. He may not be sterile with the women, so they will be able to have children at last. But within a matter of minutes, they drive him off to exile and decide that they must kill him. The remainder of the play is driven by their hate and fear. At the end of the play, we are asked to

believe that things will now be different: they have learned their lessons from the riots. If they did not learn their lessons from the war, how could the riots teach them anything? The death and destruction of the riots are insiginficant compared to that of the war. At the end of the play, they are happy that the troubles are over, and that they can start anew, but we see nothing to convince us that they have changed. Some time later, something will happen to make them panic and start all the killing again. The end has a hopeful feel to it, but it is an empty hope.

Both of these plays deal with the effect that some holocaust has on the life of a single man. Neither one tries to explain the hows and whys of their respective wars, but they do show how one man is alienated from the rest of the survivors because he has learned something from the experience, and they have not. The world wants to continue down the path it chose before the war happened: The Old Man's world has grown more and more oppressive, to the point where it is unlawful to remember the past; the First Man's world is a Petri dish for hate and fear, where the best of Man will finally be bred out, and only the animal remain.

Into Bradbury's world steps a man who dares to remember the past, not the best things and not the worst things, but the average things. The things he

remembers are attainable things. The people to whom he speaks can be inspired to make them happen again, and not frustrated by their impossibility to the point that they give up hope. A moon landing is beyond the wildest dreams of these people, a Clark Bar is possible. At the end of the play, we see that he will continue to inspire people to strive for that attainable life.

Into Bond's world steps a man who has learned from close association that death is final and very real, and life is a precious thing. As soon as he believes that the things around him are people, and not a mirage, he falls into a deep sleep. This is a sign of complete trust. He believes that they have the same respect for life that he has. This is, of course, not true. He is astonished at the fear in the others which blinds them to the world around them. The food that they have is precious, as are their lives, but they waste both as if there is an endless supply. Because he is different, they want to kill him. They are eventually killed by their own hate. At the end, we are asked to believe that hate has exterminated itself, but the play has made us too wise to believe that.

Both of these plays, like those in the previous chapter, create characters that are recognizable to today's audiences. The Old Man, from To the Chicago

Abyss, is the grandfather who is always telling stories about the Good Old Days. The people around him want to hear about these days because they are better than the ones in which they are living.

The First Man, from The Tin Can Riots, is essentially an average, caring man who is around when strange things begin to happen. He is a stranger to the rest of the characters in the play, and they fear him as they fear anything that they don't know. Acting out of their fear, they decide to lynch him. All of these people are familiar to us when removed from the science fiction worlds that they inhabit.

Their fictional worlds are made up of things that we recognize as well. The Old Man's world is a totalitarian society. Such places exist today, and the world of the play is simply an extrapolation of these sorts of societies into a post-holocaust world. We have all seen the effects of great disasters, and these effects are also extrapolated into a world-wide catastrophe. The First Man's world is reminiscent of witch trials and race wars. It is a world of fear and discrimination. All of these things are familiar to us. It is also a world spawned by our worst nightmares of nuclear holocaust. We see all the things that we saw as a result of Hiroshima and Nagasaki expanded to engulf the world.

These plays can be produced given contemporary stagecraft. In To the Chicago Abyss, there are only two benches in the first scene and a table, chairs and scrim door in the second. There is no setting called for in the third scene: the train is suggested by lighting and sound effects. The Tin Can Riots requires only hand props, the script specifies that there are no other settings.

Both of these plays show us men who overcome the worlds around them. Their names are generic, they are the Everymen in these mystery plays of survival. There is a strong sense of good versus evil in these plays, not in the Biblical sense of God against Satan, but of the good side of man against his bad side. The good is shown in an individual, the bad in the society around him. In both cases, the single person can make a difference in his world, and can bring joy into the horrors of daily life. This thought has value to today's audiences. We all have difficult lives, but we can overcome our troubles. That is the message these plays have for us.

CHAPTER IV

Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Research

As we have seen in the previous chapters, science fiction drama can create identifiable characters on the stage. Sam, from Solitaire, is an older man longing for a past that he cannot recreate, and a future that denies him. He wishes for a return to family life and his wife. This is impossible, since his wife is dead, and the society in which he lives forbids any sort of connection with one's children. As the last alternatives to his desired lifestyle are stripped from him, he chooses to die. Sasha, from A Bunch of the Gods Were Sitting Around One Day, is a man who loves his family, and since the survival of his family requires someone to give up his life, he decides that he is the one to do it. In the ideal family that we all wish we had, any member would give up his life for the others to survive. At the same time, the other family members would try to prevent the death of one of their own. The Old Man, from To the Chicago Abyss, is a grandfatherly man who remembers the good old days, and never tires of telling people about them. The people around him enjoy listening to him because they wish that their life was as good as the one he is talking about.

The First Man, from The Tin Can Riots, is a normal, caring man, who just happens to be a stranger in the area when strange things occur. The other people decide that he is responsible for the strange things, and is a threat to their lives. Because of their fear of the unknown, they decide to lynch him. All of these people, when removed from their science fiction backgrounds, are people who are familiar to us, either from contemporary life or from some historical period.

Likewise, their situations are familiar to us. None of them have happened in the course of history, but they are plausible given an appropriate change in science and technology. Sam faces a society which has outlawed the family. This has not happened in our world, but there are members of our society who have no family, orphans and such, or whose family has become seperated from them for some reason. Some people exist in social subgroups where there is no love and concern given to the others in the subgroup. It seems certain that some members of these subgroups would want something more. Sasha and his family are facing a situation that depends on something completely foreign to us: there are no such things as faster-than-light spaceships trapped in hyperspace, but we can all understand the isolation that they are suffering. Few of us have had to face a situation where we have had to die to save our loved ones, but many of us have thought about it. Sasha's

world ia a strange one made up of things that are not strange to us, only the trappings are different. The Old Man lives in a totalitarian society. Such places exist today. The play is based on an extrapolation of this sort of society into a world decimated by a disasterous war. We have all seen the effects of great disasters, and the deprivation that they bring. The Old Man's world is simply an examination of these two things taken to an extreme. The First Man's world is sadly reminiscent of the Salem witch trials and the race troubles of the American south. It is a place where anything strange is cause for fear and loathing. It is also a world where our fears of the effects of nuclear war are brought to life. The First Man's world is the world of our nuclear nightmares.

The production requirements of these plays are not beyond the capabilities of the contemporary theatre. Solitaire has two sets. One is the interior of Sam's Servocell which has some push buttons and flashing lights, some sliding panels, and a projection screen for the picture of Sam's wife. It also requires a cot which slides into and out of the wall. The second set is simply a dirty kitchen, which could easily be only a table and chairs. The set for Gods is somewhat more involved, but still possible. Most of the effects are created with lights, but there are two control domes and the landing controls which are lit from inside, and Sri. Sri is described as being a mobile of

variously colored glass rings set in the upstage center position. It is dark through most of the play, until it comes to life at the end of the play, when it is brightly lit. The only set pieces that are specifically mentioned in To the Chicago Abyss are two benches in the first scene, and the table, chairs, and scrim door in the second. The train in the third scene is suggested by lighting. There are no set pieces called for in the script of The Tin Can Riots, all the action requires are a few props. In terms of costuming, the only pecular requirement is in Gods, where all of the characters wear a 'third eye,' a sort of headband with a circle of lights over the forehead which is dark most of the time, but flashes when they are meditating.

In addition to the merits suggested by this study to this point, these plays have many more things to offer producing organizations. All of these plays are characterized by a beautiful use of language. In Solitaire the contrasts between vital relationships and relationships as plastic as the boxes fast food comes in are clearly shown through the various uses of language. In Gods the drift of languages is shown by the lack of articles in their speech. In To the Chicago Abyss, Bradbury uses simple language to evoke tender images of things that we know, some of which no longer exist in our day, much less in the world of the play. Bond creates wrenching images through his use of language in The Tin Can Riots. He does not let up for a moment; he

drags us out of our complacency and makes us face the realities of nuclear holocaust. His is a haunting vision not easily forgotten.

These plays also present acting challenges unlike most found in contemporary theatre. All four of them require the actors to create fully fleshed out images of the worlds in which they are living. Sam, from Solitaire, needs to personalize his relationship with his dead wife, know exactly what the world was like before the System took over, and create a personal history for himself that is based on a world completely different from any in which the actor may have lived. The actor can draw from real world situations, but the world he must create is entirely his own. No amount of research will give him all the information he needs. This is true of all the plays examined in this study. None of these worlds exist, but enough of each of them exist to extrapolate the rest.

The actors in Gods must find a way to alienate themselves from experiences on an entire planet. The characters have never seen one, all the world that they know is the inside of a space ship. This environment must also be created whole cloth from the imaginations of the actors. The characters in To the Chicago Abyss must also create a new world for themselves. The Old Man must have an iron grasp on his memories of the Mediocre, or the monologues in To the Chicago Abyss will land flat on the audience; they

must be moved to care about these things as much as he does. The actors involved in The Tin Can Riots also need to create a world decimated by nuclear war, and create the living images of the dead and dying that are in the play. The wholesale slaughter of humanity suggested by Bond has not been seen since World War II and the Nazi atrocities. And compared to the imagery of Bond's play, the Nazis were amateurs.

All of these plays offer challenges to designers as well. While most of the sets have few requirements, the places and things that they represent are foreign to our eyes. The designers are free to do what they will to realize these places on the stage, and this freedom has a double edge. The designer can do whatever he wants, but he has only himself and his artistic senses to guide him. There is nothing available to him for research into the various places represented. He succeeds or fails on his own merits. This is an exciting risk to undertake.

For further research, there are many other categories within science fiction drama which merit further investigation.

There are Absurdist plays, such as The Bedsitting Room by Spike Milligan and John Antrobus. This play takes place after World War III, which is, of course, a nuclear war. The main character visits an Army Surplus and Psychiatric Store for advice and treatment. He believes that, due to

radiation poisoning, he will turn into a bedsitting room. The doctor gives him some anti-bedsitting room pills and sends him on his way. At the beginning of the second act, we see the room that he has become. His doctor convinces him that charging rent will aggravate his condition, and volunteers to live in him, without paying him rent, to continue his treatments. We soon discover that Mrs. Gladys Scroakes, the current Queen of England, has become a chest of drawers, and is a part of the furnishings for the room. The Prime Minister has become a parrot. This play is a British import worth examination.

There are many plays dealing with various social issues. Decibels, by John Hale, deals with noise pollution. The sound effects of trucks, planes, and such are so loud that the characters do not speak to each other, they read each other's lips. When they must use sound to communicate, for example, when they are in other rooms or on the phone, they must use bullhorns to be heard above the din. A husband and his wife are the main characters in the play, and the only moment of silence occurs when the husband buys his wife a set of earphones which will block out all noise. She puts them on, and the noise level drops to half. When he puts his matching set on, there is total silence. She finds it so uncomfortable that they both remove them, and the noise level returns to normal. Let Me Hear You Whisper, by Paul Zindel, deals with the use of animals in scientific

experiments. A group of scientists is trying to teach a dolphin to speak without success. One night the cleaning woman, who loves animals, comes into the lab and finds out that the scientists plan to dissect the dolphin to discover why it doesn't talk. As she cleans the room alone, the dolphin asks her to help him. The dolphin shows her that the scientists want to use him for military applications, and he doesn't want to do that. She is stopped from trying to return him to the sea by the scientists. They eventually ask her to help them in their experiments, since she has started the animal talking, but she refuses.

There are also many political plays. The War Plays trilogy by Edward Bond is an example of plays that make political statements. Red Black and Ignorant deals with the life a baby born in the midst of a nuclear war didn't have because he died during the war. The character is called the Monster, and is black from head to toe, the color of charcoal. It has scenes depicting Learning, Love, Eating, Selling, Work, The Army, Humanity, and Death for the Monster. The third play, Great Peace is yet to be published in a seperate volume by Methuen. All White Caste, by Ben Caldwell, is a vignette about the oppression of blacks by whites, and the effect a final race war has on our society.

There are also a large number of science fiction plays written for children. A worthwhile example of these plays is David Mamet's Revenge of the Space Pandas. This play

centers on Binky Rudich who has built a two-speed clock which will fling him off the Earth and to another planet. He lands on a planet inhabited by Space Pandas, and he and his friends have many adventures trying to get away from the Pandas and get home for lunch.

All of these areas merit further examination for producton possibilities and literary value.

In addition to the plays mentioned in this chapter, there are two appendices to this thesis, the first listing science plays for adults, the second listing plays for children. These may provide further areas for investigation.

There are two notes regarding the appendices. Since I could not obtain copies of many of the plays in them, many of the bibliographic entries are missing such things as the place of publication and the pages on which the play occurs for a play appearing in an anthology. This information was not available from the Play Index, which was the main source for the lists. Also, the division between adult and childrens plays was taken from the Play Index. Some of the plays not marked as being for children, and therefore included in the adult list, seem to be children's plays judging from the titles. These plays have been left in the adult list due to a lack of objective evidence that they belong in the children's list, since I have not read most of them.

APPENDIX 1

Bibliography of Plays for Adult Audiences

APPENDIX 1:

Bibliography of Plays for Adult Audiences

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APPENDIX 2

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APPENDIX 2:

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