ORAL INTERPRETATION AS A FORM OF PROFESSIONAL THEATRE ON THE NEW YORK STAGE FROM 1945 TO 1965

Thesis for the Degree of Ph. D.
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
ALICE J. JASWAL
1968

THESIS

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FROM 1945 TO 1965

presented by

Alice Jeanette Jaswal

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E. L. Reynolds
Major professor

Date August 29, 1968

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ABSTRACT

ORAL INTERPRETATION AS A FORM OF PROFESSIONAL THEATRE ON THE NEW YORK STAGE FROM 1945 TO 1965

By

Alice J. Jaswal

The purpose of this study was twofold: 1) to compile the information available on oral interpretation productions which were a part of the New York professional theatre scene from 1945 to 1965, and 2) to attempt to determine if oral interpretation, on the professional level, represents a separate and distinct genre, or if it is a form of theatre which makes selective use of stage techniques and accouterments.

Information was obtained from the reviews of productions which emphasized the aural rather than the visual aspects of presentation and from correspondence with thirty-two people connected with these productions as performers, directors, or adaptors. Thirty-one presentations were considered.

Chapter I presented the statement of the problem and the definition of terms. Chapter II dealt with the Readers Theatre productions of Oedipus Rex and The Mayor of Zalamea. Chapter III examined the Laughton-Gregory productions, Don Juan in Hell and John Brown's Body. Chapter IV discussed productions which presented

material from several authors concerning a specific theme or idea. This included An Evening of European Theatre; Five Queens; When I Was a Child; The Hollow Crown; In White America; and The Golden Age. Chapter V considered productions which featured a collection of material from a single author. Included in this chapter were a solo and a group presentation of Spoon River Anthology; Ages of Man; Emlyn Williams' two Dickens programs, Mark Twain Tonight!; Theatre of Peretz; and The World of Carl Sandburg. Chapter VI examined productions which presented experiences from an author's life as well as his works. Presentations in this group were A Boy Growing Up; A Lovely Light; The Importance of Being Oscar; The Brontes; Brecht on Brecht; An Evening's Frost; and the three dramatizations from O'Casey's autobiography, I Knock at the Door, Pictures in the Hallway, and Drums Under the Windows. Chapter VII dealt with the remaining productions which did not fit in the earlier chapters. These included Moby Dick; Under Milk Wood; U.S.A.; Dear Liar; and Telemachus Clay. Chapter VIII presented summaries, conclusions, and suggestions for further research.

The following conclusions were reached:

1. Obvious differences exist between the majority of oral interpretation presentations and conventional productions in the manner of presentation used. Scripts were used in nearly three-fourths of the presentations. Performers in more than half of the productions were limited in their movement. Several productions utilized narrators.

2. Another significant difference between oral interpretation presentations and conventional productions is in the material, with

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three-fourths of the productions using material not originally intended for the stage. Practically any type of material seemed to lend itself to oral interpretation presentation if it was dramatic and had a clear central theme or idea.

3. The majority of oral interpretation productions made some use of scenery and lighting. Only about one-third of the productions used costume.

4. The performers in nearly all the oral interpretation productions had appeared in previous conventional theatre productions. More than half of the productions featured well-known actors.

5. The majority of the theatre critics were willing to accept at least some oral interpretation productions as "theatre." The criteria generally applied to these productions seemed to be the same as the criteria applied to conventional theatre productions.

Although oral interpretation productions frequently differ from conventional productions with regard to the manner of presentation and the type of material, the writer feels that oral interpretation, on the professional stage, is not a separate and distinct form of entertainment, but a specialized form of theatre utilizing selected stage techniques and accessories.

ORAL INTERPRETATION AS A FORM OF PROFESSIONAL THEATRE ON THE NEW YORK STAGE FROM 1945 TO 1965

By

Alice Jeanette Jaswal

A THESIS

Submitted to

Michigan State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Theatre

1968

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am extremely grateful to Dr. E. C. Reynolds for his guidance and encouragement during the writing of this thesis. I would also like to thank the members of my committee, Dr. Sidney Berger, Dr. John Waite, and Dr. David Ralph for their suggestions.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the staff in charge of the Theatre Collection in the Library of Performing Arts at Lincoln Center in New York for their assistance. Finally, my thanks to the theatre critics, directors, and performers who took time out from their busy schedules to answer my letters.

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITION OF TERMS

I. Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study will be twofold: first, to compile the information available on the oral interpretation productions which were a part of the New York professional theatre scene from 1945-1965; and second, to attempt to determine if oral interpretation, on the professional level, represents a separate and distinct genre, or if it is merely a form of theatre which makes selective use of stage techniques and accouterments. A more complete discussion of what constitutes an oral interpretation production will be given in the discussion regarding the limitations of the study, but in order that the reader may have a general idea as to the nature of the study before proceeding any further, a brief definition will be included here. An oral interpretation production will be defined as a production which attempts to recreate a literary experience in the mind of the listener through an aural emphasis rather than an emphasis upon the visual aspects of the presentation.

II. Justification of the Problem

There are indications that oral interpretation is becoming a part of our entertainment world. Although the number of professional oral interpretation productions done in New York each season is not

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numerically impressive, it is interesting to note that there were three times as many productions presented during the second ten-year period under consideration as during the first. Also, an increasing number of colleges and universities are offering different types of oral interpretation presentations to their patrons. These productions may be classified as Readers Theatre, Interpreters Theatre, Chamber Theatre or some other form of "reading" or "theatre," depending upon the material used, and the inclination of the director, but they all attempt to recreate a literary experience in the mind of the listener. The Interpretation Interest Group of the Speech Association of America recently compiled a list of materials presented in group readings on college and university campuses across the nation as well as on the professional stage. They reported 131 plays, 37 poems or programs of poetry, and 139 prose selections or programs of prose selection were read by groups.[1] The most recent five year survey the Educational Theatre Journal concerning play selection in American colleges and universities found that out of nearly 3,000 full length productions, 475 were play readings.[2]

Numerous articles have appeared in theatre magazines and speech journals referring to various aspects of oral interpretation or to

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[1] Speech Association of America, Oral Interpretation Interest Group, "Readers' Theatre Bibliography," Central States Speech Journal, February, 1966, pp. 35-39.

[2] Educational Theatre Journal, May, 1966, p. 139.

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Sept, 1953, pp.

specific oral interpretation productions.[3] Theatre critics such as Eric Bentley, John Gassner, and George Jean Nathan mentioned oral interpretation briefly in their consideration of the recent theatrical scene,[4] and authors of textbooks on oral interpretation mention professional oral interpretation briefly, but no systematic study has considered oral interpretation as a form of professional theatre.

Second, a study which considers oral interpretation as a form of professional theatre would be of interest and use to scholars and educators concerned with either oral interpretation or with theatre. The collection of the available data on these productions provides a record of what types of materials and techniques have been successful on the professional stage and suggests areas for further study.

III. Review of the Literature

There is a conspicuous lack of material examining oral interpretation as a form of professional theatre. Information concerning productions of this nature presented in New York City since World War II is particularly scarce. An article by Keith Brooks and John Bielenberg entitled "Readers Theatre as Defined by New York Critics," does deal with several professional Readers Theatre productions;

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[3] A representative sampling might include: "Readers' Theatre on Tour," Drama Critique, Fall, 1963; "Interpreters' Theatre," Quarterly Journal of Speech, October, 1963; "Staging Don Juan in Hell," Western Speech, May, 1954; "Charles Laughton on Oral Reading," Central States Speech Journal, December, 1951, and similar articles.

[4] Eric Bentley, The Dramatic Event: An American Chronicle, (New York: Horizon Press, 1954), pp. 83-85, 123-127; John Gassner, Theatre at the Crossroads: Plays and Playwrights of the Mid-Century American Stage (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 286; George Jean Nathan, The Theatre in the Fifties (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953, pp. 36-37, 39, 117, 216.

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however, the authors were trying to ascertain the professional philosophy of these productions, as expressed by selected critics.[5] The hope was that knowledge of this professional philosophy might aid in the formulation of an educational philosophy of Readers Theatre. This study was limited to a twelve year period and dealt mainly with productions which appeared on Broadway. Some of the conclusions reached by the authors do not seem valid in light of more extensive research. Also, the selection of critical opinions to be included in the article appears to have been made with a view toward proving a point rather than to providing a comprehensive picture of critical reaction.

E. A. Monroe's dissertation, "The Group Reading of Drama: Its Essence and Aesthetic Principles," considers professional group reading of drama briefly;[6] however, Miss Monroe limited her study to those productions which had more than two readers and which presented a single play. Much of her material was concerned with group reading of drama on the college and university level. Linn's dissertation considered oral interpretation as professional theatre in London.[7]

Irene Coger and Melvin White, in their recent book, Readers Theatre Handbook, cite various successful professional oral interpretation productions, but they do not consider them in detail.[8]

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[5]Keith Brooks and John E. Bielenberg, "Readers Theatre as Defined by New York Critics," Southern Speech Journal, Summer, 1966.

[6]Elizabeth Annette Monroe, "The Group Reading of Drama: Its Essence and Aesthetic Principles," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1963).

[7]James Reive Lindsay Linn, "A Historical Study of Oral Interpretation in London,"1951-1962 as a Form of Professional Theatre," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1964).

[8]Irene Coger and Melvin White, Readers Theatre Handbook (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1967).

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From time to time, articles have appeared in various newspapers and magazines concerning specific productions or people concerned with specific productions, but no comprehensive study has appeared. As mentioned previously, theatre critics occasionally write of the fad, or trend, towards oral interpretation presentations, but they do not elaborate other than to refer to a few productions of this sort.

IV. Limitations of the Study

The main problem in this study has been to find a workable definition of oral interpretation. Various authors of oral interpretation texts have attempted to explain what it is and what it is not. As Geiger points out in his text, The Sound, Sense, and Performance of Literature, "Everyone knows what oral interpretation is until he begins to define it."[9] There seems to be general agreement that the purpose of oral interpretation is to recreate a literary experience in the mind of the listener; however, none of the authorities explain what they mean by "a literary experience."

Another difficulty lies in trying to determine what the interpreter should and should not do to help his listeners use their imaginations most effectively to mentally recreate the literary experience. The questions which inevitably seem to arise are: How can the interpreter best accomplish this? and, at what point does the interpreter cease helping his listeners to imagine what the author had in mind, and present his own interpretation of the material so

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[9]Don Geiger, The Sound, Sense, and Performance of Literature (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1963), p. 79.

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literally that it is no longer a recreation in the mind of the listener, but a recreation on stage for the viewer? Or, to be more succinct, at what point does the oral interpreter become the impersonator or the actor?

This is an extremely difficult question to answer, and opinions held by the authorities in this area differ widely. Because the field is so broad and the productions to be considered are so diverse, the writer felt that, for purposes of this study, it would be more feasible to think of oral interpretation in terms of a continuum rather than as something which can be clearly defined and limited. This alleviates the problem of attempting to determine at what specific point interpretation ceases and acting begins. As Geiger notes, "The actor is a person who delivers a literary author's sentences out loud, delivers them to an audience, and tries to deliver them well. If an oral interpreter does not do these things, it may well be asked what function remains to him."[10]

There are some obvious differences between acting and interpreting. Normally the actor is concerned with only drama; plays only one role; and does not acknowledge the presence of the audience. On the other hand, the oral interpreter is not restricted to drama; he frequently portrays several parts; and he usually maintains a direct relationship with his audience. The other differences are less obvious. The actor memorizes his lines; he is free to move about and to use gesture; he becomes the character; he relates to other actors; and he is aided by theatrical accessories such as costume, scenery, and

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[10] Ibid.

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lighting. Some oral interpreters also memorize their lines; move freely about the stage; assume a character--or often many characters; relate to other performers; and make use of costume, scenery and lighting. Those holding a strict view of oral interpretation would say that these performers were not interpreters, while those holding a strict view of theatre would be unwilling to accept them as actors.

Charlotte Lee insists that a script be used in oral interpretation, and warns that the interpreter who has committed his material to memory risks losing the sense of direct communication he needs to have with his audience.[11] Bertram emphatically states, "Memorization followed by presentation without the script is clearly not oral interpretation. . . . Unless the reader refers to his script from time to time, the presentation is in some medium other than interpretation."[12] Smith and Linn suggest the use of a book helps to "aline" the reader with his audience and to make the reading "less obviously a 'performance'."[13] Lynch and Crain, on the other hand, maintain that memorization should not be a matter of concern; what is important is the effectiveness with which the interpreter communicates.[14]

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[11]Charlotte J. Lee, Oral Interpretation (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1952), pp. 8-12.

[12]Jean De Sales Bertram, The Oral Experience of Literature (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1967), p. 72.

[13]Joseph F. Smith and James R. Linn, Skill In Reading Aloud (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), p. 426.

[14]Gladys E. Lynch and Harold C. Crain, Projects in Oral Interpretation (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1959), pp. 4-6.

It should be noted here that the authorities who have been quoted are writing specifically for amateur interpreters. It is difficult to conceive of a professional performer giving the same material night after night and not memorizing it, even if he did not deliberately attempt to do so. Sir John Gielgud, in his Ages of Man presentation, actually used his script to read from when he first started giving the program, but after he had presented it many times, he no longer needed it for reading purposes, although he continued to use it "for certainty and to turn to, to break the continuity."[15] Similarly, Staats Cotsworth, who served as narrator in I Knock at the Door and Pictures in the Hallway, reported that he pretended to read certain sections of O'Casey's prose long after he knew them by heart.[16] The First Drama Quartet, in their presentation of Don Juan in Hell, used manuscripts strictly for effect. The story is told that one night, as they were performing on tour, Charles Boyer suddenly forgot his lines in the middle of one of his long Shavian discourses. After the performance, when the others asked him what had happened, he replied that as he reached to turn a page in the script, his eye happened to catch the line he was speaking and it completely distracted him.[17]

It would seem then, that as far as professional oral interpretation productions are concerned, it is unreasonable to insist the performers must not have their material memorized. However, the question then becomes, must the performer use a script or book or some

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[15]Letter from Sir John Gielgud to the author, June 13, 1968.

[16]Letter from Staats Cotsworth to the author, June 9, 1968.

[17]Robert Beloof, The Performing Voice in Literature (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966), p. 76.

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literary symbol to remind his audience that his purpose is the recreation of a literary experience even though he does not read from it? If so, how often must he refer to it? Emlyn Williams, in his presentation of A Boy Growing Up, brought a pile of manuscripts on stage with him, indicated the material for his program had come from the manuscripts, and then did not refer to them the rest of the evening.[18] In Ages of Man, Gielgud referred to his manuscript only between selections.[19] Finally there is the problem of productions such as John Brown's Body, which did not use manuscript.[20] If the use of manuscript is a criterion for oral interpretation, then this presentation could not be considered as such. One is then faced with the question, if it is not oral interpretation, what is it? Certainly other aspects of the production were more closely related to interpretation than to a "regular" theatre production. Despite the lack of scripts, many critics called John Brown's Body a "reading."[21] It would seem then, that the presence of a script and the use of a script should not be set forth necessarily as rigid requirements for oral interpretation.

There is also a great deal of controversy among authorities regarding how much gesture and movement an interpreter should use. There seems to be general agreement that the majority of the action

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[18]Emlyn Williams, "My Unfavourite Word is Reading," an article found in the New York Theatre Collection, probably taken from the Playbill, p. 33.

[19]John Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, January 3, 1959.

[20]John Mason Brown, Saturday Review, March 14, 1953, p. 34.

[21]John Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, February 21, 1953.
George Freedley, New York Morning Telegraph, March 24, 1953.
Sam Zolotow, New York Times, March 27, 1953, p. 28.
Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, February 16, 1953.

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should occur in the mind of the listener, but there is wide disagreement as to what the interpreter may or may not do to help the listener visualize the action in his imagination. Brooks, Bahn and Okey stress the importance of the interpreter's use of vocal and physical suggestion, but caution if he goes beyond suggestion he is overstepping his role.[22] Unfortunately, they do not give specific criteria for determining what should be considered as "going beyond suggestion." Simley writes that if the reader uses anything other than "suggestive gesture," the listener is taken out of the realm of imagination.[23] Bacon notes that, while the primary appeal of oral interpretation is to the ear, the bodily activity of the interpreter is also important. He warns that if the interpreter "fails to practice economy, he is sometimes said to be acting rather than interpreting."[24] Again, no guidelines are offered as to when the interpreter ceases "to practice economy."

Lynch and Crain refer to the difference between acting and oral interpretation as the difference between the degrees of literalness or suggestion used by the performer, but they offer no explicit criteria for determining at what point the suggestion becomes too literal to be considered suggestion.[25] However, in another part of their book they

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[22]Keith Brooks, Eugene Bahn, and L. LaMont Okey, The Communicative Arts of Oral Interpretation (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1967), pp. 34-36, 47-48.

[23]Anne Simley, Oral Interpretation Handbook (Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Company, 1960), p. 2.

[24]Wallace A. Bacon, The Art of Interpretation (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1966), p. 47.

[25]Lynch and Crain, op. cit., pp. 4-6.

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try to define "good physical behavior" in terms of clarity of meaning, ability to evoke an emphatic response from the audience, and the sense of fitness it engenders.[26] Crocker and Eich stress that words alone are not enough. "The reader must be alive physically. He must suit the action to the word."[27] Smith and Linn maintain that, "within the limits imposed by the reading situation," (use of a script) the interpreter is limited in his movement and gesture only by his ability to make what ever he does convincing.[28]

Closely associated with the problem of movement is the problem of characterization. Woolbert and Nelson, in their efforts to differentiate between interpretation and acting, point to the difference in the directness of communication and the performer's non-involvement "in the character of another individual."[29] Similarly, Brooks, Henderhan and Billings insist that the reader should not loose his identity to the extent that he "becomes" a character.[30] This would not allow us to consider some productions which should be included. For example, in Gielgud's portrayal of Richard II, tears ran down his cheeks as he, in the character of the unhappy king, parted with his beloved crown. There would be little question in the minds of those who saw Ages of Man that Gielgud became involved in the character of

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[26] Ibid, p. 132.

[27] Lionel Crocker and Louis Eich, Oral Reading (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 2d ed., 1955), p. 166.

[28] Smith and Linn, op. cit., p. 311.

[29] Charles H. Woolbert and Severian E. Nelson, The Art of Interpretive Speech (New York: Crofts and Company, 1945), pp. 4-5.

[30] Keith Brooks, Robert C. Henderhan, and Alan Billings, "A Philosophy on Readers Theatre," Speech Teacher, September, 1963, p. 230.

another individual, in fact, in the character of several individuals. And yet, somehow, there was a difference between his reading and what he would have done had he been acting. Gielgud has stated that he feels he is too old to play Romeo in a regular production, but the form of presentation he used in Ages of Man permitted him to show how he thought Romeo should be played.[31]

Lynch and Crain suggest that as long as the interpreter is attempting to "recreate for an audience an experience of what he finds on the printed page, he is performing as an interpreter."[32] Parrish, who incidently included a chapter on impersonation in his text, Reading Aloud, refers to three successful professional oral interpretation productions: Don Juan in Hell, Mark Twain Tonight!, and Emlyn Williams' Dickens programs, as proof there is no sharp distinction between acting and reading. The question, as Parrish sees it, is not which of the two to use, but rather "a question of finding the appropriate place on the continuum between acting and plain reading." This will depend on the situation in which the reader finds himself and on the nature of the material he is presenting.[33] Dickenson expressed a similar viewpoint in his article "Readers or Rhapsodes?".

> . . . one can regard acting and interpretation as belonging to the same continuum--that of performance, and therefore to be distinguished largely on the basis of their primary appeals: acting as largely visual, interpretation as largely aural. As performance, they may be regarded as different in degree, rather than in kind. The possible distinctions between them

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[31] Henry Hewes, Saturday Review, December 27, 1958, p. 20.

[32] Lynch and Crain, op. cit., p. 3.

[33] Wayland Maxfield Parrish, Reading Aloud (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1966), p. 364.

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will be matters of emphasis, rather than of clear-cut, hard-and-fast definitions--ultimately referable to the literary genre to be served, as the determining factor.[34]

Certainly there can be little doubt as to whether or not the professional readers use characterization. Nancy Wickwire, who appeared in Under Milk Wood and The Golden Age, wrote of the enjoyment she received from developing several characterizations in one evening.[35] Likewise, William Redfield, who considers himself primarily a character actor, found a great deal of satisfaction in portraying many characters in U.S.A.[36]

The question of impersonation as opposed to characterization frequently presents itself when the performers are not handling several roles. Obviously Emlyn Williams and Hal Holbrook were doing impersonations of Dickens and Twain; however it is not always easy to distinguish between impersonation and characterization. Dorothy Stickney, in her program, A Lovely Light, did not try to impersonate Edna St. Vincent Millay,[37] although some of the critics thought she "became" the poet.[38] The other performers who presented the life and works of an author often confused the critics.

In Dear Liar, Miss Cornell wore her hair in a style similar to the way in which Mrs. Campbell had worn hers, and wore a gown similar

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[34]Hugh Dickinson, "Readers or Rhapsodes?" Quarterly Journal of Speech, October, 1959, p. 261.

[35]Letter from Miss Nancy Wickwire to the author, June 3, 1968.

[36]Letter from William Redfield to the author, July 5, 1968.

[37]Letter from Miss Dorothy Stickney to the author, June 17, 1968.

[38]Frank Aston, New York World-Telegram and Sun, February 9, 1960, New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, (hereafter referred to as NYTCR), p. 375.
John McClain, New York Journal American, February 9, 1960, NYTCR, p. 374
Lewis Funke, New York Times, February 7, 1960, Sec. II, p. 1.

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[39] Letter from Miss Ka

[40] Frank Aston, New Y
NYTM, p. 317.

[41] Irene Coger, "Inte
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[42] Keith Brooks, "Rea
Dramatics, December, 1962

to one Mrs. Campbell might have worn in that era, but she was not impersonating Mrs. Pat, at least not in her opinion. She did feel that she assumed the character of the actress, however.[39] Exactly where characterization stops and impersonation begins is extremely difficult, if not impossible to determine, as illustrated by critic Frank Aston, who, after seeing Dear Liar wrote:

> Mr. Kilty implies his two are not impersonating Mrs. Campbell and Shaw. One wonders. In the beginning they bloom with vigor. At the end she has faded and he totters. Through the years he remains volatile, voluble, amusingly petulant. Until she is close to death she is a hard-headed spitfire, proud, pliant, rebellious, sentimental--a bundle of contradictions that from triumph to despair, wealth to poverty, health to weakness remains primarily a desirable woman.
> If this isn't impersonation it is marvelous suggestion.[40]

If the players do use characterization and do use movement appropriate to the material, it would seem logical that they would also interact with each other on stage. However, Irene Coger, in discussing the form of oral interpretation she calls Interpreters Theatre, suggests that the performers should visualize the scene only in their minds and therefore should not even look at each other.[41] Brooks, writing about Readers Theatre, forbids the players to "physically interact," but does not forbid them to look at each other.[42] A strict application of a criterion prohibiting interaction among the performers would again necessitate the exclusion of productions which should be considered.

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[39] Letter from Miss Katharine Cornell to the author, June 11, 1968.

[40] Frank Aston, New York World-Telegram and Sun, March 18, 1960, NYTCR, p. 317.

[41] Irene Coger, "Interpreters Theatre: Theatre of the Mind," Quarterly Journal of Speech, April, 1963, p. 157.

[42] Keith Brooks, "Readers Theatre: Some Questions and Answers," Dramatics, December, 1962, p. 14.

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[43] Joseph Wood Krutch

[44] Monroe, op. cit. p

[45] Howard Taubman, Ne

[46] John McClain, New

p. 320.

[47] Coger and White,

The performers in Don Juan in Hell delivered many of their lines directly to the audience, but they also directed comments to fellow performers and frequently looked at each other and reacted to what was being said. In fact, Miss Moorehead was praised for her reactions to the lines of the other three as well as for her presentation of her own lines.[43] John Brown's Body had some physical interaction between the players, such as Tyrone Power's kissing Miss Anderson's hand and putting his arm around her shoulder.[44] The third volume of the O'Casey autobiography, Drums Under the Window, used a narrator who spoke directly to the audience, but it also featured players who definitely interacted as they presented vignettes from O'Casey's life.[45] In Dear Liar, Cornell and Aherne frequently spoke to the audience, but they came together to act out scenes as well.[46] It would seem then, that while one may generalize that performers in oral interpretation do not interact with each other to the extent that actors do, no concrete guidelines can be established.

The extent to which oral interpreters may use costumes and scenery is also not clearly defined. Coger and White, in their book on readers theatre, state that "scenery and costumes are not used or are only selectively implied."[47] Brooks, Henderhan and Billings, also in reference to readers theatre, accept the use of "visual and

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[43]Joseph Wood Krutch, Nation, December 22, 1951, p. 554.

[44]Monroe, op. cit. p. 32.

[45]Howard Taubman, New York Times, October 14, 1960, p. 26.

[46]John McClain, New York Journal American, March 18, 1960, NYTCR, p. 320.

[47]Coger and White, op. cit., p. 19.

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48 Brooks, Henderhan

49 Bacon, op. cit., p

50 Geiger, op. cit.,

51 Martin Gottfried

auditory aids, so long as the aids are kept in the realm of suggestion and do not interfere with the function of the listener."[48] Bacon, once again in reference to readers theatre, suggests the use of costumes, make up, scenery, and props should be limited, "in the interest of keeping the scene essentially off stage," but he sees no reason to "prohibit them as a matter of definition."[49] Geiger cites Williams' success with his Dickens program as an example of an interpreter making effective use of costume.[50]

Several oral interpretation productions have used costume and scenery, and the difficulty of degree is again apparent. At what point does the costuming and scenery cease to be suggestive and cause the audience to accept what is shown rather than to encourage the audience to use what is shown as a generative point of their own imagination? Critic Martin Gottfried encountered the problem of trying to determine at what point the costumes and settings become so literal that the production can no longer be considered an oral interpretation presentation when he reviewed An Evening's Frost. Gottfried wrote:

> It's time that producers stopped palming off readings as theatre just because some lighting and prop or two have been added. Surely, there are enough people interested in recitations of autobiographies, poetry and assorted literary bric-a-brac without any need for false pretentions. "An Evening's Frost," which opened last night at the Theatre de Lys, is not a theatrical presentation.
>
> But for that matter, it isn't a reading either. Not so long as it is dotted with artificial and unnecessary theatrical equipment.[51]

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[48] Brooks, Henderhan and Billings, loc. cit.

[49] Bacon, op. cit., pp. 313-314.

[50] Geiger, op. cit., p. 86.

[51] Martin Gottfried, Women's Wear Daily, October 12, 1965.

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[52] Geiger, op. cit.,

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[55] Bacon, op. cit., p

In attempting to define oral interpretation, and more specifically oral interpretation on the professional level, the writer has concluded there cannot be a single, exact, definition. Various authorities would seem to bear this out. Geiger defines oral interpretation as "an unformulable amalgam of acting, public, speaking, critical reaction, and sympathetic sharing."[52] Crocker and Eich write that oral interpretation, (or "spoken reading" as they call it), "is an enormous province, extending all the way from (and overlapping somewhat) extempore speaking, with many and variegated gradations, up to (and partially including) the realm of acting."[53] Armstrong and Brandes, in their treatment of staged readings, note that "because of its experimental nature, there are no exact rules."[54] In Bacon's consideration of various forms of group presentations he admits, "There are no set, inflexible rules for the various group modes, any more than there are for plays meant to be performed by actors. There are conventions (though they must not be rigid), and there are outer limits (though they are not easy to define).[55]

When one searches for a definition of oral interpretation as it relates specifically to professional presentations, the outer limits become even more nebulous. The writer finds it interesting to note that Brooks, who has written several articles on readers theatre, in a 1963 article suggested the readers "should not lose their own identities to the extent that they 'become' a character,"

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[52] Geiger, op. cit., p. 86. [53] Crocker and Eich, op. cit., p. 59.

[54] Chloe Armstrong and Paul D. Brandes, The Oral Interpretation of Literature (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, Inc. 1963), p. 293.

[55] Bacon, op. cit., p. 306.

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[56]Brooks, Henderhan
[57]Brooks and Bielen
[58]Coger and White,
[59]Monroe, op. cit.,

and recommended only symbolic or suggestive costume and scenery be used,[56] but in his 1966 article on professional productions of Readers Theatre, included such presentations as Mark Twain Tonight!, Williams' Dickens programs, Drums Under the Window, and Dear Liar.[57] The first two productions were undeniably impersonations and the latter two used elements of costume and scenery which one might argue were more literal than symbolic or suggestive.

Coger and White acknowledge the wide variety of techniques utilized in professional productions. They found that the performers ranged from actors on stools with scripts on lecterns in front of them to readers who had their lines memorized, moved freely about the stage, and used tables and chairs. They concluded that oral interpretation in the professional theatre was in the experimental stages and that consequently there was "no one established form of presentation."[58] Monroe reports professional group readings have exhibited the following characteristics: "a bare stage, a full set; anonymous dress, complete costume; restricted physical movement, free use of the stage; no character interaction, clear character relationship; impression of character, representations of character."[59] Linn, in his dissertation on oral interpretation as a form of professional theatre in London, included "just about everything that might reasonably be advanced as

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[56] Brooks, Henderhan and Billings, loc. cit.

[57] Brooks and Bielenberg, op. cit., pp. 288-302.

[58] Coger and White, op. cit., p. 15.

[59] Monroe, op. cit., p. 41.

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[60] Linn, op. cit., p

similar to oral interpretation in its broadest definition."[60]

For purposes of this study, oral interpretation will be defined as the recreation of a literary experience in the mind of the listener, which is achieved primarily through the aural aspects of the presentation. Productions which require the audience to make extensive use of their imagination, or productions which engender critical commentary emphasizing the language or the images and illusions conjured up in the minds of the listeners will be considered. The problem of what to include is made more difficult by the fact that critics occasionally use certain productions which might be considered outside the definition of oral interpretation as the basis for comparison in their consideration of other presentations which can definitely be classified as oral interpretation. For example, Emlyn Williams' impersonation of Charles Dickens was referred to in several reviews of subsequent one-man performances. Comparisons were made between Sir John Gielgud's Ages of Man and Hal Holbrook's impersonation of Mark Twain. Since this study is intended to provide a comprehensive picture of professional oral interpretation, it seemed necessary to the writer to include productions closely akin to oral interpretation, though perhaps not actually a part of it.

The study is limited to works which have been produced within the twenty-year period following World War II. Because New York is considered generally to be the center of professional theatre in the United States, and the goal toward which most writers, directors, and performers aspire, this study will be limited geographically to New York.

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[60] Linn, op. cit., p. 18.

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V. Methods and Procedures

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Further limitations rule out productions not given in a commercial theatre and not intended for more than two performances. The purpose of these limitations is to eliminate productions done as benefits or special memorial performances which, though done by professionals, were novelties rather than a regular professional theatre production. These limitations have been relaxed to include productions which seem to have been important in the overall picture of professional oral interpretation, such as Under Milk Wood and the two Readers Theatre Incorporated presentations. Exceptions have also been made in cases where the productions attracted considerable attention from the New York theatre critics and later appeared commercially for a longer run. A final limitation requires that the production must have warranted an article or review in the New York Times. This newspaper is regarded by many as the most prominent one in America. It seems reasonable to assume that any production of significance would have been considered in the theatre section of the New York Times.

V. Methods and Procedures

The first step of the study involved an examination of the lists of plays produced each year to discover which of them fit the definition of oral interpretation. Theatre World offers a yearly listing of Broadway and off-Broadway productions since 1950, and usually gives some indication as to the type of production. In addition, the daily theatre column of the New York Times and the weekly theatre reports of Variety were searched for possible oral interpretation presentations.

A tentative list was compiled of productions which seemed to fit the definition and information was collected on each one.

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Critical reviews provided the bulk of the information. The reviews for the productions which appeared on Broadway were found in the annual editions of the New York Theatre Critics' Reviews. Reviews for the off-Broadway productions and additional reviews for the Broadway presentations were found in the vertical files and the yearly scrapbooks of clippings located in the Theatre Collection at Lincoln Center in New York City. The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature was consulted for articles about the productions and the performers. Biographies of actors who appeared in presentations of this nature were examined.

Letters were sent to seventy-one people involved in various aspects of these productions. Twenty-eight replies were received, of which twenty were extremely valuable. Letters were also sent to twenty-three critics who had reviewed a number of the productions over a period of years. The percentage of responses was disappointing, with only seven of the reviewers answering, but very helpful letters were received from Walter Kerr, John Beaufort, and Brooks Atkinson.

After most of the material was gathered, the productions were divided into groups, primarily on the basis of the material used. The two Readers Theatre Incorporated presentations were considered separately, as were the two Laughton-Gregory productions. The productions within each group were further divided into solo and group presentations, and then considered chronologically. Each production was examined, insofar as information permitted, with regard to: 1) setting and accessories, 2) classification by the critics, 3) manner of presentation, 4) critical verdict, 5) acting, 6) material, 7) special features, and 8) comparison to previous productions.

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Because oral interpretation productions frequently differ from regular theatre in terms of the material they use as well as in some aspects of the manner of presentation, it would be extremely difficult to try to apply the traditional Aristotelian concepts to them. The eight-point approach outlined above will provide consistency in the treatment of the material and will facilitate comparisons between the productions.

Nearly all the reviews considered the first seven points. Frequently the stage setting was the first aspect of the production the critics concerned themselves with, and it seemed to have been quite influential in determining how they classified the presentation. If the setting consisted only of stools and lecterns, most of the critics called the proceedings some variety of a "reading". If the setting was less sparce, there was a wider range of labels employed.

The classification of the production was also influenced by the manner of presentation, though not to as great an extent as one might expect. The critics occasionally wrote explicitly that the performer or performers had read from manuscript, but still did not call the production a reading. The section on manner of presentation should indicate whether manuscript was used, and to what extent the performer or performers employed movement and gesture. Unfortunately, the critics were not always as thorough in their discussion of this aspect of the presentation as the writer would have liked them to be.

The critical verdict presented the reviewers' reactions to the productions and their recommendations to their readers as to who would or would not appreciate it. The critics usually liked or disliked the presentation on the basis of the acting and/or the material. The term

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"acting" was used to discuss the performances because most of the reviewers consistently called the performers "actors" even though they described the production as a "reading" and wrote of the "skillful readings." Perhaps this was because many of the performers were well-known actors and the critics may have found it difficult to think of them in other terms.

The discussion of material considered the various types of literature used, the theme or central idea around which it was organized, the critics' evaluation of the literary material, and how well the critics thought the material suited the manner of presentation. Several of the productions had special effects, most often musical interludes or background music. The last point, comparison to previous productions, was not consistently discussed in the reviews, but occasionally a critic would point out the similarities or differences between a certain production and an earlier one. The writer hoped this section might suggest which productions the reviewers considered the most significant and whether or not the reviewers considered this type of presentation as a separate and distinct type of performance, or as a form of theatre.

VI. Preview of Remaining Chapters

Chapter II will deal with the two earliest examples of oral interpretation, the Readers Theatre presentations of Oedipus Rex and The Mayor of Zalamea, and attempt to assess the implications in the critical commentary for later productions. Chapter III will consider the Laughton-Gregory productions, Don Juan in Hell and John Brown's Body and attempt to explain the reasons for their success. Chapter IV

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will discuss productions which present material from several authors concerning a specific theme or idea. It includes: An Evening of European Theatre; Five Queens; When I Was a Child; The Hollow Crown; In White America; and The Golden Age. Chapter V will treat collections of material from a single author. These productions include: a solo and a group presentation of Spoon River Anthology; Ages of Man; Emlyn Williams' two Dickens programs, Mark Twain Tonight!; Theatre of Peretz; and The World of Carl Sandburg. Chapter VI will examine productions which present experiences from the author's life as well as his works. Included in this group are A Boy Growing Up; A Lovely Light; The Importance of Being Oscar; The Brontes; the three dramatizations from O'Casey's autobiography, I Knock at the Door, Pictures in the Hallway, Drums Under the Windows; Brecht on Brecht; and An Evening's Frost. Chapter VII deals with the remaining productions which did not fit in the earlier chapters because of the type of material they used. These were: Moby Dick, Under Milk Wood, U.S.A., Dear Liar, and Telemachus Clay. Chapter VIII will offer conclusions and summaries, and suggestions for further study.

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[1] Eugene Bahn, "Inte
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[3] Theresa Murphy an
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[4] Stanley T. Donner
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CHAPTER II

READERS THEATRE INCORPORATED

Oral interpretation is not a new phenomenon. It can be traced back as far as sixth century Greece, and may be much older than that.[1] In America, "readings" became popular in the middle of the nineteenth century, when theatrical luminaries such as James E. Murdock, Edwin Forrest, Edwin Booth, Mrs. Scott-Siddons, Fanny Kemble, and Charlotte Cushman, motivated by reasons ranging from the need to supplement their acting incomes to a genuine desire to share what they considered to be outstanding literature, appeared on stages and in lecture halls to read abbreviated versions of plays or excerpts from several plays.[2]

Besides the actors and actresses who traveled throughout the country presenting "readings," some of the well-known authors of that period achieved fame and fortune by reading their own works. Two literary greats who became widely recognized for their interpretive talents were Charles Dickens[3] and Mark Twain.[4]

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[1] Eugene Bahn, "Interpretative Reading in Ancient Greece," Quarterly Journal of Speech, June, 1932, pp. 434-436.

[2] Elizabeth Annette Monroe, "The Group Reading of Drama: Its Essence and Aesthetic Principles" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1962), pp. 2-3.

[3] Theresa Murphy and Richard Murphy, "Charles Dickens as Professional Reader," Quarterly Journal of Speech, October, 1947, p. 301.

[4] Stanley T. Donner, "Mark Twain as a Reader," Quarterly Journal of Speech, October, 1947, p. 308.

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[5]Nydia Joan Reynol
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[6]New York Times,

Professional readers were a popular feature of the Chautauqua Circuit during the last part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century. However, with the advent of radio and motion pictures, the popularity of Chautauqua faded rapidly.[5] Oral interpretation may have continued on a limited basis after the decline of Chautauqua, but it did not achieve prominence again until after World War II. The first postwar presentations to attract critical attention were the Readers Theatre productions of Oedipus Rex and The Mayor of Zalamea.

The theatre column of the November 11, 1945 issue of the New York Times contained a brief referrence to the formation of a group called Readers Theatre Incorporated.[6] On December 16, 1945, Readers Theatre Incorporated presented Oedipus Rex for a matinee and an evening performance. Six weeks later, The Mayor of Zalamea was presented for two performances under the auspices of the same organization. This play was also intended only for a matinee and an evening performance. Although the limited run violates the criterion of this study which requires that only productions intended for more than two performances were to be considered, the writer decided to include these productions for three reasons. First, they were the only oral interpretation productions to attract critical attention prior to Don Juan in Hell, second, the critical comments engendered by these presentations seemed to be of significance for later productions, and third, the instigators

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[5] Nydia Joan Reynolds, "A Lively Art," Today's Speech, April, 1961, p. 15.

[6] New York Times, November 11, 1945, Sec. II, p. 2.

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[7]George Jean Nath
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[8]Letter from Joel

[9]Variety, Decembe

[10]New York Times,

[11]Eugene O'Neill,
York Times, December 16

of the project suggested that the reading approach would "bring out the hidden magic of the spoken word,"[7] an advantage frequently claimed by oral interpretation productions.

Joel W. Schenker, one of the founders of Readers Theatre Incorporated, explained the intentions of the group as follows:

> The Readers' Theatre was created by James Light, Eugene O'Neill, [Jr.] and myself. We were younger and persuaded that Broadway would never produce many great plays that lingered on the shelves, and we conceived the notion (long before the modern recital craze) that we could get artists to appear and read these plays with a minimum of rehearsal--performing them for the public at reduced rates on Sunday matinees.[8]

The project attracted the interest and support of some important members of the theatrical community. Actors' Equity and the theatrical unions cooperated by relaxing many of their rules--thus permitting the productions to be presented at minimum cost. (However, Eugene O'Neill, Jr., who served as narrator in the productions, was required to become a member of Actors' Equity.)[9] Lee Shubert donated the use of his Majestic Theatre for the performances.[10] The theatre staff of the New York Times provided free publicity by frequent reports on the progress of the venture. A lengthy article about the presentation, written by O'Neill Jr., appeared on the front page of the Sunday theatre section of December 16, 1945,[11] the day of the first production, William Butler Yeats' translation of Oedipus Rex.

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[7]George Jean Nathan, The Theatre Book of the Year. 1945-1946 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), p. 292.

[8]Letter from Joel W. Schenker to the author, March 21, 1967.

[9]Variety, December 19, 1945, p. 44.

[10]New York Times, November 11, 1945, Sec. II, p. 2.

[11]Eugene O'Neill, Jr., "One Solid Vote for the 'Audio'," New York Times, December 16, 1945, Sec. II, p. 3.

Setting and Accessories

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[12]Euphemia Van Ren

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[13]Wilalla Waldorf.

[14]Lewis Kronenberg

Oedipus Rex

Setting and Accessories

The stage was totally bare, with the exception of chairs placed in a semicircle. No attempt was made to provide any sort of atmospheric lighting. The cast wore street clothes.[12]

Classification

All of the ten critics whose reviews were available utilized the verb "reading" in their stories. This is hardly surprising in view of the fact the initiators of the project had gone to some lengths to publicize the fact that the plays were to be read. What is of interest, however, is that two of the critics, Waldorf[13] and Kronenberger[14] used "reading" as a descriptive term to classify the production. Kronenberger set the term off in quotes and prefaced his critique by stating the "reading" should be judged in light of what it was and what it was trying to accomplish rather than how it compared to a regular production. He was the only critic to suggest that a "reading" was a different mode of presentation and required a different set of criteria to pass judgment.

Several of the reviews referred to the production as "an innovation," "something new," and "an experiment." The most lengthy discussion of its novelty came from Burton Roscoe, who wrote:

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[12] Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt, Catholic World, February, 1946, p. 457.

[13] Wilalla Waldorf, New York Post, December 17, 1945.

[14] Lewis Kronenberger, P.M. New York, December 17, 1945.

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Verdict

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[15]Burton Roscoe, N

[16]Cars., Variety,

[17]George Freedley,

[18]Kronenberger, Jo

> Of course, readings from the classics by individuals of stage presence and elocutionary talent have long been a standard kind of cultural fare among the women's clubs and on the Chautauqua and lecture circuits. But the reading of a full length play from manuscript by a complete cast in street clothes without make up on a practically bare stage before a paying audience is a stunt I can't recall having heard of before.[15]

The Variety critic was at a loss as to how to classify the production. He characterized it as "neither fish, flesh, nor gory drama, but all of these plus a taste of ham."[16]

Manner of Presentation

The cast consisted of narrator-stage manager Eugene O'Neill Jr., and fourteen actors. O'Neill, located at one corner of the stage, gave introductory and explanatory remarks.[17] The actors rose from their chairs, moved down center, delivered their lines, script in hand, and then returned to their chairs.[18] Although all of the performers carried scripts, there was a considerable discrepancy in the degree to which the scripts were used. This discrepancy was the cause of a good deal of negative criticism.

Verdict

A respectable contingent of critics turned out to watch the actors read Oedipus Rex. Most of them acknowledged that the idea of Readers Theatre, (to present the masterpieces in an inexpensive way), was an admirable one, but of the ten critics who reviewed the production in detail, none gave it an unqualified endorsement. Five of the

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[15]Burton Roscoe, New York World Telegraph, December 17, 1945.

[16]Cars., Variety, December 19, 1945, p. 44.

[17]George Freedley, New York Morning Telegraph, December 18, 1945.

[18]Kronenberger, loc. cit.

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[19]Wolcott Gibbs, T

[20]Robert Sylveste

[21]Freedley, loc. c

[22]Wyatt, loc. cit.

critics appeared to like it, but with various reservations and numerous suggestions for improvements in future productions. One critic wrote such an ambiguous review that it was impossible to ascertain whether she approved or disapproved of it. The other four critics did not like the presentation.

Gibbs reported that, "on the whole, it was a stimulating evening."[19] Sylvester urged Daily News readers to buy tickets, although he thought the prices were too high for what was being offered.[20] Freedley described the project as well worthwhile.[21] Waldorf also thought the idea was a good one, but she expressed the opinion that future productions needed to make a great many improvements.[22]

Eupheinia Van Rensselaer Wyatt announced that the readers had proved a play must be read aloud to be appreciated. However, in the same sentence she complained about "having to look at the stage, where the poetry of every line was challenged by the harsh lights, the sordid congeries of chairs, the actors in every variety of suits." She went on to admit she sorely missed the conventional stage trappings and that when she tried to blot out the bright lights, unsightly chairs, and motley attired actors by closing her eyes, she only succeeded in falling asleep.[23] It is difficult, in view of her complaints to understand just how the readers managed to convince her a play must be read aloud to be appreciated.

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[19]Wolcott Gibbs, The New Yorker, December 29, 1945, p. 34.

[20]Robert Sylvester, New York Daily News, December 17, 1945.

[21]Freedley, loc. cit. [22]Waldorf, loc. cit.

[23]Wyatt, loc. cit.

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[24]Arthur Pollack,

[25] Roscoe, loc. c

[26]Lewis Nichols,

[27]Cars., loc. ci

Pollock found the play "pretty dull."[24] Roscoe expressed a preference for creating his own mental images of the characters as he read the play in the privacy of his own home. He had no particular complaints about the way the cast had interpreted their parts, but he maintained he found his imagined version of the characters and their actions more satisfactory.[25]

Nichols admitted the performance could probably be termed interesting, but thought it was somewhat less than satisfactory. He concluded his remarks by observing experiments occasionally appeared slightly ridiculous, and that Oedipus Rex was no exception.[26] The Variety critic also termed the proceedingsinteresting. However, he was distressed that, besides dispensing with sets, costumes and lighting, the production also had dispensed with two other aspects of good theatre--"memorization of lines and uniformity of direction."[27]

There was a rationale behind the actors not having their lines memorized, but there was no justification for the lack of a uniformity of direction. Waldorf took director James Light to task for his apparent inability to decide whether the performance was to be a reading, a performance, or both.[28] The lack of a definite style on the part of the director resulted in a wide range of acting styles. Most of the critics centered their discussion of the acting on these discrepancies of style.

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[24] Arthur Pollack, Brooklyn Daily Eagle, December 17, 1945.

[25] Roscoe, loc. cit.

[26] Lewis Nichols, New York Times, December 17, 1945, p. 16.

[27] Cars., loc. cit. [28] Waldorf, loc. cit.

Acting

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[29]Gibbs, loc. cit

[31]Kronenberger, l

Acting

Gibbs reported that each actor proceeded according to his own notion of how tragedy should be played. Frederic Tozere, as Oedipus, gave what Gibbs described as a polite, "somehow suburban" performance while Blanche Yurka portrayed Jocasta in a manner:

> . . .that might occasionally have been mistaken for an imitation of Judith Anderson as Lady Macbeth. It was in the grand manner, the voice originating in the shoes and the gestures those of fate itself.
>
> Clearly puzzled by these extremes, the rest of the cast offered a variety of interpretations, from flat, unaccented discourse to a sound like thunder, and most of them were rather handicapped by the fact that a player referring to a manuscript through reading glasses and then peering uncertainly over the tops of them at his vis a vis is something less than Greek.
>
> The most unusual effort was contributed by the Second Messenger, who, conceivably scenting a talent scout in the house, ignored his script, shook his abundent hair down over his face and proceeded to give what looked like a parody of the delirium--tremens sequence in the Lost Weekend. He startled me--not, as a rule, an easy thing to do.[29]

Sylvester praised the cast as being first rate--but noted that "some of them read their roles straight out and some of them managed to add a little acting from memory.[30] Kronenberger was not impressed with the cast as individuals or as an ensemble. He was particularly disturbed with Frederic Tozere, finding his interpretation of Oedipus to be very prosaic and unroyal rendition, while at the other end of the continuum was Blanche Yurka, who "read like the tragedy queen she was" and added some acting to her reading. In between these two extremes ranged the rest of the cast. Kronenberger concluded by stating that any of the 'in-betweens' styles might have been effective if universally adopted.[31]

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[29]Gibbs, loc. cit. [30]Sylvester, loc. cit.

[31]Kronenberger, loc. cit.

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[32]Nichols, loc. c

[34]Freedley, loc.

Nichols reported Miss Yurka was "highly intense," Mr. Tozere "wrung the hand not holding the script," while others "just read in a matter-of-fact way, which probably was best."[32] The critic for Variety complained that the members of the cast performed according to their individual whims. "One orated, another read almost monotonously, a third acted (and well, as in Blanche Yurka's case), while still another, as in the case of Frederic Tozere, seemingly couldn't decide and combined several styles of reading and acting."[33]

Freedley thought Tozere was quite moving in the role of Oedipus, and credited him with having done more acting than the other members of the cast. The Second Messenger, who had met with Wolcott Gibbs' immense displeasure as mentioned above, was singled out by Freedley as having won "deserved applause."[34]

Wyatt, the contradictory critic of the The Catholic World, credited the entire cast with having given excellent readings. Her evaluation of Tozere's performance was an interesting one.

> Frederic Tozere imparted a new angle to Oedipus, consciously or unconsciously and made his insistence for the truth in the face of everyone's warning as fatuous as a 19th century moralist. His tragedy was not so much a strong man broken as a weak man trapped by his own self-righteousness.[35]

This would have constituted a distinct departure from the traditional approach to the role of Oedipus, but aside from mentioning it, Wyatt made no judgement as to whether she found it effective, disturbing, or ridiculous.

Five of the reviewers expressed dissatisfaction with Tozere's

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[32]Nichols, loc. cit. [33]Cars., loc. cit.

[34]Freedley, loc. cit. [35]Wyatt, loc. cit.

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[36] Gibbs, loc. cit., and Wal

[37] Freedley, loc. cit. [38]

portrayal of Oedipus, although Gibbs and Waldrof hastened to soften their censure by adding that Tozere was one of Broadway's finest actors.[36] Only one reporter, Freedley, praised his performance.[37]

Several of the critics singled out Henry Irving (Tiresias), as being exceptionally effective. Blanche Yurka was frequently mentioned with varying degrees of enthusiasm.

Besides the commentary regarding the style of the performers, most reviewers concerned themselves with Eugene O'Neill Jr.'s efforts as a narrator. It was his responsibility to introduce the play, set the scene, and provide any necessary information during the course of the play. Young O'Neill seemed an excellent choice for this particular production. Not only was he well-rounded in theatre, he was an assistant professor in Greek at Yale.

His introductory remarks were intended to put the audience in the proper frame of mind to appreciate what they were about to see. To accomplish this, O'Neill addressed the audience as "fellow Athenians" and suggested they imagine themselves as Athenians attending the tragedy Oedipus Rex at the Theatre of Dionysos.

Two of the reviewers felt that these introductory remarks were more suited to O'Neill's classroom than to the theatre. One wrote that it was not so much of a narration or introduction as it was a lecture, and that, like most lectures, it was much too long.[38] Another reviewer complained that the speech was "ornamented with several small, doomed jokes having a classroom flavor,"[39] but he

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[36]Gibbs, loc. cit., and Waldorf, loc.,cit.

[37]Freedley, loc. cit. [38]Cars., loc. cit. [39]Gibbs, loc. cit.

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[40] Waldorf, loc. cit.

[42] Sylvester, loc. cit.

[45] Gibbs, loc. cit.

admitted the remarks served their purpose by letting the audience know what they were in for.

Wilella Waldorf took issue with O'Neill's jocular attempt to persuade the audience to imagine themselves as Athenians. She maintained the audience should have been considered just what they were--"New Yorkers who have come to hear a piece of dramatic literature well read."[40] Kronenberger thought the introductory enlightenment was "excessive and a trifle condescending."[41]

Sylvester, on the other hand, found the text both colorful and humorous.[42] Freedley reported O'Neill's reading was extremely effective and that the concept of a narrator was "basically" a good one.[43] He did not elaborate on his qualification. No objections were raised about the use of a narrator. The criticism was primarily concerned with the appropriateness of the information he gave.

Three of the critics took note of audience reaction. Two of them were convinced that the audience had been dissatisfied with what they saw, while one critic hedged a bit, saying that the audience was "generally" attentive and interested.[44] Critic Gibbs described the audience (which he thought resembled refugees from a baseball park), "depressed and irritable about this sudden excursion into culture at $2.40 top."[45] The World Telegraph reporter characterized the audience as "puzzled," and suspected that many of them had been expecting a different sort of production.[46]

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[40]Waldorf, loc. cit. [41]Kronenberger, loc. cit.
[42]Sylvester, loc. cit. [43]Freedley, loc. cit. [44]Ibid.
[45]Gibbs, loc. cit. [46]Roscoe, loc. cit.

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[47] Pollock, loc. cit.

[48] Freedley, loc. cit.

[49] Roscoe, loc. cit.

Material

Only four of the critics concerned themselves with the material. One expressed the opinion less familiar plays would be more interesting.[47] Another thought the Yeats' English version of Oedipus Rex was "uncommonly" good."[48]

Two critics wrote specifically of the suitability of the material for the manner of presentation accorded it. Freedley thought it "worked out well,"[49] and Kronenberger attempted to explain why it worked well.

> "Oedipus Rex" . . . [is] a play which more than most others lends itself to being read rather than acted. Its appeal rests, not on action in the modern sense, but on an intensity and severity of form and development that the modern world has lost; it is compact as dynamite and inexorable as doom.[50]

Comparisons

Only two critics attempted to compare the presentation with anything else. Roscoe noted readings from the classics had been done by individuals on the Chatauqua and lecture circuits, but he was unfamiliar with any sort of group reading of drama.[51] Nichols noted the similarity between the reading of a play on the bare stage and the reading of a play on the radio. He felt that the radio reading was more effective because there were no actors in everyday clothes visible to disrupt whatever illusions the audience might be able to create while listening to the voices.[52]

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[47]Pollock, loc. cit. [48]Waldorf, loc. cit.

[49]Freedley, loc. cit. [50]Kronenberger, loc. cit.

[51]Roscoe, loc. cit. [52]Nichols, loc. cit.

Recommendations

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[53] Wyatt, loc. cit.

[55] Aronenberger, loc.

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[56] Waldorf, loc. cit.

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Recommendations

Six of the reviewers had specific suggestions for future performances in addition to the need for a unified acting style discussed above. These other suggestions covered a multitude of production aspects. The recommendation was made that the actors wear dinner clothes to give the proceedings an air of homogeneity impossible to achieve with actors wearing various varieties of street clothes.[53] Skillful and imaginative lighting was proposed as a means of achieving at least a partial illusion. It was suggested the lighting be used to create the effect of the performers being merely voices, or voices with only faces visible. Shadows were recommended as areas where readers might disappear when they were not involved in the reading.[54]

Another suggestion for achieving illusion came from Kronenberger, who complained that the lack of stage patterns had created an effect similar to that of watching speakers at a rally. He suggested the director should make some attempt to position the actors rather than have them just move down center to read and then back up to their chairs.[55]

Waldorf called for the elimination of all elements of what she described as "acting out" in the style of the performers and in the production itself. She insisted the concentration should be "on reading for the reading's sake--and also for the sake of the play."[56]

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[53]Wyatt, loc. cit. [54]Pollock, loc. cit.

[55]Kronenberger, loc. cit. Kronenberger warned that the type of staging used for Oedipus Rex would be even more detrimental to a longer and more uneven play.

[56]Waldorf, loc. cit. Waldorf had objected to certain aspects of Oedipus Rex which she felt came closer to performance than to reading, such as the introduction of the King's children for him to weep over.

The next Readers Theatre p
the reviews of Oedipus Rex, was
scheduled for two weeks later, D
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Readers Theatre presentation fi
It was The Mayor of Zalamea.
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Settings and Accessories

Pollock was pleased to
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Classification

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57 Marjorie Barkentin
Readers Theatre vertical f
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58 Arthur Pollock, B

The next Readers Theatre production, as reported in several of the reviews of Oedipus Rex, was to be The Mayor of Zalamea and was scheduled for two weeks later, December 30, 1945. An undated press release announced that unforseen difficulties in casting, illness of several of the contemplated players, and the sudden departure for Hollywood of another prospective cast member had resulted in the abandonment of plans to present The Mayor of Zalamea. Instead, Tis Pity She's a Whore would be the next play.[57] However, when the second Readers Theatre presentation finally appeared on January 27, 1946, it was The Mayor of Zalamea. No explanation was found as to what happened to Tis Pity She's a Whore.

The Mayor of Zalamea

Settings and Accessories

Pollock was pleased to see his suggestion that an attempt be made to provide some degree of illusion had been adapted. He felt the use of softer lights, a brown back drop and black drapes at the side of the stage provided a much more pleasing setting for the seventeenth-century drama by the Spanish playwright Calderon.[58] This time there were no chairs on stage.

Classification

There was no discussion as to what this production should be called. In most reviews it was simply referred to as the Readers Theatre.

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[57]Marjorie Barkentine, in an undated press release found in the Readers Theatre vertical file in the Theatre Collection at the Museum of the Performing Arts in Lincoln Center.

[58]Arthur Pollock, Brooklyn Daily Eagle, January 29, 1946.

Manner of Presentation

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Verdict

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Acting

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Variety found the acting muc
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[59] Louis Kronenberger
[60] Pollock, loc. cit.
[61] George Freedley, N

Manner of Presentation

Several of the suggestions regarding the manner of presentation had been accepted. As Kronenberger noted, "The performers this time stayed out of sight when they were not involved in the play; they did not stride awkwardly up to the center of the stage, when they were [involved in the play]; there was a greater uniformity of style."[59]

Verdict

Fewer critics concerned themselves with this second effort. Only three papers and two periodicals gave the production more than cursory mention. These critics were quick to acknowledge the improvements which had been made. Pollock wrote, "If the Readers Theatre did not come off very well when it began life a few weeks ago, with a reading of Oedipus Rex . . . it justified itself nicely in its second try."[60] Freedley announced that the Readers Theatre had hit its stride with this production.[61] Most of the critics spoke of the mechanics being much smoother this time.

Acting

The acting had also improved considerably. The critic for Variety found the acting much more consistent and the overall performance much better than the previous presentation. However, he was displeased with Herbert Berghof's portrayal of the mayor. He

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[59]Louis Kronenberger, P.M. New York, January 28, 1946.

[60]Pollock, loc. cit.

[61]George Freedley, New York Morning Telegraph, January 29, 1946.

noted that reading could be over
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Material

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[62] L. N., Variety, Jan

[63] Euphemia Van Rensse
p. 534.

[64] Pollock, loc. cit.

[66] L. N., loc. cit.

noted that reading could be over done just as acting could be over done.[62] Wyatt, on the other hand, found Berghof's portrait of the mayor superb.[63] Pollock did not discuss the performers individually but he wrote that the acting was much more spirited and more closely related to the proceedings than had been the case in the previous production.[64]

Material

The critics were divided as to the suitability of the material. Kronenberger, who had approved of Oedipus Rex as a play which profited from the reading type of presentation, found the Calderon play unsatisfactory: "The play itself was not too rewarding a choice . . . a dated sometimes even stilted literary style. Since the power of a reading version must come largely from the language, this proved a point of some importance."[65] The Variety critic felt the manner of presentation enhanced neither the story nor the language.[66]

On the other hand, Freedley found the play "the chief pleasure" and characterized it as "truly moving and amazingly modern."[67] Wyatt wrote that she was unfamiliar with the play, but found it most rewarding and thought the characters were extremely interesting.[68]

Despite the general agreement regarding the improved quality of the second production, it proved to be the last endeavor of the Readers

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[62] L. N., Variety, January 28, 1946.

[63] Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt, Catholic World, March, 1946, p. 554.

[64] Pollock, loc. cit. [65] Kronenberger, loc. cit.

[66] L. N., loc. cit. [67] Freedley, loc. cit. [68] Wyatt, loc. cit.

Theatre. Attendance dropped sha
which had attended Oedipus Rex.

With the production of The
dropped abruptly from view. No
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which might have been expected

Joel Schenker wrote that
"gave up the ghost when the mor
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Recommendations

Two well known critics
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of the past. Young was quit
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50 Schenker, loc. cit

70 Letter from Blanch

Theatre. Attendance dropped sharply from the near capacity crowds which had attended Oedipus Rex.

With the production of The Mayor of Zalamea, the Readers Theatre dropped abruptly from view. No discussion of its demise was found in the theatre column of the New York Times or in any of the other sources which might have been expected to report on it.

Joel Schenker wrote that they failed to find an audience and "gave up the ghost when the money ran out." Schenker, who financed the project, recalled that he lost his total capital.[69] Blanche Yurka surmised that Readers Theatre failed to attract public support because the productions were "not exciting enough."[70]

Recommendations

Two well known critics of the time, Stark Young and George Jean Nathan, wrote about the Readers Theatre concept after the second production--apparently with no inkling that it was a thing of the past. Young was quite positive about the possibilities of such a venture. He felt that this sort of scheme might be the answer to the rising cost of production and to the shortage of skilled actors and directors. He felt that the quality of the presentations needed to be improved and he offered some suggestions for achieving this. He believed that more acting should be introduced rather than allowing the entire effort to be "mere reading." He suggested the director should attempt to work the presentation up to a dress rehearsal

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[69]Schenker, loc. cit.

[70]Letter from Blanche Yurka to the author, June 4, 1968.

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[71] Stark Young, New R

[72] Nathan, op. cit.,

for a regular production, with actors having their lines well in mind and the script serving primarily as a stage property. Young believed that this sort of improvement was essential to a successful continuation of this "admirable enterprise."[71]

George Jean Nathan was willing to grant that the idea of Readers Theatre sounded good on paper and that, if expertly read and expertly directed, it might possibly produce satisfactory results. However, the rest of his comments were uniformly negative. As far as he was concerned, the two plays had been cast with anything but the promised professional players of the first rank, and nothing in the way of skilled direction had been visible.

> All that the Readers Theatre has done as promised is to have presented plays "without the physical accessories and services which account for the larger share of the costs of the regular productions," which it is to be suspected, are rather necessary to them.
>
> What the Readers Theatre has accomplished, in short, is little more than the old Town Hall, Women's Club and Chautauqua solo sort of thing multiplied by eight or ten. That sort of thing once flooded the land and, was responsible for some pretty dreadful evenings.[72]

Nathan noted that there was no accounting for taste and cited two supposedly knowledgeable and literate people, Harrison Smith, publisher of the Saturday Review of Literature and actress Fania Marinoff, who found the Readers Theatre productions stimulating and satisfying. Nathan admitted that there had been others who reacted favorably to the presentations, but hastened to explain at great lengths why he was not one of them.

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[71] Stark Young, New Republic, February 11, 1946, p. 189.

[72] Nathan, op. cit., p. 294.

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Nathan did set down some

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[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

> I have, I think, an imagination as puissant as the next man. I don't need tons of scenery and costumes to massage my fancy into proper action. But I can get a whole lot more of the classics' word magic from a library chair reading than from a bleak platform peopled by a number of men in Broadway business suits and women in dowdy street dresses all carrying scripts and giving out with unorchestrated elocution and periodic high-school gestures. I can also, I confess, get a deal more out of Mielziner, Jones and Chaney scenery, even when it isn't all that it should be, than out of a narrator with whiskers describing what isn't there. And I can, besmirch me, get still more out of a scene transition under my own reading lamp in my own lounging room than out of any half dozen such lecturers interposing themselves between the book and me.[73]

Nathan did set down some sensible criteria for future attempts. He insisted the readers needed to have voices at least comparable to those of actors on the stage in terms of power and eloquence; that the limited pantomime must be superior to action on the stage; and that the power of suggestion must be vastly superior in a reading. He concluded his remarks by stating his approval of experimentation, but condemning the Readers Theatre experiment as being "ill wrought" though "well considered."[74]

Summary

The Readers Theatre utilized an unusual method of presentation for its time: actors reading from scripts, no make-up or costumes, and nothing in the way of scenery. The main purpose of this mode of presentation, as stated by its instigators, was an economic one--to present plays which would not normally be produced because of prohibitive staging costs and unlikely box office appeal. It was also suggested this means of presentation might afford the opportunity to

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[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

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Six of the reviewers noted

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October 22, 1951, when the

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[75] Kronenberger, loc.

[77] Nichols, loc. cit

better appreciate the beauty of the spoken word, uncluttered by distracting stage properties, scenery, or costumed performers.

Six of the reviewers noted the novelty of the manner of presentation. One critic saw a need for a different set of criteria to evaluate this type of production.[75] However, for the most part, the criticism leveled at the productions, and particularly the initial production, might have been applied to a poorly done play. The negative criticism was not focused on the mode of presentation, but rather upon the unprofessional aspects of the production.

The majority of critics apparently did not regard the readings as a separate form of entertainment, but rather, as a form of theatre which had not been entirely successful, (particularly in the case of Oedipus Rex), in its use of theatrical techniques and accessories. Freedley described The Mayor of Zalamea as "good theatrical entertainment."[76] Two critics questioned whether the readings should be considered theatre. Nichols wrote that Oedipus Rex, "as an hour or two at the theatre, . . . seemed somewhat less than satisfactory."[77] The Variety critic thought The Mayor of Zalamea was an improvement over Oedipus Rex, but complained that "a group of actors reading a play is still not full-blooded theatre."[78]

Oedipus Rex and The Mayor of Zalamea must be classified as commercial and artistic failures. No further oral interpretation presentations of significance appeared on the New York stage until October 22, 1951, when the First Drama Quartet presented Don Juan in Hell at Carnegie Hall.

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[75]Kronenberger, loc. cit. [76]Freedley, loc. cit.

[77]Nichols, loc. cit. [78]L. N., loc. cit.

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Times, March 23, 1952, Sec

CHAPTER III

THE LAUGHTON-GREGORY PRODUCTIONS

Charles Laughton became interested in the profession possibilities of oral interpretation during World War II when he started reading to wounded soldiers in various hospitals. His readings were so popular with the soldiers that he began to wonder if there were others who would be interested in hearing readings from the Bible, Shakespeare, and other literary masterpieces. His advisers discouraged him, saying that there was no audience for that sort of entertainment, and since, as Laughton himself admitted, he could not organize a rabbit hutch, he temporarily abandoned the idea.

Shortly after World War II, an enterprising young businessman named Paul Gregory saw Laughton read a selection from the Bible on a television program. He was so impressed with the possibilities of this form of presentation that he managed to corner Laughton the next morning and proposed a partnership. Under Gregory's management, Laughton successfully toured the United States for a few years, finding a large audience anxious for high quality entertainment.[1]

The idea for the First Drama Quartet originated with Dr. Albert Rappaport who, after hearing a Laughton reading in San Francisco,

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[1]Charles Laughton, "How Mr. Laughton Became the Devil," New York Times, March 23, 1952, Sec. VI, p. 21.

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2 Kurt Singer, The C
Sons, Ltd., 1954), p. 256

approached Gregory and asked about "the possibility of a drama quartet, four people, like Laughton, to read a whole play."[2] Gregory suggested the idea to Laughton as the two were on their way to a reading engagement in Canada. Laughton was intrigued with the suggestion, and after much brain-searching came up with a play he thought would be suitable. The "play" was actually the third act of George Bernard Shaw's Man and Superman. The act, rarely performed because of its length, was a self-contained entity, featuring brilliant dialogue and a minimum of physical action. This section of Shaw's play, better known as Don Juan in Hell became the most famous and most successful oral interpretation production during the last twenty years.

The performers were known as the First Drama Quartet. The Quartet included, besides Laughton who also served as director, Charles Boyer, Cedric Hardwicke, and Agnes Moorehead. With such an outstanding cast and an author of the stature of Shaw, the experiment appeared to have possibilities, though no one expected it to achieve the popularity it did. Gregory and Laughton had hoped it would be a successful touring piece. It was.

Don Juan in Hell

Don Juan in Hell started its tour in Stockton, California, on February 1, 1951. By the time the production made its first appearance in New York at Carnegie Hall on October 22, 1951, nearly four hundred thousand people in one hundred and fifteen towns and cities in

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[2]Kurt Singer, The Charles Laughton Story, (London: Robert Hale, Ltd., 1954), p. 256.

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Regardless of whether the

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[4]John Houseman, "Drama

[5]Gelb, loc. cit. Acco
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thirty-five states and in England and Scotland had seen it.

Regardless of whether the company played in a high school gym, a tent, or an elaborate theatre, they almost always drew capacity houses and received rave reviews from the local critics. In addition to being an artistic success, the venture was also a commercial success. Just prior to the Carnegie Hall presentation, the grosses for the tour were reported to be $325,000.[3]

It is interesting and perhaps significant to note that all the towns and cities toured by the Quartet were college or university communities and the production was always presented under their cultural auspices. Many of the places visited had hosted Laughton and his solo readings in previous years. It was estimated that less than half of the audience had seen a professional performance in their own community in years, but they were obviously appreciative of the opportunity. Attendance averaged over three thousand people per night, an excellent turnout for any form of theatrical entertainment.[4]

Don Juan in Hell had planned originally to completely bypass New York. Producer Paul Gregory feared Broadway would not appreciate the presentation and would suspect the lack of scenery to be "an economic contrivance to cut costs rather than the planned stylization that it is intended to be."[5]

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[3]Arthur Gelb, New York Times, October 21, 1951, sec. II, p. 3.

[4]John Houseman, "Drama Quartette," Theatre Arts, August, 1951, p. 96.

[5]Gelb, loc. cit. According to Gregory, the show was actually more expensive to operate than most Broadway productions that go on the road, with weekly expenses amounting to $16,280.

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Settings and Accessories

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[6]Gelb, loc. cit.

The first tour gained such critical acclaim as well as popular approval however, that when the Quartet returned from England to begin their second United States tour, the decision was made to include a one-night stand at Carnegie Hall. If the reception warranted, a three to four week Broadway run would be considered later in the season after the tour commitments were fulfilled.

Within eight hours after the first advertisement appeared announcing the New York appearance of the Quartet, Carnegie Hall was completely sold out. In fact, the onslaught of ticket seekers was so furious the management did not have time to pull tickets for the critics and found themselves at the end of the first day of sales with nothing for the gentlemen of the press. The mail order list of ticket holders was consulted and telegrams and messengers were hastily dispatched to those holding the choicest reservations to explain the management's dilemma and plead for the return of the tickets. Some of the ticket holders refused point blank, others were willing to bargain. One woman agreed to return her tickets in exchange for an introduction to Charles Boyer.[6] Apparently the ticket hunt was successful, as the critics turned out in force.

Settings and Accessories

The setting consisted of a black backdrop, four stools, four music stands, and four microphones. The only props used were the thick green folders each player used to "read" from. The three men wore dinner jackets, Miss Moorehead wore a dark evening gown. Laughton originally had a more elaborate arrangement in mind.

[6] Gelb, loc. cit.

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[7] Singer, loc. cit., p

[8] Agnes Moorehead, "St
XVIII (May, 1954), p. 165.

[9] James Brough, A Vac
Doubleday and Company, Inc

[10] Moorehead, op. cit

> He saw the four perched upon high stools such as tennis scorers sit on, and wearing heavy cloaks which would drape from the pedestals in four pools of color, scarlet for the Devil, orange for Don Juan, white for the statue and mauve for Donna Anna--mauve was Agnes Moorehead's favorite color.[7]

Gregory eventually managed to persuade Laughton that simple evening dress would be more effective. The stools were necessary because the play ran for over two hours with no exits or entrances. Consequently there had to be something for the actor to rest on. Miss Moorehead described the stools as "kitchen stools" and wrote; "I can tell you truthfully that I have been ever so much more comfortable on a stage and to be the scenery for my three compatriots was exhausting."[8] Cedric Hardwicke, recalling the rigors of the tour wrote, "Those damnable stools were as big a factor in our constant fatigue as anything. I cannot sit on a bar-stool today without an irresistable urge to burst into Shaw."[9]

The music stands were used "because of the symphonic nature of the piece."[10] The microphone served to limit the performers' movement as well as to enable audiences to hear regardless of the acoustical quality of the auditoriums.

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[7]Singer, loc. cit., p. 258.

[8]Agnes Moorehead, "Staging Don Juan in Hell," Western Speech, XVIII (May, 1954), p. 165.

[9]James Brough, A Victorian in Orbit, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1961), p. 270.

[10]Moorehead, op. cit., p. 264.

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[12] Arthur Pollock, Da

[13] Lowe, Variety, Mar

[14] Houseman, loc. cit

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Classification

The Quartet described Don Juan in Hell as a reading, but few of the critics were content to leave it at that. As one reviewer wrote, "I've called the performance a reading because that is the way the Quartet describes it, but their performance is more than that."[11] Another critic thought that the term 'reading' was an accurate description insofar as the actors stood before microphones, gave the appearance of reading, and sat silently on their stools when not reading, but he thought that except for the lack of movement the term 'pure drama' would have been more accurate.[12]

Some critics resorted to comparisons with other forms of entertainment in their attempts to classify the production. Lowe thought the production resembled a cross between a musical concert and a radio broadcast, with elements of the conventional speech class blended in.[13] Houseman wrote:

> Artistically and commercially the Quartette lies somewhere between Chautauqua, the Community Concerts, and the ancient tradition of the Strolling Players setting up their boards and trestles in the Market Place. The Quartette's market places are the numerous cultural centers of America. Their merchandise is not Show Business, but Theatre.[14]

Brooks Atkinson characterized the offering as an intellectual crusade and as a "simple but inspired reading."[15] Other critics thought the production bore definite resemblence to a debate. The critic for Variety wrote that Don Juan in Hell was "more debate than

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[11]Louis Sheaffer, Brooklyn Daily Eagle, October 23, 1951.

[12]Arthur Pollock, Daily Compass, October 24, 1951.

[13]Lowe, Variety, March 14, 1951, p. 52.

[14]Houseman, loc. cit.

[15]Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, October 23, 1951, p. 34.

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[16] Bron., Variety, Oct

[17] Walter Kerr, New Yo

[18] Laughton, loc. cit.

[19] George Freedley, N

[20] John Gassner, Thea
Materials and Movements in
Publishers, Inc., 1954), p

drama," and that it was presented as a debate.[16] Kerr expanded this comparison:

> "Don Juan" is not a play nor even part of a play. It is a debate and that is how the foursome is presenting it. But it is by no means a stodgy or formal, or rhetorical debate . . . . . [it is an] enormously exhilarating exhibition of literate wit and flashing performance.[17]

The use of music stands encouraged comparison with musical performances. Laughton, in discussing his early inspirations for Don Juan, spoke of being impressed by the "drama" of intent musicians turning the pages of their scores as they played."[18] Freedley mentioned the performance was done in "oratorio style" but did not elaborate.[19] Gassner found the "virtuoso" delivery of the Drama Quartet much like the performance of tenors in opera houses and noted that good actors react to a verbal challenge in the same fashion as good singers respond to a musical challenge.[20]

Manner of Presentation

The thick green folders containing the scripts were always in evidence, but as Miss Moorehead pointed out, they were used only as props to heighten the sense of informality and to provide a little movement to occasionally distract the audience when the pages were

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[16]Bron., Variety, October 24, 1951, p. 67.

[17]Walter Kerr, New York Herald Tribune, October 23, 1951.

[18]Laughton, loc. cit.

[19]George Freedley, New York Morning Telegraph, November 5, 1951.

[20]John Gassner, Theatre of Our Times; A Survey of the Men, Materials and Movements in the Modern Theatre, (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1954), p. 161.

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[21] Moorehead, loc. c

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turned. It was feared that the audience might become tired of watching the actors who moved so little.[21] The performers did occasionally move towards the audience or towards each other, but it was a very limited sort of movement.[22] When they were not taking part in the activities, they were perched on their stools paying close attention to what the others were discussing.

Director Laughton was credited for his skillful integration of the performers's movements and subtle reactions which "made the reading a dynamic projection rather than a static exercise."[23] Krutch thought that the amount of gesture and movement was excellent; enough to give the reading life, but not so much that it might be mistaken for an imperfect performance.[24]

Verdict

Most of the critics wrote rave reviews about the presentation, and many of them commented about the effectiveness of the method of production.

> . . . Though music stands with a text are placed before each speaker, the performance is by now obviously a recitation rather than a reading, and it is also something which maintains a consistent style somewhere between what could be called declamation and what could be called acting. There is enough gesture and movement to keep the whole thing beautifully alive; never enough to suggest merely an imperfect performance. The Quartet seems to have understood exactly what it wanted to do and to do just

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[21] Moorehead, loc. cit.

[22] Thomas Dash, Women's Wear Daily, October 23, 1951.

[23] William Hawkins, New York World-Telegram and Sun, October 23, 1951.

[24] Joseph Wood Krutch, Nation, December 22, 1951, p. 554.

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Kerr, loc. cit.

[28] Robert Coleman

[29] Hawkins, loc.

> that with a sureness of touch which puts the audience instantly at ease and never for a moment creates the feeling that the method is a bastard rather than a perfectly legitimate form of presentation. Moreover each individual is admirably cooperative as well as admirably fitted to his particular role.[25]

Walter Kerr observed contemporary theatre usually smothered everything with an over abundance of scenery and costuming in the hope that the frills would mask "a stupefying dramatic vacancy," whereas the First Drama Quartet reversed the procedure by throwing out "everything that was expensive and unnecessary and filled the vacuum with fire, intelligence, and emotional power."[26] Sheaffer reported he had just discovered a stageful of actors, much scenery and costuming was not necessary to hold an audience spellbound. "It is enough when the dialogue is worth listening to and it is spoken by a small handful of players who know their job."[27]

Robert Coleman found the evening diverting and enjoyable, but he cautioned his readers that it was an evening which required an audience willing to think. He thought the presentation was somewhat comparable to sitting in one's own living room and listening to four charming, intelligent talkers discuss a great book they had just read. Only the drinks and canapes seemed lacking.[28]

William Hawkins described the production as a "mental limbering exercise, a relaxing pastime, or a gay appeal to the imagination . . . a radiantly dramatized lecture, or a play designed to inspire your own invention . . . ."[29] Regardless of what one might choose to call

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Kerr, loc. cit. [27] Shaeffer, loc. cit.

[28] Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, October 23, 1951.

[29] Hawkins, loc. cit.

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[30] Newark Evening Ne

[31] Brons., loc. cit

[32] George Jean Nath

[33] Wolcott Gibbs,

[34] Harold Clurman,

it, Hawkins assured his readers they would find it an unforgettable experience in the theatre. The critic for the Newark Evening News credited the four actors with making "this unique sceneryless presentation one of the outstanding delights of all time."[30] Variety called it a distinguished performance.[31]

Nathan wrote that Don Juan in Hell was superior to anything seen on the Broadway stage for years in terms of sheer theatrical drive and excitement. He concluded by warning his readers they would be fools not to see the presentation when it returned to New York in November.[32]

Critics Gibbs and Clurman apparently missed the Carnegie 'preview' but were favorably impressed after seeing it during its limited run in November. Gibbs called the performance "a stimulating experience,"[33] while Clurman described it as an evening of superb intellectual fun.[34]

Three reviewers voiced reservations. Garland admitted the evening had been enjoyable, but expressed the opinion the Drama Quartet fell short of what Maurice Evans would have done with the same material. (Evans had presented Man and Superman without the Hell sequence on Broadway some years before.) Garland was also displeased with what

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[30] Newark Evening News, October 23, 1951.

[31] Brons., loc. cit.

[32] George Jean Nathan, New York Journal American, November 5, 1951.

[33] Wolcott Gibbs, The New Yorker, December 8, 1951, p. 64.

[34] Harold Clurman, New Republic, December 24, 1951, p. 22.

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[35]Robert Garland, No

[36]Freedley, loc. ci

[37]Eric Bentley, The
York: Horizon Press, 19

[38]Brooks Atkinson,

[39]Time, November 5

he regarded as an improper adjustment of the microphones, apparently in terms of volume.[35]

Freedley, who had been a strong supporter of the Readers Theatre efforts a few years previous, did not appreciate the presentation, although he praised the cast and acknowledged the general critical response had been most favorable. He personally thought the production was a "stunt."[36] Bentley's comments were more in the form of an observation than a complaint, but there does seem to be an implied objection to the form:

> Praising the Drama Quartet, people are saying how nice it is to do without scenery. I do not share their implied disdain for stage scenery, but I am not surprised at it. What surprises me is the assumption that, when a play is read to us, nothing is missing but decor. Or does the fact that the readers use gestures make them actors?[37]

Various critics had pointed out the apparent simplicity of the presentation. Atkinson wrote a follow-up article two weeks after he had seen the Carnegie Hall performance in which he pointed out that, while everything looked informal and impromptu, it had all been carefully planned and rehearsed.[38] Time magazine also noted the seeming simplicity and termed it "deep theatrical cunning."[39] Houseman also cautioned against being misled by the apparent simplicity of Don Juan.

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[35]Robert Garland, New York Journal American, October 23, 1951.

[36]Freedley, loc. cit.

[37]Eric Bentley, The Dramatic Event: An American Chronicle, (New York: Horizon Press, 1954), p. 82.

[38]Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, November 4, 1951, Sec. II, p. 1.

[39]Time, November 5, 1951, p. 64.

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[40] Houseman, loc. c

[42] Richard Watts,

[44] Laughton, loc.

> It is high grade theatre . . . cunningly conceived and shrewdly executed. Only a very unobservant or ignorant theatregoer could mistake its simplicity for spareness, or its deliberate informality for accident . . . in its total effect it is no less deliberately and meticulously planned than if it contained tons of scenery, hundreds of light cues and elaborate stage moves.[40]

Hawkins was impressed by the way in which the manner of presentation gave each individual in the audience the opportunity to supply his own optimum amount of action and setting. He felt Shaw's discussion had achieved much more life and vitality in this way than could have been achieved if it had been "embellished with elaborate trimmings."[41] Atkinson also referred to the actors' effectiveness in creating an "overwhelming" illusion.[42] Shaw's stage directions were read, either by Laughton or Hardwicke and managed to "achieve effects beyond those of even an inspired scenic designer."[43]

The fact that the cast pretended to read and utilized little movement also contributed to the illusionary effect of the production.

> Only gradually, and sometimes not at all, do theatregoers become aware that the cast is acting, without seeming to act. 'Every movement of the body, even the turning of the pages, becomes important,' explains Laughton. 'You mustn't move, except for a startling effect . . . .' As theatrewise Director Jed Harris pointed out, 'By appearing to read, but actually knowing their parts by heart, they make the whole thing come alive. In a theatrical production, the power or illusion would be much more difficult.[44]

Acting

Undoubtedly a large measure of the phenomenal success of the First Drama Quartet was due, as Wyatt suggested, to the fact that

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[40] Houseman, loc. cit. [41] Hawkins, loc. cit. [42] Atkinson, loc. cit.

[43] Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, October 23, 1951.

[44] Laughton, loc. cit.

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45 Euphemia Van Re

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46 Gibbs, loc. cit

47 Whitney Bolton,

"the quartet happens to be a pretty Big Four."[45] The players were all respected theatrical veterens, though Moorehead and Boyer had been seen more often on the screen than on the stage in the years preceeding Don Juan.

With four outstanding performers, four different acting styles might have prevailed. However, Laughton, who functioned as director as well as performer, was able to conquer completely the style problem that had wreaked havoc in the Oedipus Rex presentation. Wolcott Gibbs practically went into ecstasy over the acting of the four, crediting them with a "style and humor and discipline that you seldom encounter in the theatre."[46]

The most lengthy discussion of the company's acting was offered by Whitney Bolton. Bolton confessed to having been suspicious of the Quartet because of his aversion to Hollywood performers on the Broadway stage, but was pleasantly surprised with what he saw:

> This is theatre superb, this is acting at the top level of accomplishment . . . This is not just four players standing in modern evening dress . . . but four who have taken the Shaw words and studied them for intent, for depth and for color. They plainly have studied every line and phrase, have worked over it with affection and concern and the result is performance in each case so brilliant that once more hope for the profession of acting takes a happier turn.[47]

Atkinson commented that a play about brains requires actors with brains to find the ideas amid the dialogue and skill enough to present them effectively, and he believed the First Drama Quartet

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[45]Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt, Catholic World, 174:390 (February, 1952).

[46]Gibbs, loc. cit.

[47]Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegraph, October 23, 1951.

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[48] Atkinson, loc.

[51] Chapman, loc.

[54] Atkinson, loc.

met both requirements admirably.[48]

Sheaffer wrote that the actors were excellent, in fact, they could not have been better.[49] The Variety critic termed the quartet "gifted actors" and their performance "a brilliant tour-de-force."[50] Chapman described them as charming and resourceful.[51]

The one negative reaction came from Robert Garland of the Journal American, who was negative about almost all aspects of the production. He was particularly disturbed by Charles Boyer's accent which he maintained disturbed the three other readers.[52]

Charles Boyer had been reluctant to accept the role of Don Juan because he was afraid his French accent might cause trouble in the long speeches.[53] Many critics did find his accent troublesome, but most of them were quite impressed with the total effect of Boyer's performance.

Atkinson perhaps best expressed many of the critics' reactions when he wrote, "Boyer gives a performance to which the word 'great' may be judiciously applied . . .His success is all the more remarkable because his accent is troublesome."[54] Gibbs sounded a similar note, acknowledging there were times when the pronunciation was a "little bewildering," but noting that the acting had a style, humor, and discipline seldom found in the theatre."[55]

Nathan passed over Boyer's occasional problem with the English language as a small matter in light of his overall excellence.[56]

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[48]Atkinson, loc. cit. [49]Sheaffer, loc. cit. [50]Bron., loc. cit.
[51]Chapman, loc. cit. [52]Garland, loc. cit. [53]Singer, loc. cit.
[54]Atkinson, loc. cit. [55]Gibbs, loc. cit. [56]Nathan, loc. cit.

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[57] Pollock, loc. c

[60] Dash, loc. cit.

[63] John Chapman,

Pollock found him eloquent even with his slight accent.[57] Variety mentioned the slight handicap of the accent, but credited him with delivering the longest speeches in the play with tremendous fire and passion.[58]

Clurman thought perhaps Boyer was a bit too romantic and too French for Don Juan, but found his reading of the part "altogether winning."[59] Dash, on the other hand, thought the French Boyer was an excellent choice to portray the magnetism of the irresistable libertine and lover. Dash suggested Boyer's accent might have been particularly notable because it was juxtaposed against the magnificient diction of Laughton and Hardwicke.[60]

Shaeffer also found Boyer admirably suited for the philosophizing Don Juan.[61] Shaeffer made no reference to Boyer's accent, nor did Hawkins, who spoke of Boyer's "matchless magnetism" and magnificient variety of delivery and use of vocal color.[62] Chapman did not mention the accent in his praise of Boyer's engaging and persuasive presentation of "a series of long speeches that would kill the ordinary actor."[63]

Kerr found Boyer's performance in the first act disappointing because of the French accent and inflection, but wrote of his work in the latter part of the play:

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[57]Pollock, loc. cit. [58]Bron., loc. cit. [59]Clurman, loc. cit.
[60]Dash, loc. cit. [61]Shaeffer, loc. cit. [62]Hawkins, loc. cit.
[63]John Chapman, New York Daily News, October 23, 1951.

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65. John Beaufort, C

66. Variety, April

67. Atkinson, New Y

68. Coleman, loc. c

> . . .Boyer rises to a level of emotional performance which may not have been matched on the New York stage for some years. There is a moment when he seizes his microphone and thrusts it forward in a spasm of urgency which is at least twice as exciting as the top thrill in an ordinary melodrama. Mr. Boyer is one of the finest performers we have.[64]

Boyer's command of English diction might not have always been what one would wish, but apparently this fact proved to be relatively insignificant in relation to the other aspects of his performance. "The part requires a lively intelligence, physical vitality, a gleaming wit plus the conviction that comes from a deep sincerity--and with all this, superior technical equipment. Mr. Boyer meets every requirement."[65]

The Tony Award was presented to Boyer by the American Theatre Wing for assisting in a new theatre trend.[66] Brooks Atkinson, in his evaluation of the 1951-1952 theatrical season, labeled Charles Boyer's performance as Don Juan "the finest acting of the year."[67]

Charles Laughton originated the idea of the First Drama Quartet, recruited the performers, and directed the production. He also introduced the presentation and portrayed the Devil.

In the introduction, Laughton offered a brief background of the Don Juan legend on which the play was based, set the scene, and introduced the other players.[68] His introduction was a carefully studied,

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[64] Kerr, New York Herald Tribune, October 23, 1951.

[65] John Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, December 8, 1951.

[66] Variety, April 2, 1952.

[67] Atkinson, New York Times, April 20, 1952, Sec. II, p. 1.

[68] Coleman, loc. cit.

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60 Houseman, op. c

70 Lowe, loc. cit.

73 Pollock, loc.

though apparently adlibbed presentation. He assumed the role of a jolly, scholarly host and invited the audience to share in the pleasures of a reading by him and his associates of a lesser known masterpiece of contemporary literature. He warned his audience that the reading would require concentration and effort on their part.[69]

This introduction was characterized by one critic as "deliberately informal and surprisingly coy . . . arousing interest and sympathy at the same time . . . a cannily conceived stunt."[70] Kerr wrote of the introduction and Laughton's characterization of the Devil:

> Laughton opens the evening with a modest and ingratiating setting of the stage. But the shyness, the coy mannerisms, do not conceal the fact that he is a killer. Mr. Laughton is out for blood, and within a very few minutes he is drawing it. He wags his head, chucks his chin into his collar, goes in for the twinkle and double-twinkle and then--just as you are afraid that some damage is to be done by way of excessive cuteness--he lets rip with Shaw's blasting of man as a creature essentially in love with death, in a manner that tears him to tatters, but not the sense of the speech. This may be ham, but it is delicious.[71]

Time also noted an occasional tendency on Laughton's part towards ham, but the critic did not find it "delicious" as had Kerr.[72] Pollock wrote that Laughton's Falstaffian interpretation came across as the clearest of the four characters, but noted that he had a tendency to be a bit cute at times, as if he were "still touring the sticks."[73] Variety reported Laughton had some of the best lines and handled them well for the most part, but in his enthusiasm he occasionally neglected to employ sufficient self-discipline and as a result, the devil sometimes appeared "a bit of a pansy."[74]

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[69]Houseman, op. cit., p. 14.

[70]Lowe, loc. cit. [71]Kerr, loc. cit. [72]Time, loc. cit.

[73]Pollock, loc. cit. [74]Lowe, loc. cit.

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[75] Sheaffer, loc

[77] Atkinson, Nev

[78] Bentley, op.

[79] Brough, op.

Other critics found nothing to critize in Laughton's rendition. Sheaffer thought him an unorthodox but wonderfully ingratiating Mephistopheles.[75] Dash also approved of his portrayal of Lucifer and mentioned the way Laughton sat back and beamed gleefully as he watched the other actors perform.[76]

Atkinson was quite taken with Laughton's presentation.

> As the Devil, moon-faced Mr. Laughton acts with diabolical gusto and gives dramatic weight to the whole performance. The long, closely-reasoned speeches he gives with great spontaneity, putting the emphasis where it belongs, using the words carefully, pointing the meaning with gestures and movements. Call it a masterful performance and you can not be wrong.[77]

Eric Bentley, commenting some years later on Laughton's successful portrayal of the devil, described his performance as a sort of "half acting." Bentley emphasized that "half acting" could only be successful when done by "whole actors" and that Laughton's proficiency at it came not from his years of experience in reciting, but from his years of practice in acting.[78] The prerequisite of skill in acting for success in reading was mentioned in relation to the earlier Readers Theatre presentations and will be mentioned again in later productions.

British star Cedric Hardwicke portrayed the stuffy Statue. Hardwicke, reminiscing about his experiences with the production wrote, "When Paul Gregory first broached the idea of Don Juan , I thought I was listening to a raving maniac."[79] The part of the Statue was considerably smaller than those of his male counterparts

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[75]Sheaffer, loc. cit. [76]Dash, loc. cit.

[77]Atkinson, New York Times, October 23, 1951, p. 34.

[78]Bentley, op. cit., p. 85.

[79]Brough, op. cit., p. 267.

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[80] Beaufort, loc.

[83] Dash, loc. cit

[86] Moorehead, op

in terms of the number of lines, but his skill with his limited number of lines earned him rave reviews from nearly all of the critics. Beaufort wrote of him: "Sir Cedric plays the Statue with majestic jauntiness of manner and delivers the slow witted military man's speeches with a comic deliberateness that is altogether delightful."[80]

Kerr was impressed with Hardwicke's skillful sense of underplaying.[81] Other critics cited him for providing "perfectly timed, drawling comic relief,"[82] and "little wry rejoinders that are delectably funny."[83] Even Garland had words of praise for Hardwicke, commenting that he "hadn't much to do . . . [but he] did that little well. He came forth whenever Bernard Shaw let him and talked up like a man."[84]

Miss Agnes Moorehead, as Donna Anna, had even fewer lines than did Mr. Hardwicke, but perhaps because she was the only woman in the group, she attracted more commentary than he did. One critic, noting that Hollywood had continually cast her in scraggly old maid parts, was especially impressed with her aristocratic beauty.[85] Miss Moorehead wrote of the casting:

> I sometimes wonder how they ever saw me in such a glamorous role for usually I am relegated to those dreary, drab characters that are completely void of charm and beauty, (though I must say they are usually the meatiest roles to play). Nevertheless I was so complimented to be their choice for Donna Anna they have my undying gratitude.[86]

Other reviewers were also impressed with her beauty. One

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[80] Beaufort, loc. cit. [81] Kerr, loc. cit. [82] Pollock, loc. cit.
[83] Dash, loc. cit. [84] Garland, loc. cit. [85] Shaeffer, loc. cit.
[86] Moorehead, op. cit., p. 164.

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[87] Garland, loc.

[90] Hawkins, loc.

[92] Atkinson, New

[93] Bron., loc. c

described her as "a haunting Florentine painting;"[87] another credited her with having "the crisp, clean, elegance of a lily."[88] Not only did she supply the decorative note in the offering,[89] but according to one writer her manner of striking regal poses and her queen-like movements provided the chief visual attraction of the play.[90]

Though Miss Moorehead had the fewest and possibly the least interesting lines, she made the most of them, and at least one critic found her to be "an intellectual match for the male members of the quartet."[91] Atkinson paid homage to her tongue-in-cheek presentation of respectability and propriety.[92]

Herability to remain in character during her long silences was praised. Variety singled her out as the only performer to improve "her idle moments with a bit of 'hamming' in the form of appropriate background gestures."[93] One reviewer had mentioned Laughton's apparent enjoyment as he watched the other performers,[94] but Miss Moorehead was apparently an even more outstanding listener. Krutch wrote of her:

> As Donna Anna, Agnes Moorehead has the fewest words to speak but for all that gives what may be the most remarkable performance. She is silent for all but a few minutes of the time, but she is surely one of the best listeners three talkers ever had. With an occasional gesture of the hands, a sudden turning of the head and above all by means of a perpetually fluid flow of quietly modulated expression across a singularly mobile countenance who provides a running commentary on the discourse without which it would lose a very considerable part of its comic effectiveness.[95]

Two critics had negative comments about her performance.

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[87]Garland, loc. cit. [88]Hawkins, loc. cit. [89]Dash, loc. cit.

[90]Hawkins, loc. cit. [91]Beaufort, loc. cit.

[92]Atkinson, New York Times, October 23, 1951, p. 34.

[93]Bron., loc. cit. [94]Dash, loc. cit. [95]Krutch, loc. cit.

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[96] Pollack, loc.

Pollack disliked her interpretation altogether, labeling it "artificial."[96] Nathan accused her of going "slightly askew" near the end of the performance, (he did not elaborate), but magnanimously forgave her, "since otherwise she too is excellent."[97]

Most of the critics were quite taken with the performances of the members of the quartet. Boyer's accent did engender some criticism, as did Laughton's tendence to over play, but the general verdict was that, individually and as an ensemble, the First Drama Quartet had provided New Yorkers with a superb example of the art of acting. Certainly the skill of the performers contributed significantly to the success and popularity of Don Juan in Hell.

Material

Besides the scattered criticisms about accents and hams, some of the critics had reservations about the material. Traditionally the Don Juan in Hell episode had been eliminated from productions of Man and Superman for good reasons. First, Man and Superman minus the dream sequence constituted a full evening's entertainment, and second, the lengthy discourses were considered unplayable. Shaw, usually quite prone to irritability when material was excluded from his plays, never insisted the scene be presented. In fact, when Laughton wrote asking Shaw for permission and terms to do the interlude, the old man wrote, "The Hell scene is such a queer business that I can't advise you to experiment with it, but I should certainly like you to try it."[98]

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[96]Pollack, loc. cit. [97]Nathan, loc. cit. [98]Time, loc. cit.

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[99] Freedley, loc.

[102] Coleman, loc

[103] Atkinson, Ne

Although most critics thought the experiment had succeeded admirably, there was some criticism. Two reviewers felt portions of the discussion were a bit too long. Freedley, who did not care for the production at all, wrote that "the spate of words seemed endless."[99] Time, while reporting the offering to be immensely enjoyable, did concede that, like most of Shaw's writings, the Hell scene could have been shorter.[100]

Kerr, who termed the evening "an enormously exhilerating exhibition of wit and flashing performance,"[101] admitted there were a few restive moments. Shaw's enthusiasm for taking all sides of every question caused some passages to become verbose. Also, the popularity and applicability of many of Shaw's lines had resulted in their being cribbed and quoted to such an extent that they had lost some of their original impact. Coleman felt that some of Shaw's observations had become a bit outdated.[102]

For the most part however, the crtics approved of the material and of its appropriateness for a reading presentation. Atkinson thought the manner of presentation was "just about perfect" for the long dramatic dialogue, and suggested the presentation was more stimulating than the scenic style of conventional theatre would have been.[103] "Since it was written separately, it is logical to play it, as an independent enterprise, and since it looks almost

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[99]Freedley, loc. cit. [100]Time, loc. cit. [101]Kerr, loc. cit.

[102]Coleman, loc. cit.

[103]Atkinson, New York Times, November 4, 1951, Sec. II, p. 1.

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[104] Atkinson, Ne

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[106] Chapman, loc

unactable in the texts, the scheme of presenting it as a reading is not only legitimate, but inspired."[104] Atkinson also felt it necessary to warn future imitators that not every piece of dramatic literature could be done this way, even by fine actors.[105]

Chapman had never heard or seen Don Juan in Hell before, but he thought the method of presentation was perfect.[106] Watts was not so certain. He stated that he would like to see the segment presented in the conventional way, with setting, costumes, and make up, but he acknowledged there were great advantages to doing it as a reading.

> If it were acted out in a conventional sense, many playgoers who are skeptical of stage works that are entirely conversational would complain that the episode was "talky" and lacking in physical action. Done frankly as a vast theatrical conversation piece, there can be a proper concentration on the real business of the evening which is ideas.[107]

Hawkins characterized the presentation method as a brilliant one for the nature of the script. The discussion progressed completely on its own terms, and there was nothing to interfere with the words.[108]

Clurman expressed concern over "people about town" who were suggesting that the First Drama Quartet proved stage settings were unnecessary elements in the theatre. He characterized that as "rubbish" and insisted that the reading presentation was the best theatrical way to present the "philosophical essay in dialogue form," but that this by no means should be taken as an indication that

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[104] Atkinson, New York Times, October 23, 1951, p. 34.

[105] _____, New York Times, November 4, 1951, Sec. II, p. 1.

[106] Chapman, loc. cit. [107] Watts, loc. cit. [108] Hawkins, loc. cit.

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conventional presentations were passe.[109]

Most critics felt the Don Juan in Hell sequence had been a fortunate choice for the First Drama Quartet. Some critics however, cautioned that not all dramatic material would lend itself as well to the reading manner of presentation. Subsequent productions patterned along similar lines were to bear out this warning.

Comparisons

As noted previously most of the critics regarded the production as a distinct innovation and were at a loss as to how to label it or what to compare it to. Krutch wrote that the production utilized "a method not quite like any I have ever seen exploited before."[110] Another critic wrote:

> For the first time in America, a professional play with professional actors was given for commercial consideration, at first in a concert hall and later in a theatre in which the actors merely read their parts from manuscripts, which were placed on stands before them.[111]

This seems to be somewhat of an oversimplification. Professional actors on the Chautauqua Curcuits and in Lecture Halls had read plays for commercial consideration many years ago, though not in a 'real' theatre perhaps. The Readers Theatre had presented professional actors reading plays in a theatre and had charged admission, though

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[109]Clurman, loc. cit.

[110]Krutch, loc. cit. Sam Zototow, in a New York Times theatre column of July 16, 1951, also hinted that there might be an economic motive rather than an artistic one behind the lack of scenery. He hypothesized that producers had dreamed of such a scheme to reduce the overhead costs of productions for years, but that no one had ever tried it on such a large scale before.

[111]Jacob A. Weisner, Variety, January 2, 1952, p. 268.

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the primary purpose was to present little known dramatic masterpieces rather than to achieve commercial success. Interestingly enough, the one critic who recognized, or at least the only one who felt it significant enough to report the similarity between the two Readers Theatre productions and the Don Juan in Hell presentation was George Jean Nathan.

> The late Readers' Theatre attempted much the same thing, but it was a failure for several reasons. Its company were poor readers; the direction imposed upon the readers, or rather reciters, a lot of uncomfortable, extrinsic business that made matters worse; and instead of encouraging the auditors' imagination, it accordingly stifled it as it would have been stifled by a company of incompetent stage actors. But the Messrs. Laughton, Hardwicke, and Boyer and Miss Moorehead are admirable readers and excellent reader-actors, and that is the difference.[112]

Although Nathan was the only critic to refer to the Readers Theatre productions, the format of the presentation appears to have been basically the same. Don Juan in Hell did not make the mistakes that the Readers Theatre presentations had made.

The First Drama Quartet consisted of actors who were truly "first rate." The direction, provided by Laughton was also first rate and enabled the four to perform together as an ensemble. They knew their lines and used the scripts only as props and for atmosphere's sake. There was some movement and some use of stage patterns.

The setting was unobtrusive and functional. Evening clothes provided the performers with an air of homogeneity. The use of a curtain backdrop and skillful lighting allowed the audience to use their own illusion creating capacities to the fullest. The unprofessional aspects which had clouded the "beauty of the spoken word"

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[112]George Jean Nathan, Theatre in the Fifties, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1953), pp. 117-118.

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[115] Bron., loc.

in the Readers Theatre productions were absent from Don Juan in Hell.

The commercial and artistic success of the venture was unquestionable. In summaries of the 1951-1952 season, the production was frequently mentioned as the "outstanding" or the "most noteworthy" success. Atkinson hypothesized that, from the commercial standpoint, the Quartet's performance was probably the biggest success of the season, with Boyer's performance of Don Juan standing out as the finest acting of the year.[113] Attendance at the one hundred and four New York performances was such that, had not the four stars had other committments, the run would undoubtedly have been much longer.

The Drama Circle, in what Atkinson labled the only unanimous vote ever to be taken by the Circle, (except for one never to hold social meetings), awarded a citation to Don Juan in Hell as a "distinguished and original contribution to the theatre."[114] A sizeable block of critics wanted to vote for Don Juan in Hell as "the best new foreign play" of the season, arguing that it had never been performed professionally in New York before and consequently was eligible for honors in that category. However, they were overruled.

Perhaps it should be noted that the early part of the 1951-1952 season was extremely undistinguished except for the Don Juan in Hell presentation, which served to set off the excellence of the production even more. Four unsuccessful plays opened the week before the First Drama Quartet made their Carnegie Hall presentation,[115] and as Bolton

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[113]Atkinson, New York Times, April 20, 1952, Sec. II, p. 1.

[114]Atkinson, New York Times, April 13, 1952, Sec. II, p. 1.

[115]Bron., loc. cit.

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[116] Bolton, loc.

wrote, "After weeks of trashy playing in trashy plays, it is a joy and reward to hear those four at the peak of talent."[116]

The phenomenal success of the First Drama Quartet may have been enhanced by the dearth of good theatrical fare, but that can hardly be the main reason. A great cast, an outstanding piece of dramatic literature, and an ingenious method of presentation which blended the possibilities of the script with the potentialities of the performers seem to have been the primary elements responsible for the popular and critical success of Don Juan in Hell.

Future Possibilities

Despite the success and popularity of Don Juan in Hell, there were only a few critics who suggested it might be the forerunner of a new form of theatre, and those who did mention the possibility were usually quick to point out potential problems. Bentley warned against mistaking the method of the Drama Quartet for the solution to all the problems of the theatre. He maintained acting was an essential part of the theatre and must remain so. He pointed out the performers in Don Juan in Hell had been superbly trained actors rather than simply readers.[117] Robert Coleman recognized the possibilities and problems of this form of presentation when he wrote:

> There's a new show business. It lines up a few stars, microphones and props and takes to the road. It laughs at elaborate, expensive settings and costumes and consequent high transportation costs. There is only one catch to it. You've got to have a superlative script . . . In case other impresarios may wish to emulate his [Gregory's] example, it might be well to warn them that they'd better start with a Shaw or Shakespeare and then have the good fortune to find such ingratiating personalities as the members of the First Drama Quartet. You really don't need a stage full of scenery if you have genius there.[118]

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[116]Bolton, loc. cit. [117]Bentley, loc. cit. [118]Coleman, loc. cit.

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Coleman's words of warning proved to be quite accurate. Later productions which failed to gain popular or critical support were usually deficient with respect to script or performers, with some extremely unsuccessful ventures being deficient in both.

Many of the critics considered Don Juan in Hell as a new form of theatre. A few point out the similarity to Chautauqua and Lecture Circuit production, and Nathan cited the likeness to the Readers Theatre presentations of five years before. Most of the critics experienced difficulty in describing the production. The word "reading" was frequently used, but few critics were satisfied with it. Some tried to solve their dilemma by comparing it to such things as opera, dramatized lectures, debates, and various other forms of entertainment. Nathan coined a term for the performers which seemed appropos, he called them "reader-actors."

Nearly all the critics were very impressed with Don Juan in Hell. Most of them thought the oral interpretation approach was the best possible way of staging the Hell scene, but only a few foresaw a future for the manner of presentation. Those who did see possibilities for it cautioned that it would be difficult to locate a script as suitable as Don Juan in Hell and performers of the caliber of the First Drama Quartet.

Perhaps it was inevitable that the artistic and commercial success of Don Juan in Hell would start a trend towards more oral interpretation presentations,[119] even though most critics did not

[119] Miss Agnes Moorehead, in a letter to the author dated July 6, 1968, agreed that Don Juan in Hell started a trend, but she pointed out this was not a new trend, but one revived from the Greek theatre.

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anticipate it at the time. During the next fifteen years, there were several productions similar in basic format to Don Juan in Hell, but none were as successful with the critics or with the public, and several of them were failures.

John Brown's Body

For their second oral interpretation venture, Laughton and Gregory decided to stage Stephen Vincent Benet's award winning poem John Brown's Body. This time it was Gregory who suggested the material. Laughton initially vetoed the Benet selection because he had done a few sections from it on the radio, and as he recalled, "The poem had been revised so that it looked like a leftist tract."[120] Gregory finally pursuaded him to read the entire piece, and Laughton was soon engaged in condensing the three hundred and fifty page, twelve hour epic poem.

It was decided to use a trio of actors rather than a quartet. Judith Anderson, Raymond Massey and Tyrone Power were selected. The manner of presentation was to be similar to that of Don Juan in Hell, with some significant modifications. The production took to the road, as had its predecessor, and proved to be an artistic and financial sensation, with box office receipts on the tour surpassing those of Don Juan.[121] The play opened in New York at the Century Theatre on Sunday, February 15, 1953.

It was inevitable that comparisons would be made between John Brown's Body and Don Juan in Hell. Not only was the basic format

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[120] Singer, op. cit., p. 274.

[121] John Chapman, New York Daily News, February 16, 1953.

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the same, the director and the producer were also the same. Much of the critical commentary therefore, was based on the similarities and differences present in the two presentations, with John Brown's Body being judged second-best most of the time.

Setting and Accessories

John Brown's Body retained the visual austerity and stark simplicity that had characterized Don Juan in Hell. Once again the performers wore evening dress, stood behind microphones, and in front of a black back drop. There were some differences however. The stools and the music stands were gone, while a low unpainted wooden balustrade with an upholstered red top served as a bench and as a variety of other things. Back in the shadows on either side were red-topped chairs for the actors to use when they were not on stage.[122]

The three actors, the three microphones, and the bench were located on one side of the stage. Located on the other side of the stage were bleachers for one of the more significant innovations, the twenty-member chorus. The men and women of the chorus also wore evening dress.[123]

Classification

The problem of terminology again confronted the critics. Three of the reviewers described the presentation as a "recitation"

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[122] Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, February 16, 1953, p. 17.

[123] William Hawkins, New York World-Telegram and Sun, February 16, 1953.

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[124] Bobe., Variety
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[125] John Beaufort
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[128] Shaeffer, l

or "recital."[124] "Reading" or "dramatic reading" were the most frequently employed terms.[125] Sheaffer complained that he used "reading" more or less by default because he did not know how else to classify the production. He was dissatisfied with the terminology in that he felt "reading" was misleading and gave no indication of emotional richness and passion the performers brought to their lines.[126]

Manner of Presentation

One reason why the term "reading" did not seem quite accurate was that there was no attempt this time to create the illusion the actors were reading. The thick green notebooks the First Drama Quartet pretended to read from were not in evidence.[127] Occasionally the three referred to books when reading bits of the soldiers' letters to the folks back home, or John Brown's long speech after his sentencing, but their lines were obviously memorized.[128]

There were some innovations in staging which were readily apparent. The performers in Don Juan had been almost stationary, with what little movement there was limited to the immediate area around each microphone. Anderson, Power and Massey were frequently in motion, moving from one microphone to another, crossing up to the balustrade and then back again.[129]

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[124] Hobe., Variety, February 18, 1953, p. 58.
John McClain, New York Journal American, February 16, 1953.
Chapman, loc. cit.

[125] John Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, February 21, 1953.
George Freedley, New York Morning Telegraph, March 24, 1953, p. 28.
Sam Zolotow, New York Times, February 16, 1953.
Richard Watts, New York Post, February 16, 1953.

[126] Louis Sheaffer, Brooklyn Eagle, February 16, 1953.

[127] John Mason Brown, Saturday Review, March 14, 1953, p. 34.

[128] Shaeffer, loc. cit. [129] Brown, loc. cit.

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[132] Watts, loc

[134] Brown, loc

The trio in John Brown's Body did not have to serve as scenery when they were not reading, or perch on uncomfortable stools. "When Miss Anderson has a long speech, Mr. Power may leave the stage for a few moments and Mr. Massey may relax in one of the chairs outside the playing area. There are a number of effortless variations on this platform style of direction."[130]

Verdict

The majority of the critics endorsed the production, though the response was not as overwhelming as it had been for Don Juan. Some reviewers were enthusiastic about the production. Atkinson described it as a piece of vivid theatre . . . a stage performance of fire and beauty."[131] Watts characterized it as "a stirring and impressive dramatic event . . . a distinguished evening."[132]

Beaufort found the presentation a welcome change from the fare of the 1952-1953 season. "In place of meaness . . . it gives us greatness. Instead of depressing, it inspires."[133] John Mason Brown thought the evening was a memorable experience, deeply moving, with superb acting.[134] George Freedley, one of the few reviewers who had not been enthusiastic about Don Juan, found John Brown's Body much more to his liking.[135]

Other critics, even some of those who had favorable comments to offer on various aspects of the production, thought that the second Gregory-Laughton presentation did not measure up to the first. Bolton

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[130]Brooks Atkinson, New York Time, February 22, 1953, Sec. II, p. 1.

[131]_____, New York Times, February 16, 1953, p. 17.

[132]Watts, loc. cit. [133]Beaufort, loc. cit.

[134]Brown, loc. cit. [135]Freedley, loc. cit.

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wrote of John Brown's Body, "It all adds up and yet it all has not the complete enthrallment that was in Don Juan in Hell."[136]

Time thought the performance lacked the uniformity of style which had been such an outstanding feature of the previous production, but expressed the opinion the story and the stars would insure its success anyhow.[137] Clurman endorsed John Brown's Body but complained that he really did not care for it.[138]

Chapman acknowledged the presentation was "high minded and well done," but admitted that it struck his as being a "synthesized trick," and served to remind him that the "theatre is a place for things theatrical."[139] George Jean Nathan reported that "the occasion, despite the nobility of its ambition and purpose is, after a half-hour of it, a trial."[140]

Specific critical commentary was quite varied. Objections were raised concerning the manner in which the performers approached their parts, with some reviewers complaining about too much movement while others bemoaned the lack of movement. The chorus had its supporters and its critics. Several of the critics found fault with the script.

Acting

Some of the criticism of the acting centered on the way in which the actors approached their roles. Bentley was the most vehemently opposed to the combination of acting and reading.

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[136]Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegraph, February 17, 1953.

[137]Time, December 22, 1952, p. 55.

[138]Harold Clurman, Nation, February 28, 1953, p. 193.

[139]Chapman, loc. cit.

[140]George Jean Nation, New York Journal American, March 1, 1953.

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141 Eric Bentl

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> As non-actors they come before us in evening dress. As actors they proceed to impersonate soldiers in uniform or Confederate maidens in distress; this is in itself an exciting feature; what is awkward is the transition back into non acting--or more precisely, the way Mr. Laughton has them act while not acting, kissing a hand, encircling a neck, sitting in pictorial attitudes under romantic lighting. Why there is more artifice in this sublime simplicity than in the complexities of regular theatre which it affects to eschew. No scenery, no action, just three speakers and a poem, yet Mr. Laughton so complicates the formula with fancy lighting, grouping, and movement, that I again end wishing this great artist would accept the everyday complication of the regular article.[141]

Other critics thought this dual approach and increased movement added to the evening's excitement. Hawkins thought one of the highlights was the scene in which Power used the balustrade as a ridge of land while describing Pickett's last desperate charge at Gettysburg.[142] Brown praised Laughton for his use of imaginative staging which he thought prevented the dramatization from becoming static.[143] Atkinson also approved of the way the actors moved about.[144] Although the critics were not all in agreement as to the effectiveness of this increased movement, they did agree that John Brown's Body was clearly more of a presentation in terms of movement and gesture than Don Juan in Hell had been.

Another area of disagreement among the critics was the success with which the three stars handled their various roles. Each performer had to portray a wide range of characters. One critic suggested the assignment of characters had been made primarily to provide vocal variety rather than to match specific actors to specific

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[141] Eric Bentley, New Republic, March 2, 1953, p. 23.

[142] Hawkins, loc. cit. [143] Brown, loc. cit.

[144] Atkinson, New York Times, February 22, 1953, Sec. II, p. 1.

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[145] Hobe, loc.

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characters,[145] but as later discussion of individual performers will indicate, it would seem that at least some matching of character to actor was employed.

The consensus of critical opinion was that the three stars moved easily into the roles of the many characters. At least two reviewers objected to the multiple characterization, however. Freedley found Massey's portrayal of Lincoln superb, but thought his Negro characters resembled an amateur performance of an old-fashioned Negro minstrel show. Freedley felt it was confusing to the audience to have Mr. Power impersonate both the Northern and Southern heroes.[146] Nathan also felt the mass character switching was confusing. With only vocal changes and facial expressions to delineate the different characters, Nathan confessed to being exasperated.

> I have just as expansive an imagination as the next man, but when one minute I am asked to regard an actor as one character and the next as another and totally different one simply on the score that he makes a different kind of face and alters somewhat the pitch of his voice, I confess I find myself pretty bewildered . . . it is beyond my range of fancy to visualize an actor in a dinner suit as everything from Lincoln to a Negro slave and what-not else merely on the ground that a narrator announces he is one or the other.[147]

Nathan not only objected to the multiple characterizations, he was dissatisfied with the quality of the acting as a whole. He did not think the three players in John Brown's Body were of quite the same outstanding caliber as those of the First Drama Quartet.[148] Time's critic also found the acting less satisfactory. The brilliantly unified style of acting which had characterized Don Juan in Hell was not present in John Brown's Body. Each of the three stars seemed to

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[145] Hobe, loc. cit. [146] Freedley, loc. cit.

[147] Nathan, loc. cit. [148] Nathan, loc. cit. [149] Time, loc. cit.

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[149] Time, loc.

[151] Atkinson,

[152] Bolton, lo

go his own individual way. "With his clear, Midwestern voice and manner, Tyrone Power seems the more American, the most unobtrusive, the most effective performer. In contrast, Judith Anderson's manner seems at times a little too elevated, Raymond Massey's a little too elocutionary."[149]

Bentley, who was unhappy with the amount of movement used by the players, was also unhappy about their delivery. "The three stars spend the evening posing for an imaginary photographer seated rather high in the balcony; when speaking they gaze misty-eyed at the camera; when silent they gaze misty-eyed at their speaking colleague."[150]

Many of the reviewers thought the performers were excellent. Atkinson thought all three were superb.[151] Bolton described them as "three first-rate readers" who conveyed the joy and sorrow, compassion and tragedy in Benet's work in an admirable fashion.[152] McClain thought the trio had done a wonderful job.[153] Beaufort described the three as exceptionally talented and expressed a reluctance to draw any comparisons among them.[154] Most critics however, had no such reservations and commented at some length about each individual.

The performer who came in for the lion's share of attention from the critics was Tyrone Power. Although Power came from a theatrical family, he had foresaken Broadway for Hollywood many years before. His only legitimate theatre experience since leaving

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[149] Time, loc. cit. [150] Bentley, loc. cit.

[151] Atkinson, New York Times, February 22, 1953, Sec. II, p. 1.

[152] Bolton, loc. cit. [153] McClain, loc. cit. [154] Beaufort, loc. cit.

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[159]Atkinson,

Broadway had been a summer appearance in Lilliom at a straw-hat theatre in Westport, Connecticut.[155]

Power's good looks had confined him to portraying romantic leading men and he had, as one critic politely phrased it, "never exactly set the screen on fire."[156] The critics were pleasantly surprised to find him an accomplished actor.

> Of the three principals, all eminent, one must propose a small toast to Tyrone Power who succeeds in holding his own as the single emissary from Hollywood. Here he is, surrounded by two valedictorians from the stage, and he comes away with colors flying. He is able to match them in poise and performance.[157]

Power's part required considerable versatility. He portrayed most of the younger men and the two heroes, Wingate of the South and Ellyat of the North. As the Southerner, he had the dream-like description of the Georgia countryside which garnered considerable praise. As the Northerner, his description of the emotions and fears of a Union soldier awaiting a Rebel charge at Gettysburg was considered by many to have been the high point of the evening.[158]

Atkinson found Power to be an actor of candor, skill, and understanding, and quite worthy of the company he kept.[159] Kerr was especially impressed with Power's kinetic response to the Benet poem. "He seizes upon a physical sensation--a prod in the back from an enemy guard, the sight of a dead cat on the road back from Bull Run--

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[155]Freedley, loc. cit. [156]Sheaffer, loc. cit. [157]McClain, loc. cit.

[158]Hawkins, loc. cit.
Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, February 16, 1953.
Bolton, loc. cit.
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[159]Atkinson, loc. cit.

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[160] Walter Kerr

[161] Chapman, lo

[164] Hobe., loc

[166] Kerr, loc.

and gives it accurate and compelling intensity."[160]

Chapman was particularly impressed with Power's magnificent voice and his outstanding diction.[161] Nathan also paid tribute to Power's voice and diction, but complained that "the screen beauty . . . has not yet learned much about modulations and becomes monotonous as the evening goes on."[162]

Bentley thought both Power and Massey had "real enough gifts within a narrow span."[163] Despite Bentley's reservations and Nathan's negative commentary, the overwhelming opinion of the critics was that Power had given an outstanding performance.

Raymond Massey portrayed the older men in the Benet epic. The Variety critic thought Massey's presentation was one of the outstanding performances of his career.[164] Several critics mentioned his previous success in R. E. Sherwood's "Abe Lincoln in Illinois" as they discussed his portrayal of the troubled Lincoln. Coleman noted that:

> Raymond Massey inevitably was given the passages devoted to the harassed President's anxieties, hopes, and eventual triumph. With forceful but beautifully controlled acting, he held the audience spellbound.[165]

As Kerr wrote, "He is--to the surprise of no one at this late date--a deeply touching Lincoln."[166] Chapman found Massey to be at his best "when a passage of the poem involves Abe Lincoln and he can go into a well-tried characterization."[167]

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[160]Walter Kerr, New York Herald Tribune, February 16, 1953.

[161]Chapman, loc. cit. [162]Nathan, loc. cit. [163]Bentley, loc. cit.

[164]Hobe., loc. cit. [165]Coleman, loc. cit.

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[168] Watts, loc.

[170] Freedley,

[172] Nathan, lo

Massey had what one critic termed the most fortunate assignment.[168] Not only did he have the Lincoln scenes, but also very moving episodes concerning John Brown and Robert E. Lee. Sheaffer felt the actor's finest moments were not those concerned with Lincoln, though he found them tremendously moving. He was most impressed with Massey's delivery of

> . . . a long descriptive passage, thrilling with quiet penetrating eloquence, about the iron-grey Lee . . . the marble man . . . Mr. Massey, scrupulously restraining all personal mannerisms, delivers it with heart felt sincerity and admiration for the enigmatic leader. An infinitely touching passage.[169]

Freedley, as noted before, disliked Massey's portrayal of the old Negro slave, although he acknowledged Massey "has his superb moments as Lincoln."[170] Hawkins, on the other hand, was impressed by Massey's variety of portrayals. "Mr. Massey's quiet, polished perfection allows contrasts as strong as that between clabber and sorghum. His slack-jawed house slave and the mighty, humble Lincoln are opposite poles of the actor's art."[171]

Nathan thought Massey had adjusted more successfully to the "hybrid occasion" than the other two performers, but noted that Massey too, had a hard time of it. "While his vocal delivery is nicely varied, [he] is driven to such distortions of his features to indicate his various incarnations that he intermittently suggests a man in pain rather than the possibly less afflicted character he hopes to portray."[172]

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[168] Watts, loc. cit. [169] Sheaffer, loc. cit.

[170] Freedley, loc. cit. [171] Hawkins, loc. cit.

[172] Nathan, loc. cit.

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[173] Nathan, loc

[175] Kerr, loc.

[177] Atkinson,

Nathan heartily disliked Miss Anderson's bevy of characters. He acknowledged her talent and her usual excellence, but he thought she appeared uneasy and embarrassed in her current assignment. He accused her of substituting ". . . a repertory of roguish smiles, drawing room gestures, and vocal shadings that sometimes throw the meaning of her lines into the shadow for what in normal dramatic circumstances she would be the full mistress of."[173]

Freedley was also somewhat critical of Miss Anderson's presentation, but he credited her problems to the necessity for her to "recreate so many potential roles foreign to her in time and in sex that it is a wonder she survived."[174]

Many of the critics thought Miss Anderson had done an excellent job, although several acknowledged her part to be the most fragmentary of the three. Among other roles, she portrayed a Northern mother praying for John Brown; two very different Southern belles; a young girl in her love affair and motherhood; a Yankee-hating, God-admonishing plantation mistress, and a Northern slavery ship captain.[175] Watts reported the scenes dealing with women were the least rewarding and that Miss Anderson lacked an outstanding show piece. However, he thought her "distinguished forcefulness and strength" contributed much to the success of the reading.[176] Atkinson wrote that Miss Anderson's scenes were brief, but tremendously moving.[177] The Variety

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[173]Nathan, loc. cit. [174]Freedley, loc. cit.

[175]Kerr, loc. cit. [176]Watts, loc. cit.

[177]Atkinson, New York Times, February 16, 1953, p. 17.

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[181] Ibid.

critic noted that while Miss Anderson had a tendency once in a while to "rend a passion to shreds," her catalogue of characters was vibrant and occasionally affecting.[178]

Some of the commentary regarding the actors dealt with the illusions they were able to create in the mind of the listeners. Hawkins thought that the oral interpretation manner of presentation was quite successful in enabling the audience to create their own images. "When for instance, Miss Anderson completes the passage about the burning mansion, it is an effort to admit no such house or fire was there before your eyes."[179] Bolton wrote of Power's abilities in this capacity:

> Mr. Power as a Union Soldier needs no scenic help. When he sees things that aren't there at all, you see them too. Mr. Power has a treasure of believability in his creation, and you walk Gettysburg and all of the other roads of heartbreak with him.[180]

Bolton thought that perhaps the ability of an oral interpretation production to create illusions should be considered as one of the criterion for judging their effectiveness.

> The test, I would think, of any reading work is its power for rising above the lack of settings and props. If actors can make you never miss a painted wall or a glass window, if they can make you create your own settings in your own mind, they have managed what is most difficult.[181]

Kerr thought John Brown's Body not only made the audience imagine their own settings, he thought they were more effective settings than could have been created in a "normal" production.

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[178]Hobe., loc. cit. [179]Hawkins, loc. cit. [180]Bolton, loc. cit.

[181]Ibid.

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[182] Kerr, loc. ci

[184] Atkinson, lo
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[185] Coleman, lo
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> A looting member of Sherman's army, shouting his way through the echoing halls of a deserted mansion, is far more vividly realized than he might have been had the scenic warehouses been ransacked for literal props.[182]

Chorus

Perhaps the most outstanding innovation of John Brown's Body was the introduction of a twenty member chorus. The group, directed by Walter Schumann, supplied ballads, spirituals and Civil War tunes as well as sound effects such as "marching feet, the tired ghost-like shouts of exhausted prisoners, the blood hungry yells of men charging in battle, the giggling of young girls."[183]

Sometimes the chorus spoke in unison, other times individual members of the chorus would speak, Generally the reaction to the chorus was favorable, though it was by no means unanimous. Critics Atkinson, Bentley, Chapman, Watts, and Bolton all felt the choral singing added much to the performance.[184] Coleman and Sheaffer drew comparisons between the twenty-member chorus and the Greek chorus.[185]

Other gentlemen of the press were less favorably impressed. Nathan made mention of the robust lunged chorus, but complained that the singers had to resort to "the hokum of the marching songs

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[182] Kerr, loc. cit. [183] Sheaffer, loc. cit.

[184] Atkinson, loc. cit.
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[186] Nathan, loc

[188] Wolcott Gi

[189] Time, loc.

and tunes of the Civil War period."[186] McClain considered the choral accompaniment 'appropriate,' but thought the group spent entirely too much time chanting "John Brown's Body is a Mouldering."[187]

Gibbs found the chanted songs, (especially "John Brown's Body") 'endless', and charged that the songs had no real organic connection with the central theme: rather they were "merely arbitrary and distracting grace notes, put in to give things a more portentous [sic] air."[188] Time's critic wrote:

> The chorus is well trained, but trained to do popular tricks. For every lusty "Jubili, Jubilo" there are a number of radio like vocal gadgets and sound effects. Thus, over and over the chorus--in a goblins'll-git-you voice intones: 'John Brown's Body lies a moolerin' in the grave."[189]

Clurman found the special effects and offstage noises "so naively illustrative" that he was afraid when the smell of a girl's hair was mentioned, the "aroma was going to be wafted through the theatre by some novel device."[190]

John Mason Brown was thoroughly entranced by the entire production and he presented this defense of the use of the chorus.

> If it is pointed out that its members sing background music and supply the sounds of trains, guitars, crowds at a station or rising gales, this may seem to indicate that they are merely providing the equivalent of radio sound effects. Nothing could be further from the truth, for Mr. Laughton has managed to give his chorus a style distinguished in its own right. It is a visual style, a frieze-like quality, unobtrusive yet as definite as a ballet.[191]

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[186] Nathan, loc. cit. [187] McClain, loc. cit.

[188] Wolcott Gibbs, The New Yorker, February 21, 1953, p. 60.

[189] Time, loc. cit. [190] Clurman loc. cit. [191] Brown, loc. cit.

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[192] Sheaffer, J

[193] Atkinson,
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[194] Brown, loc

Material

Perhaps the most frequently criticized aspect of John Brown's Body was the material. Comparison after comparison was made between the Benet poem and the Shaw play, with the Benet poem getting the worst of it. One critic complained that this comparison was unjust in light of the fact they were two very different literary forms. "One was a dazzling ping-pong game of ideas between Bernard Shaw and Bernard Shaw; the other is stirring poetry, passionately American and beautifully performed, a sumptuous feast of fine language and gripping emotional power."[192] Other critics pointed out that Don Juan in Hell was written to be played, while the Benet poem was written to be read by individuals.[193] Brown wrote:

> When Charles Laughton brought Don Juan in Hell to the stage in the form of a 'reading' he had at his disposal a literary work conceived as drama, meant to be acted, and written by one of the world's major playwrights. In the case of John Brown's Body, Mr. Laughton faced a very different assignment as director. Benet's poem, though stirringly dramatic, was literature without theatre in mind . . . .
>
> Shaw had no story to tell in the usual sense. His drama was a debate, conducted with all the eloquence and forensic skill at his command. . . . Although Benet wrote from fine perceptions and an excellent mind, he wrote as a poet, not as a dialectician. His concerns were emotional rather than intellectual. He, too, was interested in ideas, but his ideas were expressed in terms of individuals subject to love, exposed to death, and speaking for a distressed country while speaking for themselves. He had many stories to tell, all of which were part of a tremendous national saga and he told them movingly.[194]

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[192] Sheaffer, loc. cit.

[193] Atkinson, New York Times, February 22, 1953, Sec. II, p. 1. Bolton, loc. cit.

[194] Brown, loc. cit.

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As Brown indicated, Laughton was confronted with a tremendous task. It was necessary to condense more than twelve hours of poetry into the conventional length of a theatrical performance without losing the richness of the poem. The stories of the Northerner, Jack Ellyat, and the Southerner, Clay Wingate, representative of the two opposing traditions and viewpoints, had to be trimmed considerably. Many characters were eliminated completely and many more received only partial treatment.[195]

Laughton had to give the poem some sort of dramatic form, and it was at this point, some critics felt, he failed. Nathan paid tribute to Laughton's skill as an arranger and as a director, but he felt the materials Laughton had to work with defeated his efforts. Nathan was willing to admit that Benet's poem had dramatic elements, but because it had not been intended for the stage, it lacked directness and clarity, and despite Laughton's efforts, it was frequently difficult to keep track of the diverse threads of the story. Nathan maintained the reading amounted to little more than a "second-hand extended recitation of plot and dialogue of some play one hasn't seen."[196]

Other reviewers took issue with the poem itself. John Chapman argued that, even if the Benet poem were great, which he was not willing to concede, it had been written for reading in print and not for the theatre. Thus, regardless of how well Laughton had adapted it, in his opinion, it was still better suited for the library.[197] Gibbs also questioned the excellence of the material. He criticized the verse for having forced, predictable rhymes which

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[195]Atkinson, loc. cit. [196]Nathan, loc. cit. [197]Chapman, loc. cit.

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[198] Gibbs, loc

[200] McClain, l

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he found "painfully flat and monotonous." Gibbs credited the actors and the chorus with trying, but wrote that, due to the poor script, they were "all substantially defeated" before the evening was through.[198]

Another reviewer who did not appreciate the Pulitzer Prize-winning epic was Harold Clurman, who complained:

> It is a highly respectable literary gloss on traditional memories and ready made reactions. It has no real story and no true characters. Its pathos depends on its associations, not on what it creates itself. There are narrative passages which--apart from the distinction of the writing--are reminiscent of old time Civil War movies. The outstanding bit from the first section is a literal quotation from John Brown and another excellent piece which describes the anguish of Lincoln's self-doubt is also partly quotation.[199]

Other critics thought the Benet epic was an excellent choice for the reading. McClain thought the legend was exciting and informative.[200] Shaeffer credited John Brown's Body with bringing "back to our language-poor theatre the lyric beauty, full-throated emotion and soaring eloquence of fine poetry."[201] Hawkins found the Benet production a worthy successor to Shaw's intellectual discussion.[202]

The critic for Time suggested that, in terms of popular appeal, the Benet chronicle of the Civil War had more to offer than Shaw's "dazzling moral debate," and that, while not the work of a master of stage dialogue like Shaw, it adapted fairly well to the stage.[203] Walter Kerr described it as a narrative rather than a sparkling

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[198]Gibbs, loc. cit. [199]Clurman, loc. cit.

[200]McClain, loc. cit. [201]Sheaffer, loc. cit.

[202]Hawkins, loc. cit. [203]Time, loc. cit.

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dialogue; a vast panorama of fragmentary scenes with no natural theatrical climax. Kerr thought Laughton had done an excellent job in adapting the poem for stage purposes, and noted, "It is an old and largely forgotten literary notion that epic poetry was meant to be read aloud."[204]

Comparisons

As noted throughout the preceding pages, many critics compared John Brown's Body to Don Juan in Hell as they discussed the various merits and demerits of the second Laughton-Gregory production. John Brown's Body was more of a "production" than its predecessor had been. It had a chorus of twenty, an epic story, and a variety of roles for its three principals to cope with. There were no scripts in evidence and the actors used a great deal more movement and gesture. However, as in Don Juan in Hell, the focus of the production was on the language and the literature, and thus the emphasis was still on the aural rather than on the visual aspects of the production.

Financially the production was a success.[205] Artistically, at least according to the critics, it was not as impressive as its predecessor. The majority of complaints and expressions of dissatisfaction about the production seemed to center around the choice of material, with many of the critics questioning the epic poem's suitability for dramatic presentation. The general consensus seemed to be that the Shaw debate had been much better suited. Although the overall evaluation of Massey, Power and Anderson was favorable, they did not quite measure up to the First Drama Quartet in the

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[204] Kerr, loc. cit.

[205] Variety, May 27, 1953, p. 74.

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judgment of some of the reviewers. A few critics were also displeased with the necessity for each actor to portray several characters. Perhaps the novelty of Don Juan in Hell was partially responsible for its greater success, but it also appeared to have had better material for the oral interpretation form of presentation and to have had slightly better performers.

Frequent mention was made of the 'fad' for oral interpretation productions, though the only other Broadway presentation of that type besides Don Juan in Hell was Emlyn Williams' program of readings from Charles Dickens, which hardly seems indicative of a trend. Watts cited the popularity of what he described as "this specialized method of offering classics to playgoers" and commented that, while its appeal might fade eventually, right now it offered fresh theatrical excitement.[206]

The Variety critic acknowledged that bare stage shows had become fashionable for the intellectuals, but he questioned how long such productions would be able to draw sufficient audiences once the curiosity seekers had been satisfied.[207] Freedley, although he enjoyed John Brown's Body, spoke out against what he termed "this return to mid-Victorianism in public readings of plays and poetry."[208] Chapman described John Brown's Body as a "showmanlike descendant of such increments to American education as the lectures of Dickens and Wilde, and the dedicated tent shows of the Chautauqua Circuit . . . ."[209] Nathan, as usual had a great deal to say about the subject of oral reading.

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[206]Watts, loc. cit. [207]Hobe., loc. cit.

[208]Freedley, loc. cit. [209]Chapman, loc. cit.

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> What may be called the reading-theatre, which got its start with the performance by the First Drama Quartet of Don Juan in Hell and has since delivered of itself nationally such a profusion of solo and group copycats that seeing a play with a drop curtain, some scenery and costumes, will, if things keep up, conceivably one day be a novel and exciting experience . . . .
>
> It may be ventured that, with this presentation, the local prosperity of the reading theatre has just about run its short course. The novelty it had is gone and, unless another group as fully competent and engaging as the Drama Quartet miraculously pops up out of nowhere and unless another great wit like Shaw pops up with it, the theatre as we have always had it will be found in its old secure place . . . .[210]

John Brown's Body closed its Broadway run after sixty-five performances.[211] Gregory sent it on another cross country tour and the popularity of the poem and the fame of the trio of readers continued to draw crowds. The critics may have had reservations, but the public apparently did not.

Perhaps Laughton and Gregory agreed with Nathan that the "prosperity of the reading theatre" had run its course, for they did not produce any more oral interpretation productions. They did work together on The Caine Mutiny Court Martial, but it was not staged as a reading.

Interestingly enough, the play The Caine Mutiny Court Martial originated from author Herman Wouk's attempt to persuade Gregory and Laughton to do a dramatic reading of the trial scene in his novel, The Caine Mutiny. Laughton did not think the novel was suited for a reading presentation, but he thought the trial scene would be excellent for a "regular" play. Laughton helped Wouk with the script and eventually directed the Broadway production of The Caine Mutiny Court Martial with Henry Fonda, Lloyd Nolan, and John Hodiak in

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[210] Nathan, loc. cit. [211] Zolotow, loc. cit.

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Summary

The Laughton-Gregory productions were the first successful oral interpretation productions to be done on Broadway. Both productions featured "big name stars" who were very capable and talented performers as well as being box-office attractions. The first presentation had very little movement and prominently displayed the manuscripts, though the actors did not really "read." The second presentation was much more of a production. They made no pretense of reading from a manuscript. They used a great deal more movement and gesture than had the members of the First Drama Quartet. A twenty-member chorus played an important part in John Brown's Body.

The majority of critics approved of the presentations, and most used some form of the word "reading" in their reviews. One critic suggested that one criterion which should be used in judging oral interpretation presentations should consider how well the production succeeds in making its listeners create illusions in their minds.[213]

None of the reviewers expressed any doubt as to whether or not Don Juan in Hell constituted theatre. Kerr headlined his report, "This is Theatre!,"[214] and Bolton entitled his review, "'Don Juan in Hell' Theatre at Its Most Triumphant."[215]

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[212]Singer, op. cit., p. 282.

[213]Bolton, loc. cit.

[214]Walter Kerr, New York Herald Tribune, October 23, 1951.

[215]Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegram, October 23, 1951.

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Beaufort declared, "There has been no better theatre on Broadway this season."[216] Nathan described Don Juan in Hell as "just about the realest theatre we have had in some time."[217] Coleman observed, "You really don't need a stage full of scenery if you have genius there."[218] Sheaffer wrote, "It doesn't necessarily take a stage full of actors, a lively story, much scenery and costuming to do it - to hold and fascinate an audience. It's enough when the dialogue is worth listening to and it is spoken by a small handful of players who know their jobs."[219]

Three critics did have reservations about whether John Brown's Body should be considered theatre. Nathan complained Don Juan in Hell had spawned "such a profusion of . . . copycats" that reading presentations were no longer welcome. He declared that "unless another group as fully competent and engaging as the Drama Quartette miraculously pops up out of nowhere and unless another great wit like a Shaw pops up with it, the theatre as we have always had it will be found in its old, secure place."[220] Chapman reported that John Brown's Body served to remind him that "the theatre is a place for things theatrical."[221] Freedley preferred John Brown's Body to Don Juan in

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[216]John Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, December 8, 1951.

[217]George Jean Nathan, Theatre in the Fifties, p. 200.

[218]Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, October 23, 1951.

[219]Louis Sheaffer, Brooklyn Daily Eagle, October 23, 1951.

[220]George Jean Nathan, New York Journal American, March 1, 1953.

[221]Chapman, loc. cit.

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Hell, but still had reservations about readings. "I can't go along with all this return to mid-Victorianism in public readings of plays and poetry, or even the flavorsome stories of Charles Dickens. I like to see a play acted on the stage more than anything else no matter how great the literature being read, theoretically, is."[222]

Three other critics felt John Brown's Body was "theatre." Atkinson called it "a piece of vivid theatre,"[223] Coleman described it as "an evening of exciting and rewarding theatre,"[224] and the Variety critic found it "compelling theatre."[225]

The success of the Laughton-Gregory ventures enjoyed is undoubtedly partially responsible for many of the productions of a similar nature which followed. Don Juan in Hell proved that drama could be effectively presented as a "reading." John Brown's Body proved that material not originally intended for the stage could be successful as a "reading." Unfortunately, several of the subsequent presentations did not fully appreciate the necessity for selecting material which had some form of dramatic impact, or the necessity for having very talented readers.

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[222]Freedley, loc. cit. [223]Atkinson, loc. cit.

[224]Coleman, loc. cit. [225]Hobe, loc. cit.

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CHAPTER IV

ANTHOLOGIES

The classification of "anthologies" is used in reference to productions in which the literary material consists of selections from two or more authors and is related to a central theme. The selections may be either prose or poetry, or possibly a collection of both, but they must relate to a single idea or theme.

It is the intention of this writer to examine each presentation fitting this description in an attempt to determine answers to the following questions. What settings and accessories were used? How did the critics classify the production? What was unique about the manner of presentation? Was it a critical and/or popular success? Who were the performers and what was the critical response to them? What type of material was used and how did it adapt to the oral interpretation manner of presentation? Did there seem to be any marked similarities between these productions and previous oral interpretation productions? Were there any special features about the productions?

Not all of these questions can be answered for each of the six productions in this category. Unfortunately the critics did not always consider all the aspects this writer wished to consider. Other aspects of the productions which seem interesting and significant will also be discussed.

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[3] Bolton, loc

Only two anthologies were presented by solo performers between 1945 and 1965. Both performers were women and both productions were failures. On April 25, 1960, Maria Fein appeared in a program of selections from Schiller, Shaw, Schnitzler, Shakespeare and Cocteau entitled An Evening of European Theatre. Apparently her opening night at the 41st Street Theatre did not attract much attention in theatre circles, as only two reviews appeared in the New York newspapers.

Neither Whitney Bolton of the Morning Telegraph, nor Arthur Gelb of the New York Times gave any description of the manner in which Miss Fein presented her program. Gelb launched into his tirade against her performance without attempting to classify it. Bolton noted that "readings" were extremely difficult to do well,[1] so one might assume he classified the evening's entertainment as a reading.

Gelb described Miss Fein as "a red-haired woman wearing a black gown, pearls, and a toothy smile," who began the proceedings seated at a table decorated with a red velvet tablecloth and lighted candles.[2] Apparently this constituted the scenery.

Bolton gave what might be considered a lukewarm endorsement to the entertainment. As mentioned above, he spoke of "readings" being difficult to do, and though he did not specifically say Miss Fein had overcome this difficulty, neither did he say she had failed. He did comment favorably on her vocal variety.[3]

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[1]Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegraph, April 27, 1960.

[2]Arthur Gelb, New York Times, April 26, 1960, p. 41.

[3]Bolton, loc. cit.

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[4] Gelb, loc. ci

[5] Jay Carr, Ne

[6] Ibid.
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[7] William Benn
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Gelb also commented on her vocal variety, but less favorably. He cited the scene from Mary Stuart in which "Miss Fein played not only Mary, but Elizabeth, two Earls, a knight, a guard, and a nurse--each in a different voice ranging from bass to soprano and all in a Viennese accent."[4]

Gelb thought the program would have been extremely funny had not Miss Fein appeared so serious about what she was doing. He thought he had heard enough by intermission and, as he put it, "escaped." Neither critic wrote of Miss Fein's choice of material.

Five Queens

The second solo presentation of an anthology fared even worse, though it did attract more critical coverage. Sala Staw presented the heroines from Euripides' Andromache, Racine's Phaedra, Shakespeare's Macbeth, and both Elizabeth and Mary from Schiller's Mary Stuart. The program was entitled Five Queens, and as one caustic critic commented, "It was a losing theatrical hand."[5]

A variety of labels were applied to the presentation. Two critics used the term "readings" in their reviews.[6] Two others described the proceedings as a "tour de force."[7] One reviewer referred to the evening as "a re-enactment of dramatic moments."[8]

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[4]Gelb, loc. cit.

[5]Jay Carr, New York Post, September 11, 1963.

[6]Ibid.
Martin Gottfried, Women's Wear Daily, September 11, 1963.

[7]William Bender, New York Herald Tribune, September 11, 1963.
John Mitchell, New York Journal American, September 12, 1963.

[8]Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegraph, September 12, 1963.

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Unfortunately, no one saw fit to describe the stage setting or to discuss the manner of presentation apart from Miss Staw's acting style.

None of the seven critics in attendance liked the production. Most of their criticism was directed toward the acting. Several of them seemed to feel some pangs of remorse that duty forced them to speak unkindly about Miss Staw's histrionic abilities, but they managed to do a very thorough job of it despite this.

The Variety critic found the evening a painful one, with Miss Staw trying her best, "but failing vocally, visually, and histrionically to convey the power and drama of the excerpted scenes."[9] Calta credited her with earnestness and high purpose, but found her lacking in forcefulness, variety and eloquence.[10] Bolton complained she knew all the words, but not how to color them.[11]

Bender thought the technical aspects of her performance were acceptable, but that she failed to go beyond the externals.[12] Mitchell apparently had similar feelings. "Sala Staw conveys expression and a voice strong enough to fill an empty stage. She has grace of movement and sense of timing. She has courage, an abundance of it . . . but these are not enough.[13]

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[9]Kenn., Variety, September 18, 1963, p. 70.

[10]Louis Calta, New York Times, September 11, 1963, p. 46.

[11]Bolton, loc. cit. [12]Bender, loc. cit.

[13]Mitchell, loc. cit.

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Gottfried regretfully labeled Miss Staw's acting about fifty years too late, and from looking at the pictures of Miss Staw in action, the writer tends to think his evaluation might be correct. Gottfried found the evening pathetic.

> Pathetic because Miss Staw had prepared so mightily, believed so faithfully and cared so deeply about a kind of drama she was so incapable of. And pathetic because it was painfully obvious that the sort of actress she was trying so hard to be has long since been packed away with the theatrical memorabilia of a half-century ago.[14]

Miss Staw apparently used a different costume for each of her regal ladies. During the time between scenes while she was changing, the audience was entertained by Daniel Elliot, a young man who sang Elizabethan songs and accompanied himself on the lute. Nearly all of the critics cited his interludes as the only enjoyable part of the evening.[15]

Some of the blame for the unsuccessful evening was attributed to the choice of material. Bender thought the program was too fragmentary and that the audience found it difficult to maintain any sort of dramatic involvement when the focus shifted from character to character so often.[16] Mitchell felt the program was too filled with grief and suffering.[17]

Gottfried thought Miss Staw's material matched her acting style--unashamedly classical, with the most melodramatic passages

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[14]Gottfried, loc. cit.

[15]The bright spot of the evening for Calta was during intermission when he and six other reviewers found themselves trapped in an elevator which "refused to rise to the occasion." He missed Miss Staw's Andromache, but, on the basis of the other four, doubted that his verdict would have been any different had he seen it.

[16]Bender, loc. cit. [17]Mitchell, loc. cit.

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selected from each play. He did acknowledge the selections as being among the greatest scenes in the English speaking theatre and he chided Miss Staw for making such a mess of them.[18] Five Queens closed after eight performances.

No reference was made to Miss Fein's production. Carr mentioned that "theatregoers who have attended any of the first rate readings given here in recent seasons will find this one a letdown,"[19] but he did not specify to what readings he referred. It would seem the only parallels to be drawn between these two solo anthologies are that both performers were women, both used the classics for their material, and both were unsuccessful.

Perhaps these productions might better have been classified as "solo acting presentations," for, despite the critics' use of the term "reading," the bulk of their commentary was centered on the ladies' acting ability, or lack of it. Apparently, neither Miss Fein nor Miss Staw were outstanding actresses to start with, and this was probably the main reason their presentations failed. A contributing factor may have been that the material, although taken from dramatic masterpieces, lacked dramatic unity. The connecting links between the selections seem to have been rather superficial, with one program presenting five unhappy queens and the other, a variety of characters from five plays.

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[18]Gottfried, loc. cit. [19]Carr, loc. cit.

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When I Was a Child

Information regarding the four anthologies performed by groups was more abundant than it had been for the solo presentations, and the critical reation was more favorable to three of the four. The first non-solo anthology was presented December 8, 1960, at the 41st Street Theatre. Entitled When I Was a Child, it consisted of adaptations of short stories about various youngsters written by Dylan Thomas, Shirley Jackson, Virginia Woolf, Frank O'Connor, Sholem Aleichem, and Katherine Anne Porter.

Setting and Accessories

The stage was rather bleakly furnished with a scrim, stools of varying sizes, and a hat rack. The stools were shifted around for the different stories.[20] The background clarinet music was written for the show by Stephen Richard, Jr., and played by Scoville Browne[21] (until Union difficulties necessitated taping it.)[22] Ruth Esherick's lighting was described as "an important supplement to the action."[23]

Taubman credited both the lighting and the music with helping to create an illusion. He also referred to the "suggestion of costume" used by the actors.[24] Another critic reported the performers looked well, "despite their Bennington College costuming."[25] According to

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[20] Letter from Miss Gaye Glaeser to the author, July 6, 1968.

[21] Kali., Variety, December 21, 1960, p. 56.

[22] Glaeser, loc. cit.

[23] R.I.A., Women's Wear Daily, December 13, 1960.

[24] Howard Taubman, New York Times, December 9, 1960, p. 38.

[25] Guy Savino, Newark Evening News, December 9, 1960.

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actress Gaye Glaeser, the three men wore black pants and white shirts. Two of the women wore jumpers and colored blouses and the third actress wore a skirt and blouse. Various bits of costume, such as hats and shawls, were located on the hat stand and were used at different times throughout the evening.[26]

Classification

The critics had considerable difficulty classifying this presentation. The program note, appearing in several of the reviews, referred to it as an evening of dramatized stories. Two of the critics used this terminology in their reviews.[27] The program note appearing in the theatre column of the New York Journal American mentioned six one-act plays, and McClain used this description.[28]

The most frequently employed label was "readings," with two critics writing of "dramatized readings,"[29] one writing of "illustrated readings,"[30] and another writing of "staged readings."[31] Actor George Bartenieff thought the program could best be described as a "staged reading."[32] Two reviewers concocted their own terminology. One referred to the proceedings as a "concert version of six pieces

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[26]Glaeser, loc. cit.

[27]Savino, loc. cit.
Joseph Morgenstern, New York Herald Tribune, December 9, 1960.

[28]John McClain, New York Journal American, December 9, 1960.

[29]R.I.A., loc. cit.
Sandra Schmidt, Village Voice, December 15, 1960.

[30]Taubman, loc. cit.

[31]Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegraph, December 10, 1960.

[32]Letter from George Bartenieff to the author, July 9, 1968.

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of recollective writing,"[33] while the other spoke of a "program of adaptations."[34]

Manner of Presentation

Arnold Tager adapted the stories for the stage and directed the production. Tager used one performer to do the narration and the other five to do dialogue, mime, or dance portrayals of the characters and events. Bartenieff wrote of the manner of presentation:

> We started off with the stools, and the scripts in our hands (sometimes reading from them, but mostly looking up and turning to each other) but soon we would get up and move around; and this staging throughout had a strong formal styalized [sic.] flavor--there was little day-to-day realistic movement. This was chosen by the director to enhance and physicalize a form which relies so strongly on imagry [sic.] alone.[35]

An interesting contradiction appears to exist between what actor Bartenieff recalls and what actress Glaeser remembers. She wrote that the material was completely memorized and that no scripts were used "after the lines were 'set.'" It is possible that she meant no scripts were used after the initial lines of each story were given, although it seems more likely that she meant no scripts were used once the lines had been memorized. Miss Glaeser also recalled that "freedom of movement was as much a part of the production as the material itself."[36] This would appear to be somewhat different from the formal, stylized movement Bartenieff spoke of.

Five critics considered the manner of presentation in some detail and there was a definite difference of opinion between them

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[33]Frank Aston, New York World-Telegram and Sun, December 9, 1960.

[34]Kali, loc. cit. [35]Bartenieff, loc. cit. [36]Glaeser, loc. cit.

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as to how successful it was. Morgenstern thought the "charades," (as he called the proceedings of the five actors not involved in the narration), distracted attention from the narrator's recitation and the recitation detracted from the "charades."[37] Herridge characterized the actions as "hackneyed," and complained that Tager had pushed his actors too hard and consequently the staging lacked subtlety.[38]

Taubman thought part of Tager's staging was charming, but condemned other parts of it as "arty." He particularly disliked the still poses Tager frequently had his actors assume. He claimed these poses required the players to sit or stand in frozen positions as if they were practicing yoga.[39] The Variety critic thought the manner of presentation worked to perfection for two of the stories, but not so well for the other four.[40] Bolton thought the staging was excellent and the way in which the stories were presented served to emphasize the beauty and strength of the language.[41]

Verdict

Most of the critics liked When I Was a Child well enough to recommend it to their readers. Salvino termed it "an always interesting, and at times, deeply moving theatrical off-Broadway exercise."[42] The critics for Variety and Women's Wear Daily endorsed it as an enjoyable

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[37]Morgenstern, loc. cit.

[38]Frances Herridge, New York Post, December 9, 1960.

[39]Taubman, loc, cit. [40]Kali, loc. cit.

[41]Bolton, loc. cit. [42]Salvino, loc. cit.

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evening.[43] Bolton thought the production was worthy of praise and attention, but expressed concern as to whether or not it would find an audience.

> One never knows what public taste will be and I certainly have no way of knowing what the response to this will be. I hope, I earnestly hope, that there is a discerning public with minds above musical comedy level that will respond and crowd the little basement theatre at 41st Street.[44]

McClain approved of the proceedings, but in a more qualified way. "It is a sometimes spotty evening, but when it is good it is, like the little girl with the curl, very, very good; and when it is bad it isn't by any means awful--it is just something less than good."[45]

Two of the critics took issue with their colleagues, Morgenstern admitted the presentation was well done, but felt the material did not lend itself to the manner of treatment accorded it.

> But why was it necessary for Mr. Tager to put this on a stage and a bare stage at that? The pieces were written primarily to be read . . . no amount of ingenuity--and there is a good deal of it in this production--can provide the actors with enough to do while the narrator is narrating and no amount of declamation can make the meaning any clearer than it would have been on the printed page.[46]

Herridge was also critical of the stories being transferred from the book to the stage. She wrote of When I Was a Child:

> There's nothing wrong with the material . . . . The only trouble is going all the way to 41st St. and paying money to sit in a theatre and hear them . . . . You come away feeling that it would be better to stay home where it is warm and comfortable and read the books for yourself. There your imagination could produce far more convincing children.[47]

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[43] Kali., loc. cit. and R.I.A., loc. cit. [44] Bolton, loc. cit.

[45] McClain, loc. cit. [46] Morgenstern, loc. cit.

[47] Herridge, loc. cit.

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[48] Ibid. 4

[50] McClain,

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Acting

Most of the critics spoke warmly of the young performers, who included George Bartenieff, Gaye Glaeser, Crystal Field, Jerry Weiss, Nancy Jones-Henry, and Robert Stattel. Herridge, who liked nothing in or about the production, was an exception. She complained:

> The actions are hackneyed and most of the lines are shouted--mostly by booming masculine voices that make the childish dialogue seem disconcertingly foolish. It is hard to picture the inner suffering of rejected little Stephen when he barks out his complaints like a sergeant at arms. And it's even more irritating to be bombarded with Miss Woolf's sensitive mood pictures when they are yelled at you as in a football rally.[48]

In a more complementary vein, Schmidt described the six as highly polished and highly talented young actors.[49] McClain thought all of the performers were good, but that Bartenieff was exceptionally fine.[50] Another critic also singled out Bartenieff and noted the three male members of the cast were slightly better than the distaff side.[51]

Material

Perhaps because the six authors were so well known, the material and its suitability for this form of presentation occupied the lion's share of most of the reviews. As noted above, Herridge and Morgenstein thought the material was excellent, but would have been better left to the printed page.[52] Bolton and Taubman both commented on the ingenuity of adapter-director Tager in revising the short stories into a

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[48] Ibid. [49] Schmidt, loc. cit.

[50] McClain, loc. cit. [51] R.I.A., loc. cit.

[52] Herridge, loc. cit. and Morgenstern, loc. cit.

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form suitable for the theatre.[53] The critic for Women's Wear Daily was especially impressed with the metamorphosis from story to stage. "Adapter-director Arnold Tager has taken short stories and poems never intended for the boards and made of them an integrated set of dramatized readings which are graceful, charming, and humorous.[54] The Variety reviewer enjoyed the evening, but thought some of the stories proved to be unadaptable to the stage.[55] This evaluation seems justified in view of the criticism of the specific stories.

The most successful story was Frank O'Conner's "The Genius," the tale of a boy who decided he was uniquely gifted. Even Herridge labeled it the most successful--but hastened to add that it was successful only because the boy in the story was supposed to sound old for his years and therefore the actor playing the role didn't sound so incongruous.[56] Another critic attributed the success of the sketch to the fact that Bartenieff, who played the leading role, was the outstanding actor of the group.[57]

Two critics felt that O'Conner's story lent itself particularly well to dramatization. One pointed out that, in this story, the author had incorporated an adult point of view and a conscious attitude, both of which are lacking in most of the other selections.[58] The second critic thought the narrator-pantomime technique worked to perfection in this selection because the main character was both the narrator and an integral part of the action. Consequently there

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[53]Bolton, loc. cit. and Taubman, loc. cit.

[54]R.I.A., loc. cit. [55]Kali, loc. cit. [56]Herridge, loc. cit.

[57]Savino, loc. cit. [58]Schmidt, loc. cit.

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was a greater sense of cohesion than was found in most of the other stories.[59]

"The Downward Path to Wisdom" also had its main character serving as both the narrator and a part of the action, but it was not quite as successful. Schmidt characterized it as "the piece de resistance,"[60] but most other critics were less favorably impressed. Bolton observed a puzzled reaction on the part of the audience.[61] Morgenstern found it extremely unsatisfactory and complained that "the actors have been sufficiently ill-advised to indulge in baby talk and threaten to break out at any moment with a chorus of 'I Wuv a Wabbit.'"[62]

A mixed reaction was also accorded Shirley Jackson's "After You, My Dear Alphonse," a story about a boy who brings a Negro child home for lunch and his mother's patronizing charity. The Variety critic felt the material did not fit the presentation,[63] while the critic for the Village Voice thought it was the most successful adaptation, with its narration and acting resembling a time lapse movie.[64]

Dylan Thomas' "A Child's Christmas in Wales" was noted by the critics primarily for its language and imagery. Two diametrically opposed viewpoints were expressed as to the effectiveness of the presentation. One critic felt that Thomas' poem was well suited to this manner of presentation,[65] while the other felt its beauty suffered. "It is a beautiful piece, well narrated by Robert Stattel, but the other actors intrude rather than add to its effectiveness."[66]

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[59] Kali., loc. cit. [60] Schmidt, loc. cit.

[61] Bolton, loc. cit. [62] Morgenstern, loc. cit.

[63] Kali., loc. cit. [64] Schmidt, loc. cit.

[65] R.I.A., loc. cit. [66] Kali., loc. cit.

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"A Page from the Song of Songs" by Sholem Aleichem was also praised for the lyrical quality of the writing, but its success on stage was questioned.[67] Miss Woolf's "The Waves" seemed to have been the least successful. Aston was left "awash."[68] McClain complained, "I have trouble with Miss Woolf sometimes when she is writing about adults, but when she is writing about children for grownups, she becomes too oblique and fancy for my comprehension."[69]

Most of the critics enjoyed at least some of the selection and reccommended the production to their readers. It was the first time, (at least within the last fifteen years), that short stories had been presented on stage with a narrator and various forms of pantomime. Generally the critics thought the form of presentation worked very successfully for at least one of the stories. Some of the stories however, lacked dramatic impact and were not successful. No comparisons or references to other oral interpretation productions were made. When I Was a Child ran for thirty-eight performances. Miss Glaeser recalled that, "As they say in N.Y., Mr. Rosenblum [the producer] really 'took a loss.'"[70]

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[67] Schmidt, loc. cit.

[68] Aston, loc. cit.

[69] McClain, loc. cit.

[70] Glaeser, loc. cit.

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The Hollow Crown

January 29, 1963 saw the opening of an English import, The Hollow Crown at the Henry Miller Theatre. The production was first done by the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford on Avon in 1960. The Company made it a part of the repertory and toured Britain and the Continent with it intermittently for nearly two years before coming to the United States.

In contrast to the "unknown" status of the cast of When I Was a Child, the four members of the Royal Shakespeare Company presenting The Hollow Crown were accomplished and recognized artists. The material was by and about some of England's kings and queens. The title came from Shakespeare's Richard II. "For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the death of kings . . . for within the hollow crown that rounds the mortal temples of a king, keeps Death his court, there the antic sets, scoffing at his state and grinning at his pomp."[71]

Setting and Accessories

A black cyclorama, four Chippendale armchairs, a low table with a wine bottle and four glasses, and a lectern constituted the scenery. Slightly off to one side were a piano and a harpsichord. Further off to the side were seated four musicians. All the performers were in evening dress. Miss Tutin wore an ivory colored satin gown with a gold-colored scarf, while the men wore dinner

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[71] Shakespeare, King Richard II, ed. by John Dover Wilson (Cambridge: University Press, 1939), p. 54.

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dinner jackets and suede shoes.[72] No mention was made of any special lighting effects.

Classification

Most of the critics classified the production as a "reading." A few elaborated on exactly what kind of a reading it was. Two referred to it as a "dramatic reading,"[73] one described it as a "stage reading,"[74] and another called it a "concert reading."[75] Dorin labeled it a "reading," but hastened to add that it was no "mere reading." "It is a presentation that has more inventiveness than any half-dozen conventional stage productions."[76]

Manner of Presentation

The manner of presentation was characterized by the use of what one critic called "big prompt books."[77] The critic for Show described the proceedings as follows:

> . . .seven men in dinner jackets accompanied by Miss Dorothy Tutin in full evening dress, clutching stout folders full of reading matter marched onstage and sat down. And there they stayed for the rest of the evening, like the board of select men at a town meeting taking it in turns to read aloud, or pretend to do so.[78]

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[72] Hobe., Variety, February 6, 1963, p. 62.

[73] Ibid.
Time, February 8, 1963, p. 56.

[74] Michael Smith, Village Voice, February 7, 1963.

[75] Newsweek, February 11, 1963, p. 84.

[76] Rube Dorin, New York Morning Telegraph, January 31, 1963.

[77] John Chapman, New York Daily News, NYTCR, p. 387.

[78] Anthony West, Show, May, 1963.

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Most critics were more favorably impressed with the manner of presentation. Taubman wrote that at first the actors seemed to speak and perform "in their own persons, but it is not long before the stage becomes vibrant with illusion and comment. Kings, queens, consorts and courtiers seem to speak in their voices."[79] Dorin was convinced he received a more vivid impression of pageantry from the reading presentation than he could have from a conventional stage production.[80]

The critics differed as to whether or not the four performers acted. Clurman maintained there was no acting in the production, though he found the evening "as pleasing and precise as a normal drama."[81] Stern was convinced the production was "ACTED."[82] Other reviewers wrote of the skill with which they impersonated the rulers.[83] Cooke noted a few spirited moments of acting, but only occasional attempts at impersonation, except through the use of voice.[84] Director John Barton wrote that most of the selections were "characterized" and that the manuscripts were not always used.[85]

Verdict

The critical verdict was overwhelmingly favorable. Perhaps the most enthusiastic review came from the critic for Cue who raved:

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[79]Howard Taubman, New York Times, NYTCR, p. 386.

[80]Dorin, loc. cit.

[81]Harold Clurman, Nation, February 16, 1963, p. 146.

[82]Harold Stern, New York Standard, January 31, 1963.

[83]Newsday, February 6, 1963.
Robert Coleman, New York Mirror, NYTCR, p. 386.

[84]Richard P. Cooke, Wall Street Journal, January 31, 1963.

[85]Letter from John Barton to the author, June 10, 1968.

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"The entry is a cause for celebration, a reason for opening that vintage champagne reserved for special occasions . . . it is a royal delight. I suggest that you rush to buy tickets."[86] Stern found it "dramatic, wildly funny, touching, wryly amusing, literate and melodious. It is spoken, sung and acted with taste, clarity, and joy by a company of superlative performers."[87] Dorin wrote that, not only was this "civilized theatregoing in the fullest sense, it was absorbing, vibrant, richly humorous and brilliantly put together."[88]

Other critics, though personally enthralled with the presentation, were not sure of its appeal for the general public. Coleman warned theatregoers seeking escapism they probably would not enjoy The Hollow Crown, but recommended it enthusiastically to those not averse to giving their minds a work out.[89] Likewise, Chapman cautioned his readers that this was not entertainment for the impatient playgoer; but added that anyone with patience and insight would be amply rewarded.[90] Cooke labeled the evening as one which would "commend itself much more to certain playgoers than to others," but thought there would be something to appeal to almost everyone.[91]

The critic for Newsday detected a considerable amount of instruction concealed in the royal revue, but found it a painless way to learn.[92] McCarten complained the entertainment became a bit didactic at times, but he hastened to add that it never became dull.[93]

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[86] Cue, February 9, 1963. [87] Stern, loc. cit. [88] Dorin, loc. cit.

[89] Coleman, loc cit. [90] Chapman, loc. cit. [91] Cooke, loc. cit.

[92] Newsday, loc. cit.

[93] John McCarten, The New Yorker, February 8, 1963, p. 66.

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Two critics did not like the production. West, writing for Show, found The Hollow Crown a "literate amusement, but a highly untheatrical one, amateurishly conceived without any regard for the needs or possibilities of professional theatre."[94] The reviewer for Theatre Arts thought the presentation failed to come off because of an inconsistency in the style of the actors.[95]

Acting

The four members of the Royal Shakespeare Company who presented The Hollow Crown were Dorothy Tutin, Max Adrian, John Barton and Paul Hardwick. Most of the critics were favorably impressed. Three of the reviewers commented about the excellent diction of the performers. McClain observed, "There is the background of training in enunciation and the meticulous timing which makes excellent English inspirational."[96] Coleman wrote, "What a joy it is to hear English delivered with such meaning, such style, dramatically and humorously."[97] The reviewer for Cue was elated to report there was "not a mumbler among these performers. Everyone is clear and everyone is elegantly precise."[98]

The performer most frequently singled out for praise was Miss Tutin. This was her first appearance in the United States and she made an excellent impression on most of the critics. Taubman thought all the performers were outstanding, but that Miss Tutin was the most magnetic.[99] Watts was impressed with her excellence and versatility

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[94]West, loc. cit. [95]Theatre Arts, March, 1963, p. 64.

[96]John McClain, New York Journal American, NYTCR, p. 386.

[97]Coleman, loc. cit. [98]Cue, loc. cit. [99]Taubman, loc. cit.

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in her roles which ranged from the young queen Victoria to the ardently partisan Jane Austen to the stern Mary Tudor.[100] Gottfried noted Miss Tutin seemed to have the best material, but hastened to add, "If her material was the juiciest, she did marvelously in splendidly containing that juice."[101]

Max Adrian also received considerable comment. One critic felt his was "the solidest stage presence."[102] Hipp described him as "a dark solid fellow with a booming voice [who] needs neither costume nor crown to become a merry monarch."[103] Adrian's rendition of Horace Walpole's caustic account of the burial of George II attracted special attention from three critics.[104] The Theatre Arts reviewer was less impressed with Mr. Adrian, complaining that, while the other three members of the cast were content to give excellent readings of their parts, Adrian could not stop "guying" whatever struck him as comic.[105]

The other two men received less attention. Hardwick was described as personable and generally believable.[106] Barton, who arranged and directed the proceedings received both praise and

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[100] Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, NYTCR, pp. 386-387.

[101] Martin Gottfried, Women's Wear Daily, January 30, 1963.

[102] Time, loc. cit.

[103] Edward Hipp, Newark Evening News, January 30, 1963.

[104] McClain, loc. cit.
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[105] Theatre Arts, loc. cit. It was also noted that Mr. Adrian used heavy stage make-up, while his colleagues did not.

[106] Hobe, loc. cit.

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criticism. Dorin thought he was outstanding--"a sensitive, finely controlled actor."[107] The Variety critic labeled Barton "acceptable," although he was amazed to see Barton lip-following the other actors' lines.[108] Gottfried did not think Barton was up to the level of the other three players. He also felt Barton had given himself the least attractive material.[109]

The skillful performers undoubtedly contributed to the success of The Hollow Crown. Certainly their talents were responsible for creating an illusion of kings and queens in the minds of some of the critics. "The Royal Shakespeare Company players, although never out of modern evening attire, transform many of these shreds of English history into dramatically stirring vignettes."[110] Dorin wrote of a "vivid impression of pageantry on the scenery-less stage."[111]

Music

The Hollow Crown also featured a pianist and a male trio who provided period ballads. The Time critic wrote that balladers Stephen Manton, John Lawrenson, and Richard Golding, together with their accompanist James Walker, provided "a harmonic counter-point of period music to the proceedings."[112] Nearly all the critics found the musical interludes entertaining and appropriate.

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[107] Dorin, loc. cit.

[108] Hobe., loc. cit.

[109] Gottfried, loc. cit.

[110] Hipp, loc. cit.

[111] Dorin, loc. cit.

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Material

The material chosen and adapted by Barton was gleaned from letters, chronicles, diaries, and speeches of, and about, royalty. The program spanned some eight hundred years; from William I to Victoria. Taubman wrote of the production:

> Between prologue and epilogue we get excerpts from ancient chronicles, letters, memoirs, speeches, pleadings, histories and songs. From these adroitly chosen selections emerge swift, sharp portraits of sovereigns and courtiers. It is as if we see through a theatrical kaleidoscope droll and wry images of rulersfrom William I through the Plantagenets, Tudors, Stuarts, the House of Hanover, and finally, Victoria.[113]

The prologue, from which the title was taken, came from Shakespeare's Richard II. The epilogue was from Sir Thomas Malory's Morte d'Arthur. One critic thought this made "an eminently fitting epilogue,"[114] while another regretted the evening had not been ended before "the last and terminable epilogue involving King Arthur and the Holy Grail."[115]

The theme of the evening's entertainment was somewhat vague. In fact, one critic expressed a doubt if a theme or plot existed "unless the history of the Crown of England from King Arthur to Queen Victoria is to be considered as one vast dramatic sequence."[116] The Time reviewer decided the theme was that "divinity, mortality, and personality all hedge a king."[117] The Villager critic wrote of the common bond between the rulers: "Individual as the rulers were, they had one thing in common; they never forgot they were of royal blood and their personal dignity shines through the most abject and adverse circumstances."[118]

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[113]Taubman, loc. cit. [114]Hipp, loc. cit. [115]McClain, loc. cit.
[116]Chapman, loc. cit. [117]Time, loc. cit. [118]Villager, loc. cit.

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Maddocks found two themes in the evening's material.

> When it focuses close on the passing face, it ranges the scale of high comedy from Regency-vaudeville to slightly overstylized pathos. But when it is the enduring crown that fascinates--as ultimately it does--a sense of tragedy gives sudden depths to the evening, quite beyond the limits of national history, and one feels a little of what one felt upon first reading The Golden Bough: an intuition for the practical and mystical tensions that prompt people to institute and sustain a tradition of authority--and occasionally rebel against it.[119]

Jane Austen's version of English history, Anne Boleyn's last letter to Henry VIII, Queen Victoria's account of her coronation day, the trial of Charles I for treason, Horace Walpole's gossipy account of the funeral of George II, and James I's tirade against tobacco were cited by most critics as outstanding portions. Perhaps the diversity of the material was best described by the Variety critic. "The material ranges from eloquently romantic poetry to mundane prose, from the legendary King Arthur to the literal-minded Queen Victoria, from high tragedy to broad comedy and from fascinating entertainment to numbing tedium."[120]

Comparisons

None of the critics compared The Hollow Crown to any other oral interpretation production, but it was apparent from the reviews that the manner of presentation was not unknown. Gottfried spoke of the success of The Hollow Crown in overcoming "the natural tendency of an audience to resist a recitation."[121] Dorin proclaimed, "Here is no mere 'reading' such as we have known it."[122] The Variety critic described the production as "an elegant version of the

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[119]Melvin Maddocks, Christian Science Monitor, February 2, 1963.

[120]Hobe., loc. cit. [121]Gottfried, loc. cit. [122]Dorin, loc. cit.

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familiar dramatic reading,"[123] and the Newsweek critic noted "the stark, black cyclorama, the lecturn, the on-stage prompt books, mark this outing for the connoisseur as a concert reading."[124]

The Hollow Crown got off to a slow start because of a newspaper strike,[125] but it became a financial as well as a critical success. The production expenses were thirty thousand dollars and the box office took in thirty-seven thousand, five hundred dollars.[126] The show ran for forty-six performances and probably could have run considerably longer had not the performers had other commitment.[127] Two votes were cast by members of the Drama Critics' Circle for The Hollow Crown as the "best play" of the 1962-1963 season.[128]

The success of The Hollow Crown was somewhat of a surprise. The production was fortunate to have recognized and accomplished performers, but they were not particularly well-known to American audiences, (Dorothy Tutin made her American debut in The Hollow Crown), and consequently could not be expected to draw crowds merely on the strength of their names.

Also, the material was quite diverse and the connection between the selections was not always clear. As some critics noted, there was a good deal of British history in the production and an American audience was sometimes at a disadvantage. Although The Hollow Crown received very enthusiastic reviews, many of the critics warned that

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[123] Hobe., loc. cit. [124] Newsweek, loc. cit.

[125] New York Times, February 14, 1963, p. 5.

[126] New York Times, May 24, 1963, p. 17.

[127] New York Times, June 30, 1963, Sec. II, p. 1.

[128] New York Times, April 26, 1963, p. 25.

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the general public might not appreciate it. However, the material was sufficiently dramatic and interesting, and the performers skillful enough to overcome whatever problems the historical aspects of the program might have created, and the general public in New York thoroughly appreciated and enjoyed the presentation.

The Hollow Crown is still in the repertory of the Royal Shakespeare Company. However, some changes have been made. The men in the production now wear grey trousers and black polo-necked sweaters instead of dinner jackets, and the piano, harpsichord, and three singers have been replaced by a "guitarist-singer."[129]

In White America

A Princeton history professor was responsible for the very successful oral interpretation presentation, In White America. Martin B. Duberman discovered the students in his lecture course at Princeton on the Civil War were almost completely unaware of the role the Negro had played in American history. He decided this was an area which needed to be explored, and consequently compiled some one thousand pages of double spaced, typewritten notes on the history of the Negro in white America.

After trimming the results of his research down to a more manageable size, Duberman turned the manuscript over to Claire Degner, who had handled his previous books.[130] Degner passed the manuscript

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[129]Barton, loc. cit.

[130]Duberman's previous books had been concerned with nineteenth century American history. In 1962 he had been awarded the Bancroft Prize for his biography of Charles Francis Adams, descendant of two presidents and Lincoln's envoy to England during the Civil War.

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on to Judith Rutherford Marechal, an energetic young producer of off-Broadway shows. She read it through once and proceeded to start raising money for the $15,000 budget she estimated would be needed to get the production underway. Harold Stone was engaged to direct, and Oscar Brand was selected to choose the songs to be incorporated into the proceedings.[131]

In White America opened Thursday, October 31, 1963, at the off-Broadway Sheridan Square Playhouse. The cast included Gloria Foster, James Greene, Moses Gunn, Claudette Nevins, Michael O'Sullivan, Fred Pinkard, and the musician, Billy Faier. Three of the cast members were white and three were black. None of them were well-known theatrical personalities.

Settings and Accessories

At one end of the arena theatre was a multilevel platform on which wooden tables, benches and chairs were situated. One critic wrote that the lighting added to the theatrical effectiveness of the presentation, but other than noting the lights shifted from one performer to another, he did not elaborate.[132] The actors were dressed in contemporary street clothes. At the center of the stage was an antique table with several old books and documents on it. These served to suggest the historical basis of the readings.[133]

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[131]Richard F. Shepard, "Professor Talks," New York Times, December 15, 1963.

[132]William Bender, New York Herald Tribune, November 1, 1963.

[133]Martin B. Duberman, In White America (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1964), p. 8.

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[134] Edith Ol
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[135] Candide
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[136] John Mc
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[137] Oliver

[139] Howard

[140] Dubern

Classification

The critics had difficulty in attempting to classify the presentation. Several contented themselves with advising their readers it was NOT a play.[134] Others labeled it a "documentary play."[135] Still others termed it a "dramatized reading."[136]

Manner of Presentation

The performers combined acting and reading. Oliver reported, "As the evening progresses, the actors switch positions and move up and downstage as they recite or act out their roles."[137] Bernheimer spoke of the documents being "half-read, half-enacted."[138] Taubman wrote that the actors "take turns reading from documents and the moment the opportunity offers to embody a character they seize it with relish."[139] According to the production notes found in the play script, "Scenes were sometimes begun by an actor taking a book or document from the table, reading a few lines from it, and then easing from that into acting out the scene." The players not involved in a scene would remain seated.[140]

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[134] Edith Oliver, The New Yorker, November 9, 1963, pp. 98-99.
Martin Bernheimer, Christian Science Monitor, November 29, 1963.
Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, November 1, 1963.

[135] Candide, Villager, November 7, 1963.
Robert Brunstein, New Republic, November 16, 1963, p. 29.
Martin Gottfried, Women's Wear Daily, November 1, 1963.

[136] John McClain, New York Journal American, November 1, 1963.
Kenn., Variety, November 11, 1963, p. 64.
Al Cohn, Newsday, November 5, 1963.

[137] Oliver, loc. cit. [138] Bernheimer, loc. cit.

[139] Howard Taubman, New York Times, November 1, 1963, p. 26.

[140] Duberman, loc. cit.

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Verdict

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Smith complained the production trapped itself between drama and staged reading and succeeded as neither.[141] On the other hand, Oliver was impressed with the manner of presentation and could not imagine "how anything could have made the story more theatrical or moving."[142] Bender thought the manner of presentation created an interesting effect. "More and more throughout the evening it comes to resemble a courtroom. This is not intentional, but as the players move from level to level, and as the lights shift from one character to another, and as the evidence mounts, one feels with a certainty that someone is on trial."[143]

Verdict

The majority of the critics approved of In White America. Again the critic for Cue was one of the more enthusiastic supporters as he wrote, "This is one of the most exhilarating and distinguished evenings you'll find in the American theatre at this moment."[144] The Variety reviewer described the production as "the most unusual and one of the most rewarding productions of the off-Broadway season."[145] He thought it was more dramatic and theatrical than most plays. Watts characterized it as a "steadily interesting stage presentation . . . a moving, disturbing and thought-provoking dramatic evening."[146]

Gottfried approved of the evening's entertainment, but he had a few reservations. He thought the production occasionally became

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[141]Michael Smith, Village Voice, November 7, 1963.

[142]Oliver, loc. cit. [143]Bender, loc. cit. [144]Cue, November 16, 1963.

[145]Kenn., loc. cit. [146]Watts, loc. cit.

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[151] Ibid.

"so scholarly that it approaches sleepiness" and pointed out the audience it attracted would be one that already agreed with the point the production was making. However, he still felt it was an important production about an important problem and a production which provided a frequently absorbing and moving evening.[147] McClain recommended the evening as an engrossing and educational experience for thoughtful playgoers.[148]

Two of the critics did not like the presentation. Smith thought the idea was good, and the timing was good, but that the production was unsuccessful because it fluctuated between a drama and a staged reading.[149] Harris was willing to admit that In White America had some dramatic moments, but he found it unacceptable as drama.[150]

Acting

The six actors were listed in alphabetical order on the program and no indication was given as to who played what role. Most of the reviewers wrote favorably of the acting, but three had complaints. Harris thought the entire cast frequently was guilty of overacting.[151] Taubman thought some of the attempts at characterization did not

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[147]Gottfried, loc. cit. [148]McClain, loc. cit. [149]Smith, loc.cit.

[150]Leonard Harris, New York World Telegraph and Sun, November 1, 1963. An undated press release found in the clippings in the vertical file of In White America in the Theatre Collection at the Museum of the Performing Arts in Lincoln Center in New York City claimed that Harris, who liked nothing about the production, was really the night club critic for the World Telegram and Sun. Apparently Harris and the drama critic decided to switch jobs for the evening so the drama critic reviewed a night club show, while Harris covered the opening of In White America.

[151]Ibid.

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[152] Taubman

[155] Gottfri

[156] Ibid.
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[157] Bender
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work out--most notably the portrayal of the Presidents, but he thought the overall quality of acting was good.[152] Brustein noted some of the actors "indulge a weakness for caricature," but found them excellent for the most part.[153]

Nearly all of the critics singled out actress Gloria Foster and her portrayal of Daisy Bates, the Negro girl who tried to enter Central High in Little Rock, Arkansas in the fall of 1957. "Most extraordinary, however, is a young woman named Gloria Foster . . . . Her recitation of the Little Rock episode is almost unbearably poignant because it is built on dignity rather than self-pity."[154] Gottfried wrote, "Gloria Foster's segregation breaking Arkansas school girl is heartbreaking. Miss Foster is magnificent the evening through, displaying an endless variety of Negro dialects and a wide, wide range of skill."[155]

Moses Gunn's portrayal of the Scottsboro boy was singled out by two critics as the finest performance of the men.[156] Michael O'Sullivan's Presidents received the most negative commentary, but his delivery of "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman's speech in defense of lynching as a preventative for rape was favorably received.[157]

The other three performers, Fred Pinkard, James Green, and

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[152]Taubman, loc. cit. [153]Burstein, loc. cit. [154]Bernheimer, loc.cit.

[155]Gottfried, loc. cit.

[156]Ibid.
Kenn., loc. cit.

[157]Bender, loc. cit.
Watts, loc. cit.
Taubman, loc. cit.

Claudette Nevins attracted less

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Music

A special feature of In

parliment arranged by Oscar Bra

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an accomplished musician, but

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and made an effective bridge

Material

Author Duberman arrange

from state papers, official

journals, diaries, speeches,

The evening started with a s

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The critic for Cue rea

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theatrical.[160] The Village

based on actual incidents w

[158] Harris, loc. cit.

[159] Candide, loc. cit.

[160] Cue, loc. cit.

Claudette Nevins attracted less critical attention. However, each one was mentioned favorably in at least one review.

Music

A special feature of In White America was the musical accompaniment arranged by Oscar Brand and played by Billy Faier on guitar and banjo. Critical opinion was divided as to the effectiveness of this aspect of the production. The reviewers all agreed Faier was an accomplished musician, but some disliked the selections and placement of the songs.[158] Others thought the music added considerably and made an effective bridge between episodes.[159]

Material

Author Duberman arranged his collection of documents, excerpts from state papers, official records, records of conversations, letters, journals, diaries, speeches, and histories in chronological order. The evening started with a slave-ship captain's description of conditions below deck and ended with Daisy Bates' attempt to integrate Central High in 1957.

The critic for Cue reassured his readers they need not be frightened away by the fact a history professor assembled the material, for the material contained humor, passion, and a sense of the theatrical.[160] The Villager reviewer thought the situations and lines based on actual incidents were far more revealing and overwhelming

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[158] Harris, loc. cit. Gottfried, loc. cit.

[159] Candide, loc. cit. McClain, loc. cit.

[160] Cue, loc. cit.

than any fictitious dramatizatio

Some critics had reservati

wrote:

> His documentary reveals u
> famous people and indicates
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Harris also labeled the materi

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Comparisons

Two reviewers thought In '

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> reading which requires
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[161] Candide, loc. cit.

[164] Taubman, loc. cit

[165] Stuart Little, Ne

[166] Cohn, loc. cit.

than any fictitious dramatization could have been.[161]

Some critics had reservations about the material. Gottfried wrote:

> His documentary reveals unpublished and unpleasant sides of famous people and indicates, a little too reservedly perhaps, the resentment of oppression that Negroes have harbored since the very earliest days of slavery . . . . It was more an evening of enlightenment than of excitement . . . . The classroom aroma of many of his vignettes tends to make them seem as detached and unreal as a text book.[162]

Harris also labeled the material "textbookish," and complained that, while some of it was interesting, almost none of it was theatrical.[163]

Comparisons

Two reviewers thought In White America was reminiscent of the Federal Theatre's Living Newspaper of the 1930s.[164] Spoon River, which opened on Broadway earlier in the season presented a natural target for comparison. (This adaptation of Edgar Lee Masters' anthology of graveyard epitaphs will be discussed in the following chapter.) Both productions got off to a very slow start in terms of attendance despite generally favorable reviews.[165] Cohn found several areas for comparison:

> The latter [Spoon River] concerns the history of people who are dead, while the former [In White America] details the American history of an entire race which, in the final analysis, hasn't been much better off. Like Spoon River, In White America is a reading which requires of its cast versatility and the ability to display a wide range of emotions.[166]

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[161] Candide, loc. cit. [162] Gottfried, loc. cit. [163] Harris, loc. cit.

[164] Taubman, loc. cit., Candide, loc. cit.

[165] Stuart Little, New York Herald Tribune, November 12, 1963.

[166] Cohn, loc. cit.

In White America proved

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Vernon Rice Award for 1963-19

Several factors should

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Both actors had done a gr

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[167] Press release,
Collection, New York.

[168] Letter from Ri

In White America proved to be the longest running "oral interpretation production," running for 498 performances before going into rehearsal for a national tour. Not only was it a tremendous popular success, it was also a critical success, receiving the Vernon Rice Award for 1963-1964.[167]

Several factors should be considered with regard to the success of In White America. First, the performers, though not well known, were extremely talented. Second, the timing was fortunate. White America was just beginning to realize how badly, and for how long, the Negro had been mistreated. Third, and perhaps most important, the material, though not intended for the stage, was dramatic and compelling.

The Golden Age

On January 21, 1962, a production entitled The Elizabethans was presented for a single performance at the Kaufmann Auditorium. This presentation had been conceived by two Englishmen who were, at that time, appearing in successful Broadway shows. Richard Johnson, starring in The Complaisant Lover, selected and edited the material. Douglas Campbell, playing the lead in Gideon, directed the production. As Johnson recalled, both he and Campbell were looking for "something constructive to do during the daytime." Both actors had done a great deal of Elizabethan drama and they felt a program concerning the life and literature of this era would be "entertaining and instructive"--for them and for the audience.[168]

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[167] Press release, dated June 3, 1965, Vertical files, Theatre Collection, New York.

[168] Letter from Richard Johnson to the author, June 11, 1968.

Johnson and Campbell acted in

Squire, appearing at that time

Nancy Wickwire--apparently the

quartet. The program was desc

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The production was desi

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Setting and Accessories

The performers wore

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[169] Norman Nadel, Ne

[170] Guy Savino, Newa

[171] Norman Nadel, Ne
NYWR, p. 191. Nadel su
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[172] John McClain,
NYWR, p. 193.

Johnson and Campbell acted in the presentation, along with William Squire, appearing at that time as King Arthur in Camelot, and Nancy Wickwire--apparently the only "unemployed" member of the quartet. The program was described as "an entertainment devised from the music, the songs and the literature of the Golden Age."[169]

The production was designed for a single performance, as three out of the four players had other responsibilities, but audience response was so favorable that one critic prophesied other performances would be arranged.[170] On November 18, 1963, nearly two years after its initial presentation, The Elizabethans, renamed The Golden Age,[171] opened on Broadway in the Lyceum Theatre. Campbell and Wickwire were holdovers from the first performance, but Squire and Johnson were replaced by Douglas Rain and Lester Rawlins.

Setting and Accessories

The performers wore evening dress. The setting consisted of "chairs that were probably of the proper vintage and a few limited props."[172] No further details were given.

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[169] Norman Nadel, New York World Telegram and Sun, January 22, 1962.

[170] Guy Savino, Newark Evening News, January 22, 1962.

[171] Norman Nadel, New York World Telegram and Sun, November 19, 1963, NYTCR, p. 191. Nadel suggested Producer Arthur Canton apparently realized The Elizabethans was hardly the title to inspire any box office stampede and so changed the name to The Golden Age in hopes of attracting more people. Nadel sympathized with Canton's desire for attracting a large audience, but he felt The Golden Age was a misleading title which got people to attend under false pretenses. This resulted in unhappy audiences who felt they'd been sold a false bill of goods.

[172] John McClain, New York Journal American, November 19, 1963, NYTCR, p. 193.

Classification

The critics were in gener
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one described it as a "concert
"staged reading."[176] Two crit
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Manner of Presentation

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[173] Ibid.

[174] Richard Watts, Ne
pp. 191-193.
George Oppenheim

[175] Lewis Funke, New

[176] Arthur Sainer, V

[177] Cue, November 3
Edward Hipp, Ne

[178] Martin Gottfrie

[179] Letter from Na

Classification

The critics were in general agreement the production should be classified as a reading, but only one was content to call it just a "reading."[173] Two reviewers classified it as a "dramatic reading,"[174] one described it as a "concert reading,"[175] while another called it a "staged reading."[176] Two critics referred to the proceedings as "divertissements,"[177] and one termed it a "compilation of words and music."[178]

Manner of Presentation

The manner of presentation was similar to that of The Hollow Crown. The performers each had a manuscript and they were seated when not performing. Nancy Wickwire wrote that the manuscripts were used only for props, as the actors' had their lines completely memorized. The only movement used by the performers was "to come forward to speak directly to the audience, either singly or as a group."[179] Although the actors occasionally functioned as a group, usually it was one performer at a time, with the other three remaining seated,

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[173] Ibid.

[174] Richard Watts, New York Post, November 19, 1963, NYTCR, pp. 191-193.
George Oppenheimer, Newsday, November 19, 1963.

[175] Lewis Funke, New York Times, January 22, 1962.

[176] Arthur Sainer, Village Voice, October 10, 1963.

[177] Cue, November 30, 1963.
Edward Hipp, Newark Evening News, November 19, 1963.

[178] Martin Gottfried, Women's Wear Daily, November 19, 1963.

[179] Letter from Nancy Wickwire to the author, June 3, 1968.

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Verdict

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Kerr described the

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[180]Walter Kerr, Ne
NYTCR, p. 193.

[181]Melvin Maddocks

[182]Gottfried, loc

[184]Hipp, loc. cit

[187]Richard P. Coc

[188]Kerr, loc. ci

pretending to be engrossed in what the other was saying.[180]

One critic spoke of the players' attempts "to counteract the antitheatrical implications of a reading by acting out and inventing roles."[181] This however, was the only mention of an attempt at acting. Campbell, who along with performing was resposible for the directing, was chided in one review for having failed to do much directing.[182] Another critic thought Campbell's directing was, at times, "almost unbearably coy."[183] Still another critic praised Campbell for "subtly maneuvering the players to prevent the entertainment from settling into a stilted set piece."[184]

Verdict

Most of the critics reacted negatively to The Golden Age. Gottfried noted the program called the proceedings "An Entertainment" and complained that this was precisely what it failed to be.[185] McClain spoke of the "tasteful reconstruction of a period in English history," but found it "too placid theatrically to be properly enlivening on the stage."[186] Cooke thought those "whose hearts belong to Elizabeth I rather than Elizabth Taylor" might enjoy the evening, but he recommended Cleopatra for the rest.[187]

Kerr described the evening as "an entertainment entirely suitable for the Library of Congess."[188] The Variety critic pointed

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[180] Walter Kerr, New York Herald Tribune, November 19, 1963, NYTCR, p. 193.

[181] Melvin Maddocks, Christian Science Monitor, November 21, 1963.

[182] Gottfried, loc. cit. [183] Oppenheimer, loc. cit.

[184] Hipp, loc. cit. [185] Gottfried, loc. cit. [186] McCalin, loc. cit.

[187] Richard P. Cooke, Wall Street Journal, November 19, 1963.

[188] Kerr, loc. cit.

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189 Variety, Novemb

190 Nadel, loc. ci

191 Howard Taubman

192 Hipp, loc. ci

out The Golden Age was intended primarily as a vehicle for one night campus bookings and that, while it was a "modest and acceptable program," it was hardly a world-beater, even for college audiences.[189] Nadel began his review as follows:

> For lo, there was in the Lyceum a multitude of empty seats, where formerly had sat people. But intermission had come, and they had risen up and gone therefrom, for they were ill at ease.
> I mention this not to fault last night's opening performance of The Golden Age, which was, in fact, an occasion of charm and gentle pleasure, but to point out that an evening of 16th Century verse, song, story and banter is not everybody's bowl of porridge.[190]

Taubman was decidedly in the minority as he characterized the production as "a warm, humorous and charming entertainment."[191] He admitted The Golden Age was no substitute for a play, but maintained it was far more rewarding than a mediocre play. Also in the minority was Hipp, who found the evening's proceedings "charming entertainment" and claimed that he "relished every minute of The Golden Age."[192]

Acting

Most of the critics spoke favorably of the acting. Some, like Maddocks felt that the total effect given by the performers was unsatisfactory.

> Despite individually brilliant readings, the sense of an excerpted evening being held together--or is it apart?--by one long line of dots finally defeats the purpose of theatre: to produce and sustain a special singleness of experience
> . . . . . .
> The trouble is that turn follows turn so breathlessly that each quick-change characterization, like each quick-change text, carries less weight than it should.[193]

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[189] Variety, November 20, 1963.

[190] Nadel, loc. cit., November 19, 1963.

[191] Howard Taubman, New York Times, November 19, 1963, p. 49.

[192] Hipp, loc. cit. [193] Maddocks, loc. cit.

Nancy Wickwire pleased m
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> Mr. Rawlins . . . s
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[194] Gottfried, loc.

[196] Taubman, loc. c

[197] Oppenheimer, lo
Watts, loc. cit

[198] Taubman, loc.

Nancy Wickwire pleased most of the critics, particularly her presentation of the speeches of Elizabeth I. Gottfried was an exception, complaining that, despite her glowing charm, she did not seem to have a talent for reading. Gottfried was also in the minority in his evaluation of Campbell's acting abilities. He not only found fault with Campbell's directing, but he thought "his performance in the acting capacity was no more admirable."[194] Hipp disagreed, labeling Campbell's performance the outstanding feature of the evening.[195] Taubman singled out Campbell's performance of a country fellow reading a letter to his love, and of a bumbling oaf extolling the pleasures of hunting as especially effective.[196] Two other critics noted Campbell's comic abilities.[197]

The other two members of the quartet received less notice. Rain made an impression on Taubman with his "furiously funny bit" about football and even funnier sermon on the evils of theatre. Rawlins was remembered for his tirade against doctors.[198] Gottfried, who liked little about the presentation, did like Rains and Rawlins.

> Mr. Rawlins . . . seemed to take up his own directorial reins now and then, wandering over to the musicians and then back across the stage. His sense of plain enjoyment was remarkably effective . . . . Mr. Rain too, managed a casual theatricality that almost brought the production to life in a variety of selections.[199]

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[194]Gottfried, loc. cit. [195]Hipp, loc. cit.

[196]Taubman, loc. cit.

[197]Oppenheimer, loc. cit.
Watts, loc. cit.

[198]Taubman, loc. cit. [199]Gottfried, loc. cit.

Music

The performers were supp

of musicians. The music was

an authority on English music

James Tyler, Leonard Bolotine

to the common violin and viol

included virginals, a lute,

and a pandora, "which looks

prettily."[201] The singers w

Gordon Meyers.

Taubman thought the m

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[200] Nadel, loc. ci

[201] John Chapman,

p. 192.

[202] Taubman, loc.

[204] Oppenheimer,

[206] Gottfried, lo

Music

The performers were supported by a trio of singers and a quartet of musicians. The music was selected and arranged by Sidney Beck, an authority on English music.[200] Instrumentalists Blache Winogron, James Tyler, Leonard Bolotine and Robert Kuehn played, in addition to the common violin and viol, instruments from the period which included virginals, a lute, recorders, tenor and bass viols, citterns and a pandora, "which looks like an outsized mandolin and plinks prettily."[201] The singers were Betty Wilson, James Stover and Gordon Meyers.

Taubman thought the musical score was outstanding.[202] Chapman classified the songs as being of the "hey-nonny-noony type," but found them a light and charming addition to the production anyway.[203] Oppenheimer admitted the singers were sufficiently talented, but complained the music was repetitious.[204] Maddocks disliked the manner in which the vocal trio was used, grumbling that they were "turned on and off as if an invisible hand were abruptly raising and lowering the arm on a record player."[205]

The singers were also cited for their acting. Gottfried found something else to like in Betty Wilson, "cute as the devil, and a prankish pixie, who seemed to always be there when there was any fun to be had."[206] Oppenheimer was not impressed with the

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[200] Nadel, loc. cit.

[201] John Chapman, New York Daily News, November 19, 1963, NYTCR, p. 192.

[202] Taubman, loc. cit. [203] Chapman, loc. cit.

[204] Oppenheimer, loc. cit. [205] Maddocks, loc. cit.

[206] Gottfried, loc. cit.

singers' theatrical attempts a

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Met to join in an Irish jig."

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pixie" and "a lady of Junoes

Material

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wide variety of material wa

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Maddocks was also

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[207] Oppenheimer, l

[209] Watts, loc. ci

singers' theatrical attempts and complained they "too often behave as if they were doing parodies of Elizabethan song." He was further displeased with director Campbell for allowing "a lady of Junoesque figure looking as if she had just wandered up from Valkyrie at the Met to join in an Irish jig."[207] Since Miss Wilson was the only female member of the trio, it would seem that she must be the one referred to by Oppenheimer, but the discrepancy between "a prankish pixie" and "a lady of Junoesque figure" seems rather sizable.

Material

The two most frequent criticisms were the choice of "non-theatrical" material and the apparent lack of a central theme. A wide variety of material was chosen, ranging from selections from Christopher Marlowe, Sir Walter Raleigh, Shakespeare and Queen Elizabeth to contributions from lesser known or even unknown contributors. Gottfried condemned the material as undistinguished and uninteresting.[208] Watts found it lacking in dramatic and emotional values.[209] Maddocks wrote of the material:

> Most of the evening is taken up with lighter matters, courtship and pastorial pursuits, drinking and hunting songs, masques and street cries, precepts on conduct and courtly etiquette. Mr. Johnson has practically eliminated the blood and guts of this bawdy, boisterous age in favor of its quaint humor. The result is an entertainment that too soon languishes with its anemia and only intermittently thereafter flashes with life.[210]

Maddocks was also troubled at the lack of a "thematic spine" for the prose and poetry collection. "Almost 70 fragments, unified

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[207] Oppenheimer, loc. cit. [208] Gottfried, loc. cit.

[209] Watts, loc. cit. [210] Maddocks, loc. cit.

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[211] Ibid. [212] Kerr,

[214] Taubman, loc. ci

chiefly by the accident of chronology, are set in hopeful juxtaposition or nudged into artificial continuity by transition tracks of stage-craft."[211] Kerr complained:

> Because arranger Johnson has discovered no controlling principle to link these urgently or even gently, to one another, we are in the unhappy position of having to refocus our attention 65 times. The very business of bobbing up and down from the program to identify what is being read, produces a certain disturbance of the inner ear.[212]

Here again, there were dissenting opinions. Two of the better known critics thought there was a definite structure to the evening's proceedings. Chapman credited Johnson with having "arranged it ingeniously so that it seems to have some continuity and form."[213] Exactly how much continuity and form is indicated by "some" is difficult to say. Taubman thought Johnson had depended on "the essence of a period for unity."

> Love, the domestic virtues, illness, physical fitness, sport, drink, the workaday world, the unimaginably varied and amusing city of London, the theatre, the church, the Queen and the court and the world of nature are the themes that he has brought together in this anthology of swiftly changing moods and humors.[214]

Miss Wickwire recalled the performers were conscious of a theme, or at least a rather loose form of Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter organization, but admitted that perhaps it was too subtle for the audience to follow.[215] Johnson, who compiled the material, wrote that the theme was "an attempt to display the incredible diversity and richness of the time--in literature, in drama, in poetry, in music, and

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[211] Ibid. [212] Kerr, loc. cit. [213] Chapman, loc. cit.
[214] Taubman, loc. cit. [215] Wickwire, loc. cit.

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216 Johnson, loc. c

218 Johnson, loc. c

the great spirit of adventure and discovery that the Elizabethans embody." He remembered having considerable difficulty in selecting and arranging the material because there was so much to choose from and he wanted "to cover the whole breadth of the age."[216]

Comparisons

As might have been expected, there were several comparisons drawn between The Hollow Crown and The Golden Age. This writer originally thought perhaps the success of The Hollow Crown had something to do with Johnson and Campbell's attempt to use the same formula. However, according to Miss Wickwire, The Golden Age most emphatically was not patterned after the English import, though it was quite similar in many respects. As Miss Wickwire pointed out, The Elizabethans, (i.e. The Golden Age), appeared at the Kaufmann Auditorium several months before The Hollow Crown opened in New York.[217] Johnson wrote that The Golden Age "was only inspired by "The Hollow Crown" insofar as I had appeared in the original production in Stratford and London." He noted the differences between the two with regard to material and manner of presentation.

> The materials of the [sic.] "The Hollow Crown" and "The Golden Age" were essentially different in that "The Hollow Crown" followed the fortunes of the English Royal Houses throughout history and "The Golden Age" treated a particular short period in which there was an explosion of genius in all walks of English life. I would say that the manner of presentation of "The Golden Age" was slightly more elaborate than the [sic.] "The Hollow Crown" in that we had an orchestra of several pieces and several singers, whereas "The Hollow Crown" had merely a pianist and two singers.[218]

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[216] Johnson, loc. cit. [217] Wickwire, loc. cit.

[218] Johnson, loc. cit.

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[219] Gottfried, loc.

[221] Variety, loc.

It should be pointed out here that Johnson was referring to the first production of The Golden Age, or The Elizabethans, as the newspapers called the presentation at the Kaufmann Auditorium in 1962. When it was produced on Broadway it had three singers and four musicians. It also should be noted that in its American appearance, The Hollow Crown had a trio of singers as well as an accompanist who played the piano and the harpsichord.

Gottfried pointed out the similarities and differences between the two productions with The Golden Age suffering from the comparison.[219] Oppenheimer wrote of the two productions:

> Last season's The Hollow Crown, a pageant of England's rulers . . . delighted audiences with its fine recreation of moments in royal British history. The Golden Age is similar in form, with the readers giving a dramatic reading and the singers and musicians accompanying them or presenting musical interludes. There the resemblance ceases, for this current offering has little of the sense of history or dramatic content.[220]

The critic for Variety observed that The Hollow Crown seemed "alive and occasionally inspired," whereas The Golden Age seemed only "painstakingly researched."[221] Watts wrote:

> Dogberry warned us against the danger of comparisons. In fact, he said they were 'odorous.' But it is impossible not to contrast this pleasant little excursion into a great period in the English past with the wonderfully moving survey of the annals of British royalty that gave such delight to The Hollow Crown last year. Possibly too, we have approached a saturation point in dramatic readings substituting for plays.[222]

Another critic who questioned the substitution of readings for plays was McClain, who, even though he liked some of the "oral

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[219] Gottfried, loc. cit. [220] Oppenheimer, loc. cit.

[221] Variety, loc. cit. [222] Watts, loc. cit.

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[223] McClain, loc.

[224] New York Times

interpretation productions," almost invariably questioned whether they belong in a theatre.

> If we are to be lured to what the British call a 'proper' theatre we can reasonably expect to be rewarded with what anybody would call a theatrical evening.
>
> In a close conventional sense I believe this kind of evening suggests sets, costumes and a general atmosphere of make-believe which removes the proceedings from the level of a 'reading,' which might be given in an auditorium or town hall almost anywhere in the world.
>
> There have been notable exceptions, like Spoon River, Don Juan in Hell, and The Hollow Crown, which, by virtue of the theatrical nature of the material and the exceptional readings of the performers, lifted them into a particular realm of dramatic importance.
>
> But it is mostly kidding the public on a grand scale, and I have been opposed to it on the basis that it is seldom worth the price of the ticket, for even the best of them don't bring to the clients the sense of magic and elegance that should be the reward for the current Broadway scale.[223]

The performers of The Golden Age were capable and well-known veterans of the theatre, and the critics generally spoke favorably of their readings. The lack of a clearly defined theme, coupled with the lack of material with dramatic or theatrical excitement was probably responsible for the unfavorable response the production elicited. Despite McClain's protests that "readings" were not "theatre," the public had been, and continued to be, willing to pay Broadway rates to see outstanding "readings."

Perhaps The Golden Age might have succeeded in attracting a specialized audience to an off-Broadway theatre where it might have enjoyed a profitable limited engagement, but as a Broadway production, it was a failure. Scheduled for a four week run, The Golden Age closed after eight performances. The producers lost $27,500.[224]

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[223] McClain, loc. cit.

[224] New York Times, June 29, 1963, p. 13.

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Summary

A wide variety of materials were used in the anthologies. The two solo productions used excerpts from plays, but the rest of the material was not intended for theatre. When I Was a Child made use of short stories by well known authors. The other three productions utilized a potpourri of material, ranging from diaries, court records, letters, speeches, and history books. Apparently the type of material was not as important as whether or not the material was dramatic and whether or not it had a central theme or focal point. The one critical failure of the group anthologies lacked both dramatic material and a clearly defined structure.

The manner of presentation ranged from limited movement and the almost constant presence of scripts in The Hollow Crown and The Golden Age, to a great deal of movement and minimal use of scripts as the players in When I Was a Child and In White America acted out scenes. No conclusions can be drawn about which manner of presentation was the most successful. The Hollow Crown was a critical and financial success, while The Golden Age, which was very similar in manner of presentation, was not. Likewise, When I Was a Child was a failure financially, though it received a generally favorable critical reaction, and In White America was very popular both with the public and the critics.

It is also difficult to draw any conclusions about the part well-known performers played in the success or failure of the productions. The ladies in the solo anthologies were apparently experienced actresses with whom the critics, at least, were familiar.

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However, the performances given by Miss Fein and Miss Staw were not considered to have been of the highest caliber. The Golden Age featured a talented and well-known cast, but they were not able to overcome the difficulties created by the material. The Hollow Crown also had a talented and well-known cast, which undoubtedly contributed to the success of that production. The other two presentations did not have established theatre personalities, but the young performers were apparently quite talented. It would seem then, that noted performers are a help, but not a guarantee, for success. Unknown performers who are very talented and who have excellent material to work with may also be successful.

If one examines these productions with a view toward attempting to answer whether they are a form of theatre or a separate and distinct type of entertainment, one finds himself in somewhat of a quandary. The six productions used very few theatrical accessories. The lighting in When I Was a Child and In White America was mentioned in a few reviews, but no special effects were cited. Miss Staw used costumes in her program, Five Queens, but the only group presentation to use any sort of costume was When I Was a Child, with the actors occasionally utilizing hats and scarves. The four group productions used only very limited scenery. As noted above, except in the two solo presentations, the material used was not intended for the stage.

However, characterization was used in all of the productions. There was limited staging and interaction between the performers in The Hollow Crown and in The Golden Age, and considerably more movement and interaction in the other two group presentations. The critics

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225 McClain, loc.

wrote of the "acting" in all the productions. In summary, it would seem that, taken as a group, these oral interpretation anthologies made very little use of theatrical accessories, but the performers made use of at least some of the techniques of acting.

Several of the critics expressed their opinions as to whether or not oral interpretation, (or "readings"), should be considered "theatre." McClain did not think so. He found The Hollow Crown very enjoyable and recommended In White America, but The Golden Age encountered his opposition. He liked the performers and had no quarrel with the material; he simply did not think it was "theatre." In his opinion, a "theatrical evening" meant "sets, costumes, and a general atmosphere of make-believe which removes the proceedings from the level of a 'reading.'" He admitted there had been exceptions, and cited Don Juan in Hell, Spoon River, and The Hollow Crown as productions which had had dramatic material and exceptionally fine performers and consequently attained a "particular realm of dramatic importance." However, McClain felt even the most outstanding productions failed to "bring the clients the sense of magic and elegance that should be the reward for the current Broadway scale."[225] Taubman conceded The Golden Age was "no substitute for a play," but thought it was "infinitely more rewarding than a mediocre one."[226]

Bolton, in his review of In White America, noted the presentation stirred the emotions of the audience, made them share the suffering of the Negro, and caused them to think deeply about the race problem.

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[225] McClain, loc. cit. [226] Taubman, loc. cit.

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[227] Whitney Bolton

[228] Robert Brustei

[229] Martin Bernhe

[230] Martin Gottfr

[231] Harold Stern,

He concluded, "No theatre can ask more, or do more."[227] Brustein recommended In White America to his readers, although he thought staged readings were less rewarding than staged dramas.[228] Bernheimer admitted the production could not be considered a "play" because it had no plot or set cast of characters and made no use of scenery or costumes or special lighting effects. However, he still felt that "it adds up to one of New York's most moving evenings in the theatre."[229]

In reviewing The Hollow Crown, Gottfried wrote of the "natural tendency of an audience to resist a recitation," and of the lack of costumes and scenery "that lend so much to the creation of another world."[230] Stern had no reservations or questions about what The Hollow Crown was. He told his readers, "It should not be missed by anyone professing a love for the theatre. It is THEATRE!"[231]

In conclusion, some of the reviewers who considered the group anthology presentations regarded them as different from conventional theatre. However, if the material was dramatic and the players were very good, they were willing to accept oral interpretation as a form of professional theatre. The critics were quite receptive to several productions of collections of works by a single author. These presentations are discussed in the following chapter.

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[227]Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegraph, November 2, 1963.

[228]Robert Brustein, New Republic, November 16, 1963, p. 29.

[229]Martin Bernheimer, Christian Science Monitor, November 29, 1963.

[230]Martin Gottfried, Women's Wear Daily, January 30, 1963.

[231]Harold Stern, New York Standard, January 31, 1963.

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CHAPTER V

COLLECTIONS OF AN AUTHOR'S WORKS

Six productions between 1945 and 1965 presented excerpts from the works of a single author. Three were solo performances and three were presented by groups.[1] Of these six, only one featured material intended for the stage. Two used poetry; one presented short stories; another utilized short stories and cuttings from novels; while the sixth offered the author's essays, speeches, and jokes as well as selections from his novels and short stories.

Two of the performers in the solo presentations employed costume and make-up to assume the appearance of the author whose works they were presenting. Simple costume changes were used by the actors in two of the group presentations to suggest a variety of characters. The players in the two remaining productions wore evening dress.

Four of the presentations were done on Broadway. Three of these four featured well-known performers. The three solo productions received rave notices. One of the group presentations also garnered rave reviews, another received a mixed response, and the last attracted mostly negative notices. Apparently all six achieved popular success.

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[1] A fourth solo production has been included in the chapter although the material used was a single novel rather than a collection of an author's works. The writer decided to consider Emyln Williams' adaptation of Dickens' Bleak House immediately after the discussion of Williams' Mixed Bill, from Dickens because, except for the material, the other aspects of the production were identical.

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[2] E.V.R. Wyatt, C

Three of the productions ran for more than 100 performances, while the other three, at least ostensibly, had "limited runs" by choice.

Mixed Bill

The first solo performance of a collection of an author's works was Emlyn Williams' Mixed Bill, which was presented in February of 1952. In some respects, this program is outside the definition of oral interpretation used in this study. Williams used make-up and costume to achieve Dickens' physical appearance, and much of the attention the presentation received was due to his skill in impersonating the nineteenth century literary lion. However, Williams impersonated Dickens reading his works; so, in a secondary sense, the recreation of a literary experience was an aspect of this production. It might be argued that Williams' intention was to present a vivid characterization of Dickens, and that the recreation of the literary experience was only a means to an end.

From what Williams has written about his Dickens' programs though, it is evident that he thoroughly enjoyed the material and wished to share this enjoyment with others. Also, as one reviewer suggested, by impersonating Dickens reading his own works, Williams reminded his listeners that these works were from a different age; thus bypassing the question of Dickens' current stature in literary circles.[2] (In 1860, English and American critics considered him to be one of the greatest English writers of all times. This opinion was not shared by many mid-twentieth century literary critics.) Another reviewer thought that, because the program was offered as

[2] E.V.R. Wyatt, Catholic World, March, 1952, p. 462.

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a sort of "period piece," the audience was willing to temporarily suspend their sophistication and allow themselves to be touched and amused by material which they might otherwise have considered beneath them.[3]

Although it is difficult to determine what influence, if any, the Dickens programs had on later solo presentations, there can be no question that critics of subsequent one-man shows frequently referred to these productions in their reviews. Because the Dickens programs were often used as a basis for comparison by critics of later oral interpretation productions, and because Williams seems to have had the recreation of literary experience in the minds of his listeners as at least a secondary goal, the Dickens presentations have been included in this study.

Williams, a well-known Welsh actor and playwright, had always been a Dickens fan. When his sons were growing up, he used to bribe them to bed by reading from Dickens and impersonating the many characters. Some years ago, he did a reading of Bleak House for a television program in New York. In this presentation he appeared as Williams reading Dickens. The next step was to appear as Dickens reading Dickens.

He tried out this approach for the first time in February of 1951 at a theatrical charity show at the Drury Lane Theatre. The coordinators of the event were dubious as to whether or not Williams would be able to hold his audience merely by reading aloud, and consequently cut his time allotment down from twelve minutes to eight.

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[3]Joseph Wood Krutch, Nation, February 23, 1952, pp. 189-190.

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[4]Stephen Watts, "T
February 3, 1952, Sec. I

[5]James Reive Linds
tation in London, 1951-1
(unpublished Ph.D. disse
1964), p. 77.

[6]Walter Kerr, New

[7]Robert Coleman,

The audience loved it and begged for more. However, Williams found himself so totally exhausted after eight minutes of Dickens, that he completely dismissed the idea of presenting an entire evening of the man.[4]

He changed his mind a short time later, and won the acclaim of the London critics with a program from Dicken's novels and short stories entitled Mixed Bill. The production, which opened on October 29, 1951, received more than twenty-five enthusiastic reviews,[5] and attracted the attention of American producer Sol Hurok, who arranged to bring the program to the United States. The selections in the presentation were the same ones Dickens had used when he toured America in 1867,[6] and Williams elected to start his American travels in Boston on the anniversary of the date Dickens started his tour eighty-five years before.[7]

Dickens had enjoyed great success in America with his reading tours, and his impersonator met with similar good fortune. Williams' Mixed Bill was cited as one of the outstanding events of the 1951-1952 theatre season, along with the First Drama Quartet and Don Juan in Hell. Mixed Bill opened on February 4, 1952, at the Golden Theatre for a run of six weeks. According to the program note, it was Williams'

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[4]Stephen Watts, "The Man Who Would Be Dickens," New York Times, February 3, 1952, Sec. II, p. 1.

[5]James Reive Lindsay Linn, "A Historical Study of Oral Interpretation in London, 1951-1962 As a Form of Professional Theatre" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1964), p. 77.

[6]Walter Kerr, New York Herald Tribune, February 5, 1952.

[7]Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, February 5, 1952.

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[8] John Beaufort, C

[9] Brooks Atkinson

[10] Sam Zolotow, N

[11] Watts, loc. ci

pe to present Dickens as such an enthralling writer that the dience would be persuaded to go home and lift "down from their okshelves what they had possibly thought of as a ponderous classic d to turn its pages for the first time, with the feeling that they re about to explore a wonderful new world."[8]

ttings and Accessories

Williams took full advantage of the art of make-up to provide s twentieth century audiences an amazingly accurate picture of the neteenth century author. The long gray hair was pushed back and e chin whiskers were carefully parted.[9] He wore a black frock at, an old fashioned high collar, a pair of immaculate white gloves, d a red geranium boutonniere.[10] Williams considered the Dickens stume and make-up essential. He felt that it would be almost possible for him to give the program except in the character of ckens. He was sure that if he did it as himself, it would be a ry inhibited presentation which he did not think would be as ccessful. Consequently, the Victorian dress and the whiskers were f great psychological importance to him."[11]

Besides assuming the physical appearance of the subject of his ogram, Williams also used an exact replica of the lectern Dickens rsonally designed for his reading performances. Dickens had

[8]John Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, February 9, 1952.

[9]Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, February 5, 1952, p. 25.

[10]Sam Zolotow, New York Times, February 4, 1952, p. 14.

[11]Watts, loc. cit.

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[12] Lewis Funke, Ne

[13] Coleman, loc. c

[14] Louis Sheaffer,

[15] Richard Watts,
John Chapman,
Coleman, loc.

[16] Whitney Bolton

[17] Kerr, loc. ci

[19] Atkinson, New

ıished to provide his audiences with as complete a view of him and ›f his performance as possible, and after much trial and error, had leveloped a reading stand which suited his purpose.[12] It was covered vith fringed red velvet and featured a low ledge for a water glass, :he author's white gloves, and a book or two; and a raised arm rest for his left arm. Coleman thought the arm rest proved to be quite important. During the course of the program, Williams frequently gestured with his left hand, which was emphasized by its height.[13] The actor and his reading stand appeared in front of dark blue drapes. The only special lighting effect mentioned was the dimming of the stage lights for the recitation of a ghost story.[14]

Classification

The most popular term for describing the presentation was "a one-man show."[15] Bolton called it a "solo performance,"[16] and Kerr wrote of "solo readings."[17] Atkinson used "readings" when he first discussed the production,[18] but later decided "reading is a tepid word to apply to Mr. Williams' performance."[19]

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[12]Lewis Funke, New York Times, January 6, 1952, Sec. II, p. 3.

[13]Coleman, loc. cit.

[14]Louis Sheaffer, Brooklyn Eagle, February 5, 1952.

[15]Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, February 5, 1952.
John Chapman, New York Daily News, February 5, 1952.
Coleman, loc. cit.

[16]Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegraph, February 6, 1952.

[17]Kerr, loc. cit. [18]Atkinson, loc. cit.

[19]Atkinson, New York Times, February 17, 1952, Sec. II, p. 1.

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Hell had been.[21] Krutch de

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Manner of Presentation

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Williams bowed to the rea

and announced to the audi

return next year.[23]

In the slightly mo

entrance and exit, he pr

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[20] George Freedle

[21] Newsweek, Febr

[22] Krutch, op. ci

Freedley labeled the evening "the performance" and observed that no one could call it a reading in all conscience."[20] Two critics oted the Williams program was no more a "reading" than Don Juan in ell had been.[21] Krutch declared it was inaccurate to speak of the erformance as a "reading."[22]

anner of Presentation

The evening began with Williams, attired as Dickens, walking riskly out on stage, scrutinizing his audience carefully, removing is white gloves and placing them on the stand. He then opened one f the books he had carried on stage with him, realized it was the rong one, put it on the reading stand, selected the right book, ocated the correct page, rested his left arm on the arm rest of the eading desk, and started to read. At the close of the evening, lliams bowed to the reading stand and to the volumes he had used, id announced to the audience, as Dickens used to do, that he would eturn next year.[23]

In the slightly more than two hours between Mr. Williams' trance and exit, he presented six selections; two short stories d excerpts from four novels. Williams opened various books at e start of each story, and he turned the pages regularly, but ly for theatrical effect. As Sheaffer wrote, "He has memorized l the words, absorbed all their juice, color and meaning, and

[20]George Freedley, New York Morning Telegraph, February 11, 1952.

[21]Newsweek, February 18, 1952, and Richard Watts, loc. cit.

[22]Krutch, op. cit., p. 190. [23]Beaufort, loc. cit.

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Williams did not simp

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Verdict

The critical verdi

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[24]Sheaffer, loc.

[25]John McCarten

[26]Stephen Watts

[28]Chapman, loc.

pours them out in a performance of tremendous versatility and skill."[24]

Williams did not simply impersonate Dickens, nor did he simply impersonate the characters in Dickens. He impersonated the author impersonating his characters.[25] Williams described his presentation as follows: "As I see it, I am playing the people in the stories as I imagine Dickens would have played them--playing them through him to put it another way."[26] Atkinson wrote of the manner of presentation:

> Mr. Williams is acting the part of Dickens. Since Dickens was, in turn, acting parts of his readings, Mr. Williams is giving a performance of a performance. Let's not go into the methaphysics of this situation, because it might crack the philosopher's stone straight down the middle and turn up nothing of value. And there is not much doubt that the theatrical staging of Mr. Williams readings an extra, if nostalgic pleasure to the job he is doing. It personalizes the readings as Dickens personalized them for dazzled audiences in the middle of the 19th century. Although we cannot feel quite so ecstatic as apparently they did, we can feel pretty generally elated![27]

erdict

The critical verdict was overwhelmingly and enthusiastically favorable. Atkinson, as indicated above, was delighted with the rogram. Chapman headlined his review "Emlyn Williams' Dickens ecital is a Fascinating One-Man Show," and reported Williams' performance was so convincing the audience was practically hypnotized.[28] atts labeled the evening "one of the rich delights of the theatrical eason." He admitted to being a "rabid and rhapsodic" Dickens fan,

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[24]Sheaffer, loc. cit.

[25]John McCarten, The New Yorker, February 16, 1952, p. 58.

[26]Stephen Watts, loc. cit. [27]Atkinson, loc. cit.

[28]Chapman, loc. cit.

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> enough?
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[29]Richard Watts

[31]William Hawki

[32]Coleman, loc

[33]John McClain

but he was sure anyone with "taste and intelligence" would enjoy it, even if they were not Dickens addicts.[29]

Kerr wrote that the Williams-Dickens combination had "a fascination and a charm."[30] Hawkins noted it would be "impossible to keep Dickens fans away from this program," but he thought the "uninitiated" would find it just as fascinating.[31] Coleman raved, "The Williams performance is extraordinary. We have never seen a better solo show in our time. In fact, it sets a new high standard for this type of presentation."[32]

The only dissenter among the critics for the major newspapers was McClain. He acknowledged that Williams was an exceptionally fine actor, but, as the title of his review indicated, he thought "Reading, talent Don't Justify the Price." McClain did some mental cost-accounting while Williams presented Dickens presenting his characters and decided the overhead on the show must be unbelieveably low.

> He is thus laying out about $200 for costumes, $20 for beard, $100 for desk, and he uses a couple of books which he might easily have borrowed from the Public Library. I suppose the union laws are such that he is paying for some unnecessary scene-shifters, but the fact remains that this kid stands to make a load of loot.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> On a critical basis I would say you have to accept two things. First, you have to be a big Dickens fan and, second, you must want to have it read to you--especially by Emlyn Williams.
>
> This provokes a further point: will he read the things you want read? Will he also read it that much better than you might read it at home, yourself, with the light switch handy when you have had enough?
>
> . . . . . .
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> Is this THEATRE? I wonder.[33]

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[29] Richard Watts, Jr., loc. cit. [30] Kerr, loc. cit.

[31] William Hawkins, New York World-Telegram and Sun, February 5, 1952.

[32] Coleman, loc. cit.

[33] John McClain, New York Journal American, February 5, 1952.

Wyatt had been expose

and she had enjoyed him the

in the theatre.[34] Freedle

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[34] Wyatt, loc. c

[36] George Jean N
Alfred A. Knopf, 195

[37] Sheaffer, loc

[39] Bolton, loc.

[40] Hobe., Varie

[41] McCarten, lo

Wyatt had been exposed to Dickens as a child, in her own home, and she had enjoyed him there, but she found him even more enjoyable in the theatre.[34] Freedley had also been exposed to Dickens as a child and had detested him. He still detested him.[35] Nathan praised Williams' talent and admitted his program deserved a "highly complimentary notice," but complained it just was not his "personal dish of tea, at least after a half hour of it!" He regarded it as a stunt, and maintained that, while stunts were fine in their place, their place was in the side show, not the theatre.[36]

Sheaffer thought the Mixed Bill was a marvelous "conducted tour into the great writer's vivid, teeming 19th Century world of original characters."[37] Krutch thought the production was a "tour de force" and extremely successful "from every standpoint."[38] Bolton marveled that any one might deliberately choose to miss such a fruitful and beguiling event in the theatre."[39] The critic for Variety called it "an entertaining and even compelling show."[40]

McCarten was sure that, "Whether you have neglected Dickens for the years or are a walking concordance to him . . . you will be edified and entertained by Mr. Williams."[41] Dash thoroughly

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[34]Wyatt, loc. cit. [35]Freedley, loc. cit.

[36]George Jean Nathan, The Theatre in the Fifties (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), pp. 215-216.

[37]Sheaffer, loc. cit. [38]Krutch, op. cit., p. 189

[39]Bolton, loc. cit.

[40]Hobe., Variety, February 6, 1952, p. 56.

[41]McCarten, loc. cit.

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Acting

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[42] Thomas Dash,

[43] John Mason B

enjoyed the program, but did not think it would have the general appeal McCarten seemed to think it would. "It is meant for a selective audience of people who still read. It should be a wonderful brushing up exercise for students in college and for teachers of English literature. It is a compact one-night course in Dickens, and Mr. Williams, the professor of the course, deserves the summa cum laude."[42]

Acting

Even the few critics who reacted negatively to the production spoke favorably of Mr. Williams' virtuosity as an actor. Some of the reviewers thought his style was a bit florid on occasion, but the consensus of opinion was that the flamboyant style of the acting was essential to the flamboyant style of the material. John Mason Brown, who had nothing but good things to say about Williams' performance wrote:

> Mr. Williams' success does not depend upon his making himself up to look like Dickens, upon his wearing evening clothes as dandified as Boz's were, upon his sporting the inevitable boutonnier or upon his using a desk which is a replica of the specially designed contraption Dickens evolved after long years of trial and error. These outward similarities established by the make-up box, the tailor, and the carpenter play, of course, a helpful part. The fun they provide would, however, be shortlived and of a childish kind were Mr. Williams' evocation of a Dickens reading to stop with them. Fortunately these externals mark the beginning, not the end, of the evening's genuine and unusual pleasures.
>
> Mr. Williams happens to be by training, temperament, and long employment what Dickens was only by temperament and inclination. He is an actor and an exceptional one, proud of his profession and unfrustrated in pursuing it.[43]

Watts wrote of experiencing an almost unconquerable conviction

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[42] Thomas Dash, Women's Wear Daily, February 5, 1952.

[43] John Mason Brown, Saturday Review, February 23, 1952, p. 26.

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Kerr paid tribut

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[44] Richard Watts

[46] Hawkins, loc

he beginning of the evening that Williams was really Dickens, and proceeding to completely forget about both Dickens and Williams he "immortal men and women of the author's imagination" came ife.[44] There were forty-two different characters, and Williams them all clearly, through changes in voice, gesture, and expression. ffer found that there was "something of quicksilver to his ormance" as he became "a dreamy small boy, the boy's brusque father, lf-satisfied pomposity, a whispy old maid, a circus dwarf, a ted man, a shrilly complaining landlady, and cold aristocrat," others in rapid succession.[45]

Hawkins thought the little touches Williams used to build his acterizations were superb and achieved whatever effect Williams seeking. "A stammer, a pointed finger, the tipping head or ure of smoking are all done so exactly as that particular person have done it himself, that the theatrical Dickens and the per- ng Williams are soon as furniture and floor for the live passage ese people."[46] Atkinson was amazed to find Williams extended f beyond simply acting out the characters and managed to act he costumes, the rooms, the furniture, the decor, the weather e landscape. Everything is highly personalized as in the ."[47]

err paid tribute to Williams' remarkable range of characters l virtuosity. However, he thought Williams tended to be ral.[48]

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ichard Watts, loc. cit. [45]Sheaffer, loc. cit.

awkins, loc. cit. [47]Atkinson, loc. cit. [48]Kerr, loc. cit.

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Atkinson, Ne

[51] Hobe., loc.

He adds revealing gesture. When he speaks of a fashionable lady's purse snapping shut like a pistol, he jumps at the sound. He creates an electrifying moment as a man in a ghost story shudders and looks behind him for an oncoming train. And in the Podsnap episode from "Our Mutual Friends" he even manages elaborate impressions of inanimate objects.

If anything, Mr. Williams is too eager to illustrate, to enlarge. Especially in the first three of his selections, there is a strong tendency never to let well enough alone, never to let Dickens' prose do some of the visual work. By insisting on acting out everything down to the commas, Mr. Williams gets to gilding the lily, and laboring his comic points. Some of the gesture is terribly literal, too, as when a sheet is drawn back from the face of Dombey's dead son. In the first half of his show, Mr. Williams is long on emphasis, short on suggestion.[49]

Two critics attributed Williams' acting style to the reports of kens' own antics when he presented his readings. The English hor supposedly regarded himself as an excellent actor and always ught he would do well on the stage. When he began to give his grams of readings, he found in them an opportunity to use his trionic abilities to the utmost. His audiences reportedly ughed and wept in fits of hysteria."[50] The Variety critic ration- zed that, since reports indicate Dickens gave "full-blown drama- ation" of his selections, and since no one could prove that he did , Williams had justification for his "full-blown dramatization."[51]

McCarten recalled reading that Dickens was a "singularly estrained man on the platform," whose performances "were as rich emotion as a revivalist's meeting." He supposed that on this basis, on the basis of the material, Williams' "rather full blown

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Atkinson, New York Times, February 5, 1952, p. 25.

[51] Hobe., loc. cit. [52] McCarten, loc. cit.

treatment" of the initial ep

"audiences not accustomed to

acting disturbing.[52]

Atkinson readily adm

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> The Podsnap scene fr
> Sawyer's bachelor part
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> "A Tale of Two Cities"
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[52] McCarten, loc.

[53] Atkinson, New

[54] Hawkins, loc.

eatment" of the initial episodes was justified, but he feared udiences not accustomed to old-fashion bravura" would find the ing disturbing.[52]

Atkinson readily admitted the acting was bravura acting, but ied it was over-acting because it was perfectly suited to the erial:

> The Podsnap scene from "Our Mutual Friend" is gaudy, Bob Sawyer's bachelor party from "Pickwick Papers" is a boozy revel, the ghost story is morbid, the prelude to the revolution in "A Tale of Two Cities" is melodramatic. If these scenes were underacted they would never come to life and would not carry across to the audience the gusto and fervor of Dickens.[53]

Hawkins praised Williams' embellishments of character and ion. He thought they were "as appropriate as the leaves are on ree," and confessed he forgot the actor and the method soon after evening began.[54] Krutch characterized the evening as "a baroque sentation of the baroque characters and the baroque language" of kens. He thought they were well suited.[55] Beaufort also found "theatrical style and prose style . . . admirably matched."[56]

rial

Williams took excerpts from four of Dickens' novels and ented two of his short stories. The evening began on a light with party scenes from Our Mutual Friend; changed moods with ctions from Dombey and Son, a rather touching tale of a youngster's y years "in a world of stupid, unfeeling grown-ups"; changed moods

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[52] McCarten, loc. cit.

[53] Atkinson, New York Times, February 17, 1952, Sec. II, p. 1.

[54] Hawkins, loc. cit. [55] Krutch, loc. cit. [56] Beaufort, loc. cit.

again with the drunken bache

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"Mr. Chips"; and concluded

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Each of the six were

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winded writer,"[62] but

Other reviewers

Wyatt described him as

pointed out Dickens'

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[57] Hawkins, loc.

[60] Freedley, loc

[63] Wyatt, loc.

ain with the drunken bachelor party from Pickwick Papers; moved to a grim ghost story, "The Signal Man"; presented the pathetic grotesquely humorous tale of a circus dwarf who enters high society, . Chips"; and concluded with a selection from A Tale of Two Cities ch depicted the luxury and contrasting poverty in Paris shortly ore the revolution.[57]

Each of the six were "self-contained and self-explanatory."[58] liams had tried to adapt them in such a way as to provide those amiliar with Dickens the necessary background information for h character he presented. Coleman wrote that "this method succeeds making each number on the bill seem like a complete playlet rather n a random excerpt. It is skillful dramaturgy, but, then, Williams an excellent dramatist as well as a fine actor."[59]

Freedley was the only critic to vigorously challenge Dickens' erary stature. He called Dickens "one of the most over-rated comic ters known," and observed he had "mercifully forgotten how corney kens' humor was, to which I had been exposed in childhood and had stomach for since."[60] The critic for Variety noted that parts he readings "seemed slightly drawn out,"[61] and the Newsweek ic observed that Dickens was a "sometimes flamboyant and long-ded writer,"[62] but both critics liked most of the selections.

Other reviewers paid tribute to Dickens' literary prowess. t described him as "a reporter of the first magnitude."[63] Hawkins ted out Dickens' ability to involve all the senses of his readers;

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[57]Hawkins, loc. cit. [58]Beaufort, loc. cit. [59]Coleman, loc. cit.
[60]Freedley, loc. cit. [61]Hobe., loc. cit. [62]Newsweek, loc. cit.
[63]Wyatt, loc. cit.

his awareness of humanity a

"above all, always, there i

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As might have been e

expressed with Williams' c

"The Signal Man" was "rath

Pickwick Papers "commonpla

> All of us who are f
> and unfair taskmaster
> and I, who have less
> the novels, would hav
> tales for, say, more
> is the most shameless
> worked out provides a
> greatest and most unf

The critic for Tim

He complained that much

was close to mediocre."

a "truly top-notch show"

figures such as Mrs. Je

the Wellers.[67]

Comparisons

Several critics

Don Juan in Hell in th

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[64] Hawkins loc. c

[65] Atkinson, New

[66] Richard Watts

[67] Time, Februa

s awareness of humanity and his ability to describe it; and,

ove all, always, there is the author's warm, piercing, rudimentary

nor."[64]

As might have been expected, there was some dissatisfaction

ressed with Williams' choice of selections. Atkinson thought

e Signal Man" was "rather juvenile," and found the excerpt from

kwick Papers "commonplace."[65] Watts wrote:

> All of us who are frankly Dickens cultists are bound to be hard and unfair taskmasters, with our own prejudices among the works, and I, who have less enthusiasm for the short stories than for the novels, would have sacrificed at least one of the Christmas tales for, say, more of my other particular heroes. But this is the most shameless quibbling, and the program Mr. Williams has worked out provides a fine indication of the range of one of the greatest and most unforgettable of all writers.[66]

The critic for Time also took issue with the selections.

complained that much of the material, "by Dickens' standards . . .

close to mediocre." He suggested that Williams might develop

truly top-notch show" if he concentrated on Dickens' great comic

ures such as Mrs. Jellyby, Pecksniff, Micawber, Sairey Gamp, and

Wellers.[67]

parisons

Several critics referred to the First Drama Quartet and

Juan in Hell in their reviews. Bolton spoke of Don Juan setting

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[64] Hawkins loc. cit.

[65] Atkinson, New York Tines, February 5, 1952, p. 25.

[66] Richard Watts, loc. cit.

[67] Time, February 18, 1952, p. 61.

the pace for readings.[68] M

had regarded as a dirty wor

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been set with The First Dra

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Chapman, whose mair

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Three critics commented

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Atkinson was fairly su

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[68] Bolton, loc. c

[71] Hobe., loc. c

[73] Richard Watts
Beaufort, loc
Newsweek, loc

[74] Atkinson, loc

e pace for readings.[68] McCarten noted that "elocution," which he d regarded as a dirty word when he was a boy, was developing into omething to be reckoned with on Broadway . . . the trend having en set with The First Drama Quartet's excellent reading of Don Juan Hell."[69] Kerr warned that "to keep the record straight, it must noted that Mr. Williams' solo readings do not create the heady ilaration of the Drama Quartet, this season's earlier experiment h declamation."[70] The Variety critic pointed out that, compared Don Juan in Hell, "this show is highly, almost flamboyantly atrical."[71]

Chapman, whose main bone of contention with Don Juan in Hell been the use of microphones, rejoiced, "Thank goodness, Williams s not use a microphone as did those elocutionists in Don Juan in Hell."[72] ee critics commented on the similarity in the manner of presen- ion of Don Juan in Hell and the Williams program in that both d scripts--but noted that neither one could really be considered eading.[73] Atkinson regretted that "on account of the capriciousness human life," it was impossible to compare Mr. Williams performance Dickens performing his works with the original Dickens performances. inson was fairly sure the Williams program would have been judged erior.[74]

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[68]Bolton, loc. cit. [69]McCarten, loc. cit. [70]Kerr, loc. cit.

[71]Hobe., loc. cit. [72]Chapman, loc. cit.

[73]Richard Watts, Jr., loc.cit.
Beaufort, loc. cit.
Newsweek, loc. cit.

[74]Atkinson, loc. cit.

Atkinson surmised the
have been less enthusiasti
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Early in 1953, Wil
new Dickens program, Ble
of the same name. Altho
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in all the other aspect
the production abroad a
States, visiting forty-
week period, prior to
for a limited three we
featured attraction o
present his Mixed Bil

75 Atkinson, New

76 John Beaufor

77 Sam Zolotow,

Atkinson surmised the reception for Williams and Dickens might ve been less enthusiastic if the theatre had not been suffering om a dearth of decent "regular" dramatic fare.[75] This may have en partially responsible for the critical and popular success the xed Bill enjoyed, but Mr. Williams' blending of his considerable lents with the characters and stories of the popular Victorian iter were undoubtedly more important. The show ran for forty-ght performances.

Bleak House

Early in 1953, Williams came back to the United States with a Dickens program, Bleak House, his own adaptation from the novel the same name. Although the production was not concerned with a llection of an author's works, as are the other presentations cussed in this chapter, it was believed this was the logical ce to consider Bleak House because of the distinct similarities all the other aspects of the two Dickens programs. He had given production abroad and had presented it on a tour of the United tes, visiting forty-six cities in thirty-six states in a twenty k period, prior to his opening at the Bijou Theatre on April 20, 1953, a limited three week engagement.[76] Although Bleak House was the tured attraction of this engagement, Williams also planned to sent his Mixed Bill three times a week.[77]

[75] Atkinson, New York Times, February 17, 1952, Sec. II, p. 1.

[76] John Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, April 25, 1953.

[77] Sam Zolotow, New York Times, March 27, 1953, p. 28.

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[79] Robert Colem
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[80] Rowland Fie

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The format for the presentation was the same as he had used in his program the previous year.[78] Williams, in beard, white hair, formal attire, red boutonniere and white gloves, stood before a replica of Dickens' reading desk and proceeded to impersonate the author presenting his works. The critics did not mention any changes between the two productions and used almost exactly the same terms to classify Bleak House as they had used for the Mixed Bill.

There was more mention of the lighting effects used in the later production. Two critics noted the lights changed in color and intensity to match the differing moods,[79] and another reviewer wrote of the reading desk being "wreathed in eerie light" for one suspenseful sequence.[80] Williams again used a book as a prop. Hawkins reported that Williams pretended to read from the book when he wanted to indicate a new setting or mood, but the rest of the time he simply told the story.[81]

Verdict

Bleak House did not fare as well with the critics as had its predecessor. The reviewers were still impressed with Williams and his remarkable characterizations, but many thought the material was not as enjoyable as that contained in the Mixed Bill. Most of them

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[78] Because the two programs were so similar, setting and accessories, classification, and manner of presentation were not discussed in detail.

[79] Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, April 22, 1953. William Hawkins, New York World-Telegram and Sun, April 21, 1953.

[80] Rowland Field, Newark Evening News, April 21, 1953.

[81] Hawkins, loc. cit.

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[82] L.F., New Yor

[83] Coleman, loc

[85] Vene., Varie

[86] Thomas Dash,

[87] John Chapma

recommended the program, but with much less enthusiasm than they had shown for the previous one.

The critic for the New York Times wrote that there were still lots of good characters to be seen, but that the total effect was not too successful.[82] Coleman advised those of his readers who had not seen Williams as Dickens to avail themselves of the opportunity, but he thought there were quite a few parts which were "taxing rather than arresting."[83] Beaufort described the evening as a "stimulating two hours of theatre entertainment," but thought that the Mixed Bill had been much more enjoyable.[84] The critic for Variety admitted it did not quite measure up to last years production, but he termed it a "sock virtuoso performance" anyhow.[85]

Dash warned his readers they might have difficulty following the story, but assured them they would enjoy "this anatomized dissection of the rapacious and predatory London society, its hypocrisy, its callousness, and its jungle savagery."[86] Chapman also cautioned it might be difficult for those not familiar with Dickens to keep track of the action, but he felt it was well done, even if it was confusing.[87]

Watts praised Williams' editorial and histrionic talents, and he admitted much of the Dickens spirit came through, but he complained

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[82] L.F., New York Times, April 21, 1953, p. 33.

[83] Coleman, loc. cit. [84] Beaufort, loc. cit.

[85] Vene., Variety, April 22, 1953, p. 58.

[86] Thomas Dash, Women's Wear Daily, April 21, 1953.

[87] John Chapman, New York Daily News, April 22, 1953.

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[88] Richard Watts

[89] Henry Hewes,

[90] E.V.R. Wyatt,

[91] Wolcott Gibb

[92] George Freed

[93] John McClair

[94] Whitney Bol

[95] Walter Kerr

[96] Louis Sheaf

e novel was simply "too diffuse."[88] Hewes labeled Bleak House as
nly occasionally good drama," but thought the evening was "always
od acting and good Dickens."[89] Wyatt wrote, "There is not the
ightest question but that Williams is as brilliant as ever. It
Charles Dickens who has failed him."[90]

Gibbs found the evening admirable, but not particularly
joyable.[91] Freedley decided he was "just completely allergic to
kens," and that he "should be kept home" whenever Williams was
forming Dickens.[92] McClain also had not altered his opinion of
proceedings. He told his readers, "You've got to love Dickens,
t's all."[93]

Bolton disagreed. "They tell me that you have to love Dickens
h considerable passion to fully enjoy an entire evening . . . .
as one who has neither disdain nor passion for Mr. Dickens,
y a wholly full appreciation of his craftsmanship, I don't think
s is true." He heartily recommended it to his readers.[94] Kerr
ught it was "good spirited fun."[95] Sheaffer called both programs
re treats."[96]

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[88]Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, April 21, 1953.

[89]Henry Hewes, Saturday Review, May 9, 1953, p. 28.

[90]E.V.R. Wyatt, Catholic World, June, 1953, p. 228.

[91]Wolcott Gibbs, The New Yorker, May 2, 1953, p. 52.

[92]George Freedley, New York Morning Telegraph, April 24, 1953.

[93]John McClain, New York Journal American, April 21, 1953.

[94]Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegraph, April 22, 1953.

[95]Walter Kerr, New York Herald Tribune, April 21, 1953.

[96]Louis Sheaffer, Brooklyn Eagle, April 21, 1953.

Acting

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[97] Dash, loc. c

[100] McClain, lo

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Williams' ability to swiftly sketch in a character and his ility to convey a mood were the main areas discussed by the re- ewers. Dash was particularly delighted with Williams' creation of me of the more bizarre Dickens figures and with his skill in creating spense.[97] Coleman observed Williams enjoyed remarkable success th all types of characters.[98] Sheaffer described his performance follows: "When the bearded actor speaks for Lady Dedlock, he sumes a cool, reserved air and proud stance that conjure [sic.] sharp picture of the society beauty. He appears to shrink into nself and become the essence of a scrawny, frightened street Arab Jo, the pathetic street cleaner."[99] Even McClain admitted that thout leaving the reading stand, Williams succeeded "in creating personalities of the myriads of people involved," solely through ture and vocal inflection.[100] The critic for Variety wrote:

> His performance is as subtle as it is varied. From the pages he turns but never reads, each character springs full-blown with its own particular movement, expressions and inflections . . . . In his descriptive passages, the actor skillfully evokes the various settings, the murky London streets . . . . Even inanimate things, like an engraved brass plate or a society newspaper notice, achieves a special life and character of their own as read by Williams.[101]

Hewes expressed appreciation for the way Williams coordinated heatrical devices with the material. Mention of the world of y caused Williams' eyes to half close, indicating the boredom of habitants. When he began to talk about opium, he slowly turned

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[97]Dash, loc. cit. [98]Coleman, loc. cit. [99]Sheaffer, loc. cit.
[100]McClain, loc. cit. [101]Vene., loc. cit.

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Field paid tribute to Will

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[102] Hewes, op.

[104] Chapman, l

[107] Eric Bentl

p. 22.

urned a page of the book to indicate how ominous the subject was.[102] ield paid tribute to Williams' success at indicating the changing oods of the text.[103] Chapman wrote of his ability to make the istener "feel a London fog," or shrink back in repulsion from a rimy tenement.[104]

Two critics thought Williams' acting was better in Bleak House han it had been in the Mixed Bill. Kerr noted that Williams still ad a tendency to be too literal in his pantomime, and still had a habit of laying it on thick as the comedy becomes lower," but raised him for showing more restraint in the second production.[105] awkins wrote, "From an actor with sensational tendencies, he has ecome a master of subtle showmanship. His significant readings righten Dickens' phrases without distorting them."[106]

Eric Bentley attempted to analyze Williams' success as a reader the following discussion.

> Williams will begin to take on a character's voice when he is described in the narrative. He will also embellish the narrative passage with any noises and gestures that may be intimated in them. The diagnostic of Williams the reader, as of Laughton the reader, is that he has a complete actor's technique to draw on. Where the amateur would use gestures of mere emphasis, Williams will choose an action with a reference: a quick movement of the hand to the face will tell us someone has been splashed in the eye. Or he will build a whole scene by a repeated turn of the head--to see if the speaker's companion is listening. Abstract gestures can be added at more solemn moments: at the end of a chapter he will "freeze" under the dimming lights with one arm outstretched.[107]

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[102]Hewes, op. cit., p. 27. [103]Field, loc. cit.

[104]Chapman, loc. cit. [105]Kerr, loc. cit. [106]Hawkins, loc. cit.

[107]Eric Bentley, "On Being Read To," New Republic, May 11, 1953,

Material

Dickens wrote Bleak H
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[108] L.F., loc.

[111] L.F., loc.

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Dickens wrote Bleak House in 1852-1853. He intended it as an ack on the Court of Chancery and on the entire British legal tem. It contained a multitude of interrelated plots and charac-s. It was full of savage caricature, bitter satire, and vehement ial protest.[108] The novel was sprawling and episodic, partly ause Dickens had written it for serial publication.[109]

A note in the program reported that, to read Bleak House in entirety would take more than sixty hours, which Williams sur-ed might overtax the audience as well as the reader. He managed cut it down to slightly more than two hours. Bolton likened liams' editing to "reducing a great redwood tree to a garden ub."[110] The critic for the New York Times agreed with the simile, thought "this pruning process" had not been very successful.[111] McClain pointed out, even after Williams' editing, there still ained "thirty odd, highly divergent types to be accounted for, say nothing of a rash of sub-plots and several thousand words cribing London and the general state of society of the period."[112]

The program was divided into three acts. According to McClain, first act consisted almost entirely of description and of the roduction of the characters. In the second act the plot gradually an to emerge, and the second and third acts had some moments of itement and suspense which culminated in thrilling, though

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[108] L.F., loc. cit. [109] Hawkins, loc. cit. [110] Bolton, loc. cit.
[111] L.F., loc. cit. [112] McClain, loc. cit.

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Coleman was also dis

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[113] Ibid. 114

[116] Kerr, loc.

[118] Vene., loc.

mewhat altered, climax. McClain complained that there were too
ny segments which seemed to have been included solely for the
rpose of allowing Mr. Williams to portray some unusual character.[113]

Coleman was also distressed with the reliance on characterization,
ther than on action. He warned that listeners unfamiliar with the
vel would have a hard time figuring out what was happening.[114]
tts thought the characters were so skeletal and the narrative so
mbled, even "Dickens veterans would have problems."[115] Kerr wrote
at Detective Inspector Bucket, (one of the characters in Bleak House),
uld be hard pressed to track down the plot. He felt the narrative
d become "little more than a device for opening and closing each
the three acts."[116]

Beaufort reported that so much mood and so many characters
re presented in one evening that the poor spectator was "overtaxed."[117]
e Variety critic thought the plot was quite melodramatic, and that
hose who are trying to follow all the convolutions of the story
ie may find it rough going."[118] Chapman agreed. "Even with Williams'
ear-headed editing, Bleak House is no Mickey Spillane scenario.
ot is thick and incidents are thicker."[119]

Among critics expressing the minority opinion, Hawkins thought
e Williams adaptation had "calmed down" the story and added to its
matic impact. He admitted the novel seemed sprawling at the
inning while Williams was providing the background and sketching

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[113] Ibid. [114] Coleman, loc. cit. [115] Watts, loc. cit.
[116] Kerr, loc. cit. [117] Beaufort, loc. cit.
[118] Vene., loc. cit. [119] Chapman, loc. cit.

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Comparisons

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[120] Hawkins, l

[122] Bentley, l

the characters, but he felt an atmosphere of dread gradually ilt up throughout the evening.[120] Dash wrote that Williams had naged "to weave into his interpretation a tremendous amount of nsion and suspense as the turbulent work unfolds and spirals to s macabre and grisly climax."[121]

Eric Bentley thought Williams' served as a critic in that he s forced to be selective in consolidating sixty hours worth of ory into two. He credited Williams with sharpening the Dickens tire and bringing out the author's narrative skill. Bentley nfessed to frequently neglecting Dickens' plots for his scenes d characters, and was amazed to find that, "when stripped of some the moralistic rhetoric the Gothic narrative in Bleak House comes seem pretty impressive."[122]

The Time critic admitted Williams had provided "a loose rubber nd of a story," but complained it was no longer Bleak House. He s willing to agree that drastic cutting had its advantages, (he was ppy to have "sweet virtuous Esther Summerson" silenced), but he ought it had more disadvantages in that the satire on the Court of ncery and the panoramic picture of London were almost completely minated. "An imposing novel and a great portrait gallery have ome an agreeable scrapbook and an amusing one-man show."[123]

mparisons

The only comparisons made concerning this production were with previous Williams presentation. Almost without exception, the

[120] Hawkins, loc. cit. [121] Dash, loc. cit.

[122] Bentley, loc. cit. [123] Time, May 4, 1953, p. 84.

critics thought Bleak House had been. The New York Ti his earlier format. "Cert on the shelves to be duste ran for twenty-four perfo

Williams apparently program. One of the New Williams was preparing a Copperfield, Martin Chuz Cities."[125] The followi that "the report that th Dickens repertoire," wh Williams' appearance wi Williams recently tried a tour of Wales and wa fall of 1954. Mr. Hur planned to bring this of the 1955-1956 seas America, it was with years of Dylan Thomas chapter.

In contrast to Sir John Gielgud's

[124] L.F., loc.

[126] J.P. Shan

critics thought Bleak House was not as effective as the Mixed Bill had been. The New York Times critic suggested Williams stay with his earlier format. "Certainly, Dickens left enough of his works on the shelves to be dusted off for variety's sake."[124] Bleak House ran for twenty-four performances.

Williams apparently did plan to present another varied Dickens program. One of the New York Times theatre columnists reported Williams was preparing a "second mixed bill culled from David Copperfield, Martin Chuzzlewit, Little Dorrit, and A Tale of Two Cities."[125] The following year, another Times columnist revealed that "the report that the Welsh actor had decided to abandon the Dickens repertoire," which had been circulated shortly after Emlyn Williams' appearance with Bleak House, was inaccurate. He reported Williams recently tried out a new miscellaneous Dickens program on a tour of Wales and was planning to take it to South Africa in the fall of 1954. Mr. Hurock, who handled Williams' two previous visits, planned to bring this new program to the United States at the beginning of the 1955-1956 season.[126] However, the next time Williams visited America, it was with A Boy Growing Up, which told of the boyhood years of Dylan Thomas. This production is discussed in the following chapter.

Ages of Man

In contrast to Williams' flamboyant impersonation of Dickens, Sir John Gielgud's presentation of selections from Shakespeare was

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[124] L.F., loc. cit. [125] Zolotow, loc. cit.

[126] J.P. Shanley, New York Times, August 8, 1954, Sec. II, p. 1.

rather restrained. Gielgu

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festival performances.[127]

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at the Edinburgh Festiva

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Late in 1958 he toured

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Sir John Gielgud

Theatre on December 28

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Setting and Accessori

The curtain ros

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[127]Letter fro

[128]Linn, op.

[129]Tom F. Dr

[130]John Beau

[131]Driver,

rather restrained. Gielgud first developed Ages of Man as a program which he could give for lectures, school appearances, and special festival performances.[127] Linn, in his dissertation concerning oral interpretation on the London stage, reported the immediate impetus for the program was a recital given in London on August 1, 1956, for the Arts Council, the government agency for the support of the arts. The next August, Gielgud gave a program entitled Ages of Man at the Edinburgh Festival. In October, he presented it at the Berlin Festival, and in November, he took the program to Paris. Late in 1958 he toured Canada and the United States with his Shakespearean excerpts.[128]

Sir John Gielgud opened in Ages of Man at the 46th Street Theatre on December 28, 1958. The presentation was extremely successful with both the critics and the public.

Setting and Accessories

The curtain rose to reveal Mr. Gielgud standing beside a reading stand which held a large notebook. Grey drapes and a rug were the only other furnishings.[129] Gielgud wore "the male recitalist's prescribed uniform, the dinner jacket."[130] No mention was made of lighting effects, though one reviewer did comment about the light which was "reflected from Sir John's nearly hairless head."[131]

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[127]Letter from Sir John Gielgud to the author, June 13, 1968.

[128]Linn, op. cit., pp. 247-273.

[129]Tom F. Driver, New Republic, February 2, 1959, p. 20.

[130]John Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, January 3, 1959.

[131]Driver, loc. cit.

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[132] John Chapman.
p. 158.

Brooks Atkin
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Driver, loc.
Harold Clurm

[133] Frank Aston,
NYTCR, p. 157.

Robert Cole
NYTCR, p. 158.

[134] Atkinson, l

[136] Gielgud, lo

Classification

The most popular label for Ages of Man was "readings."[132] Two of the critics described it as a "one-man show."[133]

Manner of Presentation

Gielgud started off the evening in the manner of "a casual host." He gave a few introductory remarks and then began the program with some of Shakespeare's more lyrical passages.[134] Between selections he consulted the notebook on the lectern,[135] but the consensus seemed to be that it was strictly a prop. Gielgud wrote that the presentation originally was actually a reading, but eventually the manuscript was used only "for certainty and to turn to, to break the continuity."[136] Whenever necessary, the actor would preface the selections with "informative, often witty comments."[137] Watts described the manner of presentation as follows:

> Mr. Gielgud, in evening clothes, simply came out and gave us an evening of Shakespeare. His program ranged through the entire Shakespearean canon, including the sonnets, presenting the famous speeches and characters with the art of which the distinguished actor is the master.
>
> It was by no means a mere series of brilliant recitations. Mr. Gielgud spoke the superb lines with wonderful beauty and

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[132]John Chapman, New York Daily News, December 29, 1958, NYTCR, p. 158.
Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, December 29, 1958, p. 21.
George Oppenheimer, Newsday, January 7, 1959.
Driver, loc. cit.
Harold Clurman, Nation, January 10, 1959, p. 39.

[133]Frank Aston, New York World-Telegram and Sun, December 29, 1958, NYTCR, p. 157.
Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, December 30, 1958, NYTCR, p. 158.

[134]Atkinson, loc. cit. [135]Beaufort, loc. cit.

[136]Gielgud, loc. cit. [137]Coleman, loc. cit.

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Verdict

Ages of Man receive
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[138] Richard Watt
p. 159.

[139] Walter Kerr,
NYTCR, p. 159.

[140] Atkinson, l

[142] Coleman, lo

clarity, but he also acted the characters whose speeches they are, with tremendous skill and variety.[138]

Verdict

Ages of Man received unanimous raves from the critics of the seven major New York newspapers, and enthusiastic approval from most of the other reviewers. Kerr called the Gielgud-Shakespeare combination "perfect," and warned his readers they had only four weeks in which to see it.[139] Atkinson termed the program a "masterpiece," and wrote that it was a "Shakespearean event of first importance," presented by a "consummate artist at the peak of his career."[140] Aston was amazed at the variety and abundance of passion Gielgud brought forth in his program of "excerpts which touch the high spots in man's rush from crib to crematory." He described the proceedings as "a grand evening, a novel one . . . one that was warmly rewarding."[141]

Coleman headlined his review, "Gielgud and Bard a Perfect Pair."[142] Chapman's report read "Gielgud's Splendid Solo Evening."[143] Watts rhapsodized that when Shakespeare and Gielgud were at their best, the result could not help being magnificent. He found only one possible disadvantage in this "thrilling evening in the theatre." He warned that those who saw the Gielgud program were likely to be

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[138]Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, December 29, 1958, NYTCR, p. 159.

[139]Walter Kerr, New York Herald Tribune, December 29, 1958, NYTCR, p. 159.

[140]Atkinson, loc. cit. [141]Aston, loc. cit.

[142]Coleman, loc. cit. [143]Chapman, loc. cit.

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Two critics fel

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[144] Watts, loc.

[145] John McCla
NYTCR, p. 158.

[146] Driver, lo

[147] E.V.R. Wya

[148] Jess., Va

dissatisfied with future Shakespearean productions in which the roles were not performed as well as Gielgud had done them.[144] McClain was ecstatic.

> Sir John Gielgud appeared alone on the stage of the Forty-sixth St. Theatre last night and brought more meaning and majesty to the incredible genius of Shakespeare than a platoon of touring companies. Taking selections from plays and sonnets, he has traced the progression of man from youth to death, with reasonable digressions. He calls it "Ages of Man" and it is magnificent.
>
> We have all been witness to Shakespeare in his various guises. Here he is unencumbered by people who often clutter the stage: the best of his writing is delivered by a single actor who has respect, appreciation and the ability to transmit it with the mere aid of a dinner jacket and a neglected lectern. I doubt that we will, in our time, hear so many memorable passages read with equal passion of [sic.] understanding.[145]

Most of the other critics had similar sentiments. Driver called the evening an "intellectual triumph" and advised his readers that anyone who cared anything about theatre should not miss it.[146] Wyatt was completely captivated. She wrote, "The experience which I count as one of the happiest in the theatre is the memory of a baldish man in a dinner jacket alone on a stage whose voice unlocked the gate to consumate beauty."[147]

Two critics felt it necessary to voice reservations. The reviewer for Variety found Gielgud's artistry compelling, but warned that the program was still a "reading" and consequently the "entertainment value" was limited.[148] Clurman, writing in Nation, started

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[144] Watts, loc. cit.

[145] John McClain, New York Journal American, December 29, 1958, NYTCR, p. 158.

[146] Driver, loc. cit.

[147] E.V.R. Wyatt, Catholic World, March, 1959, pp. 505-506.

[148] Jess., Variety, December 31, 1958, p. 46.

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[149] Clurman,

his review with the observation that only good things should be said about Ages of Man which provided a "splendid evening of educational pleasure," but then he proceeded to spend the rest of his review worrying over comments he had overheard on opening night.

> Everyone talked of Gielgud as a great actor; and everyone echoed the notion that such an actor speaking Shakespeare's glorious verse made the trapping of the stage unnecessary. As a mark of enthusiasm, this observation was proper as well as pleasant; as theatre aesthetics it is deplorable.
>
> Gielgud is an actor of high rank, but his readings are readings: By themselves they are certainly not theatre. This became particularly apparent to me as I listened to a speech from Measure of Measure. I had seen Gielgud as Angelo in the play some years ago at Stratford-on-Avon and was much impressed by the insidious, worm-eaten, crabbed "medievalism"--half anguished conscience, half sadistic hypocrisy--which informed his impersonation. In the reading only the verbal sense and the inspiration of language was communicated.[149]

Acting

All the critics wrote in glowing terms of Mr. Gielgud's talent and performance. Several of the reviewers commented on the illusions he was able to create and many of them thought the outstanding feature of the evening was the way in which Gielgud subjugated his performance to the material. It is interesting that four of the critics, while heaping lavish praise on the histrionic abilities of Mr. Gielgud, felt compelled to point out certain of his natural limitations. Atkinson observed that although Gielgud had been considered one of the top classical actors for a quarter of a century, his voice was rather high pitched and his volume was limited. Atkinson hastened to add, however, that his voice was still "a superb instrument" because Gielgud's training and experience enable him to

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[149]Clurman, loc. cit.

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[150] Atkinson,

[152] Kenneth Ty

to use it to its utmost capacity.[150] Chapman also noted that Gielgud lacked an outstanding voice.[151]

Tynan had no quarrel with Gielgud's voice, in fact, he thought it was superb, but he had several other areas in which he thought Gielgud was deficient. He thought these deficiencies were much less evident in Gielgud's Ages of Man than they were in roles he had acted previously.

> I have always felt (and once wrote) that Sir John Gielgud is the finest actor on earth from the neck up, and, having heard his Shakespeare recital, "Ages of Man," I am in no mood to revise that opinion. Whenever I think of Sir John, I remember what C.E. Montague (my favorite drama critic next to Shaw) said of Coquelin: namely, that "his power was simply the sum of the three strict elements of great acting--a plastic physical medium, a finished technical cunning, and a passion of joy in the thought of the character acted." Sir John has the last two qualities in abundance, and is almost entirely deficient in the first; when in motion, he is constricted, hesitant, and jerky, enmeshed in unseen cords of inhibition. His exceptional virtues of mind and voice stand out most clearly in repose, and for this reason the present display at the 46th Street Theatre seems to me one of the most satisfactory things he has ever done. Now and then, when the impulse of a speech demands it, he takes a step or two to the right or left and permits his hands, which spend much of the evening protectively clasping each other, to fly up in gestures that claw the air, but for the most part he is still, and all the better for it; the voice flows freely among us, a thrilling instrument that commands the full tonal range of both viola and cello . . . . The impact of the performance is not, however, exclusively aural; as I've said, Sir John's physical inexpressiveness does not extend above the collar stud. Poker-backed he may be; poker-faced he certainly isn't. Wherever pride, scorn, compassion, and the more cerebral kinds of agony are called for, his features respond promptly and memorably.[152]

On the other hand, Driver, who had long considered Gielgud the best Shakespearean actor on the stage, had never noticed that "he has

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[150] Atkinson, loc. cit. [151] Chapman, loc. cit.

[152] Kenneth Tynan, The New Yorker, January 10, 1959, p. 60.

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[153] Driver, loc

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almost as many natural liabilities as assets." While watching Ages of Man, Driver became aware that Gielgud's voice was rather high pitched and not particularly resonant; that Gielgud lacked an imposing physical presence; and that his movements occasionally lacked fluidity. "One is much aware of his hands, his stance, his feet, as if some residue of awkwardness had not entirely been expunged. In other words, when I saw him alone in evening dress upon the stage, I was surprised to learn that he is not, as I had imagined, all grace."[153]

The other critics did not bother to temper their praise. Watts reminded his readers no one had challenged Mr. Gielgud's rank as a great Shakespearean actor for many years.[154] Beaufort thought Gielgud was "perhaps the greatest English speaking actor of our times."[155] Coleman acknowledged it was unnecessary to tell his readers what a magnificent Shakespearean actor Gielgud was; and he then proceeded to do so at considerable length.[156] Regardless of whether or not they observed any weaknesses in Sir John's natural abilities, they were all aware of his superlative performance in Ages of Man.

The critic for Newsweek recalled the evening began quietly. Gielgud initially gave the impression he was going to present Shakespeare entirely through the use of his voice, but soon "the quiet man in the dinner jacket is acting the roles for all the fervor they are worth."[157] Coleman found Gielgud's voice almost hypnotic and his

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[153]Driver, loc. cit. [154]Watts, loc. cit. [155]Beaufort, loc. cit.
[156]Coleman, loc. cit. [157]Newsweek, January 12, 1959, p. 56.

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[161] Aston, lo

characterizations extremely moving. He thought the most touching episode was the abdication speech of Richard II. "Tears flowed down Gielgud's cheeks and many in the audience were observed dabbing handkerchiefs at moist eyes." Coleman strongly recommended that aspiring actors make a careful study of Gielgud's performance. "It was inspired acting, acting from within, completely under the control of a master."[158]

Gielgud began the evening by requesting the audience to watch as he greeted, "in the realm of the imaginative mind," the greatest writer in the English language.[159] Kerr noted that during the course of the evening, Gielgud frequently blinked his eyes "as though he were trying to see better." What he was seeing were the characters, the meanings, the concepts of many of Shakespeare's greatest works; and his consumate skill was such that he was able to make the audience see them as well.[160] Aston found the stage "fully peopled with Danes and thanes, with kings and young men hopelessly in love."[161] Oppenheimer was so transported into the realm of imagination that he saw "not only Richard II in his abdication scene, but Bolingbroke to whom he must surrender his beloved crown and all the courtiers who have robbed him of their allegiance."[162]

Many of the critics were favorably impressed with the way in which Gielgud focused the attention of the audience on Shakespeare's words rather than on his own performance. The reviewer for Newsweek

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[158]Coleman, loc. cit. [159]Driver, loc. cit. [160]Kerr, loc. cit.
[161]Aston, loc. cit. [162]Oppenheimer, loc. cit.

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[163] Newsweek,

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[167] Time, Jan

thought the actor's feeling for, and devotion to, the spoken word was so apparent that, at the end of the evening, "the ultimate hero to emerge is Shakespeare."[163] Wyatt, writing for Catholic World, observed Gielgud apparently believed it was not necessary to embellish Shakespeare, and noted that as the evening progressed, the audience gradually became convinced Gielgud was "honestly more interested in Shakespeare than in himself."[164]

Hewes praised Gielgud for being able to conquer the temptation to show off technique, and that because he was not concerned with displaying his talents, Ages of Man was "less a cascade of star virtuosity that it is a great actor's revelation about Shakespeare's total work."[165] Chapman observed that only an actor of "exceptional [sic.] good judgement and keen intelligence could make this fine evening in the theatre Shakespeare's and not Gielgud's."[166] Perhaps the reviewer for Time best summed it up when he wrote:

> It is Shakespeare the magician with language who bulks largest in the recital, and Gielgud has his own touch of magic, not from any magnificence in voice or roll of theatrical thunder, but from a projection of a feeling, a rush of psychological light . . . .
> . . . . . .
> What stands out along with Gielgud's mastery of his material is his absorption in his subject--the sense toward Shakespeare, of something loved and life long. The effect that such a recital seems to promise most, flashing virtuosity, is what matters least. The essence of the evening is not glitter but glow.[167]

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[163] Newsweek, loc. cit. [164] Wyatt, op. cit., p. 506.

[165] Henry Hewes, Saturday Review, January 17, 1959, p. 74.

[166] Chapman, loc. cit.

[167] Time, January 12, 1959, p. 66.

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Material

The critics, probably assuming their readers had at least a rudimentary knowledge of the Bard, did not devote much time to the consideration of the material beyond mentioning that Gielgud had used George Rylands anthology of Shakespeare.[168] Beaufort noted that, in two hours time, Gielgud "spreads out of cloth of gold tapestry of word, image, and character into which are woven 9 sonnets and fragments of some 19 plays."[169]

There were three sections to the program; "Youth," "Manhood," and "Old Age." The first showed the lyrical side of life and of Shakespeare. The second was concerned with "moments of action, royal decision or adult revery." The last part contained reflections and problems of the old.[170]

Gielgud tried to arrange the material so that the program would have plenty of variety. He gave only what introductory material was necessary for each scene. Atkinson wrote:

> Most of the passages are familiar to most theatregoers and lovers of literature . . . . Mr. Gielgud has not tried to confound us with erudition, although he could. In addition to the sonnets, the speeches come from the kings and princes, the lovers and sprites, the soothsayers and sorcerers who are part of our cultural heritage. Although most of them are familiar, they are as fresh as creation by the time Mr. Gielgud is through with them.[171]

Comparisons

The only critic to draw a comparison between Ages of Man and other oral interpretation productions was Oppenheimer. He noted there

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[168]Atkinson, loc. cit. [169]Beaufort, loc. cit.

[170]Chapman, loc. cit. [171]Atkinson, loc. cit.

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had been many one-man readings in recent years, with Emlyn Williams and his Dickens and Thomas programs being noteworthy examples. Although he labeled Mr. Williams' programs as "admirable," he regarded them as merely readings which could not measure up to Mr. Gielgud's "evocation of moments that capture and enthrall you," and offer the listener a panorama of all the action and all the characters.[172]

The Ages of Man was a spectacular success financially as well as critically. Variety reported the production had recouped its $30,000 investment in less than three weeks. The gross for the third week was $36,700, which was believed to be one of the biggest box office weeks on record for a one-man show, and which meant an estimated $15,000 net profit.[173] The fourth week must have been at least as lucrative, for the New York Times reported there was standing room only for the final week's performances.[174] Ages of Man ran for forty performances.

In April of 1963, Gielgud returned with Ages of Man for a one-week engagement. He again garnered rave reviews and must have been extremely popular at the box office again. McClain warned his readers the only problem with the program was that of getting in to see it.[175]

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[172]Oppenheimer, loc. cit.

[173]Variety, January 21, 1959, p. 81.

[174]Sam Zolotow, New York Times, January 27, 1959, p. 26.

[175]John McClain, New York Journal American, April 15, 1963.

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Mark Twain Tonight!

Hal Holbrook's Mark Twain Tonight! does not fit the definition of oral interpretation used in this study. Holbrook did not seek to recreate a literary experience in the mind of the listener, with the possible exception of his presentation, as Mark Twain, of a ghost story and a selection from Huckleberry Finn. Holbrook's purpose was to provide a visual and auditory recreation of Mark Twain as platform lecturer.

The only justification for including Mark Twain Tonight! is that reviewers of subsequent one-man shows which do fit the definition of oral interpretation used here quite often referred to the Holbrook program for purposes of comparison. In order that the reader might be familiar with the production when such references are made, the writer decided a limited discussion of Mark Twain Tonight! was necessary.

Hal Holbrook began working on Mark Twain when he was a senior at Denison University in Granville, Ohio. He prepared a short skit on Twain for a class assignment. His professor was so impressed that he contacted a lecture agent to book Holbrook for a tour in the Southwest. For twelve years, Holbrook studied all he could find on Twain. He listened to records of Twain, watched an old Edison film of him, and talked with many of his contemporary. He worked constantly to perfect his Twain program and toured it throughout the country. When not on the road with Twain, he appeared in the CBS-TV serial "The Brighter Day."[176]

Holbrook gave two performances at The Lambs early in 1958.

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[176]Louis Calta, New York Times, April 8, 1959, p. 42.

Producer John Lotas saw o

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Sabinson recalled that, a

Hal Holbrook presenting

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Setting and Accessories

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Producer John Lotas saw one of the performances and decided to present the Twain program in an off-Broadway theatre. Holbrook had never appeared on the New York stage before, and press agent Harvey Sabinson recalled that, after he sent out the general release about Hal Holbrook presenting Mark Twain, the only response he got was "a fishy stare and a single question from the press; 'Who is Hal Holbrook?'"[177] Mark Twain Tonight! opened on April 6, 1959, at the 41st Street Theatre.

Setting and Accessories

One critic described the stage as "a faded daguerreotype, with a high, old-fashioned lectern, a desk with a topply mound of books and a cut-glass pitcher of water, a McKinley-era chair."[178] Holbrook devoted three hours to applying the bushy white hair and eyebrows, the gray mustache, and the facial lines and wrinkles which turned the thirty-four year old actor into the seventy-year-old Twain.[179] Holbrook wore a white linen suit which looked like the white suit in which Twain was always photographed. Holbrook, as Twain, explained that he wore the white suit "because a naked person exerts little constructive influence on society."[180]

Holbrook had a heavy watch chain across his vest and used the watch for a prop, pulling it out before the end of each act to see

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[177] John Fuller, Saturday Review, May 30, 1959, pp. 6-7.

[178] Time, April 20, 1959, p. 71.

[179] John Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, April 11, 1959.

[180] Frank Aston, New York World-Telegram and Sun, April 7, 1959.

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if it was time to stop. The most frequently used props were cigars and matches. One of the critics suggested the cigar, the lighting of the matches, and the puffs of smoke served the same purpose for Mark Twain as the rope did for Will Rogers.[181]

Classification

Most of the critics used some form of the term "one-man" to describe the presentation. Clurman and Coleman called it a "one-man show."[182] McClain classified it a "one-man reading,"[183] Chapman labeled it a "one-man recitation,"[184] and Kerr termed it a "one-man presentation."[185] The critic for Variety surmised the production could technically be called a "reading" because there was a lectern and several books on the stage; but he hastened to add these books were only props.[186]

Manner of Presentation

Holbrook came on stage, not only dressed and made-up to look like Twain, but with the movements, gestures, and twitches a seventy-year-old man would be expected to have. Kerr admitted for the first three seconds he was afraid Holbrook had made a "tactical error in electing to spend an entire evening with the vocal quaver, the

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[181] E.V.R. Wyatt, Catholic World, June 1959, p. 241.

[182] Harold Clurman, Nation, August 15, 1959, p. 79.
Robert Coleman, New York Mirror, April 7, 1959.

[183] John McClain, New York Journal American, April 7, 1959.

[184] John Chapman, New York Daily News, April 10, 1959.

[185] Walter Kerr, New York Herald Tribune, April 7, 1959.

[186] Nedi., Variety, April 15, 1959, p. 72.

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[187] Kerr, loc. c

[189] Fuller, op.

[190] Lewis Funke

possibly arthritic fingers, and the ducklike shuffle of Twain," but he promptly forgot about the technique and proceeded to enjoy the results.[187]

Holbrook's performance was a recreation of Twain as a platform speaker and of "his personality and human, humane viewpoints on the eternal verities."[188] The only times Holbrook was not Twain, the lecturer, were the times he was Twain, the story-teller, presenting an excerpt from Huck Finn and telling a ghost story. In these two instances Holbrook portrayed Twain portraying characters from his own stories, similar to what Emlyn Williams had done in his Dickens programs. The majority of the time however, Holbrook was "just" Twain.

> On the evening of April 6, 1959, the critics of the New York stage made their way to a small theatre snuggled into a building on 41st St. which looked for all the world like a subway entrance. It was not a very distinguished or signal occasion. Two of the critics, Brooks Atkinson of the Times, and Richard Watts of the Post were happy to send substitutes to this obscure off-Broadway opening.[189]

Verdict

The two substitutes and the remaining "regulars" were completely captivated by Mark Twain Tonight! As Funke reminisced, "Who could have known that Hal Holbrook would set the aisle sitters in the aisles."[190] There were no negative reactions and only a few qualified endorsements. The majority of the critics were practically ecstatic.

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[187] Kerr, loc. cit. [188] Coleman, loc. cit.

[189] Fuller, op. cit., p. 6.

[190] Lewis Funke, New York Times, July 12, 1959, Sec. II, p. 1.

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[191] Clurman, loc
[193] Kerr, loc.
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[197] Francis He
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[199] Harold Hew

Clurman thought Holbrook had provided a "first rate miniature portrait" of Twain and called the show "one of the pleasantest things put on our stage."[191] Coleman headlined his review "'Twain Tonight!' Spellbinding," and recommended it as an excellent "refresher course in Twain as well as a spellbinding evening of entertainment."[192] Kerr described it as "rich, robust, and mightily entertaining."[193] Chapman told his readers to take advantage of the opportunity to see a splendid actor portray a splendid writer.[194] Gelb, who covered the opening for Atkinson, reported that "an extra-ordinary show called Mark Twain Tonight! slipped into the 41st Street Theatre last evening . . . . Everything about the evening is perfect."[195] Atkinson found time to attend the show two weeks later and agreed with his substitute's evaluation. He found it "thoroughly enjoyable."[196]

Herridge described Mark Twain as a "thoroughly delightful companion," and warned her readers not to miss this chance to make his acquaintance.[197] Wyatt rejoiced that "another generation can again enjoy the surprises of the venerable but impish, witty Missourian."[198] Hewes thought the Twain portrayed by Holbrook was much more enjoyable than any modern, super-charged comic.[199]

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[191]Clurman, loc. cit. [192]Coleman, loc. cit.

[193]Kerr, loc. cit. [194]Chapman, loc. cit.

[195]Arthur Gelb, New York Times, April 7, 1959, p. 40.

[196]Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, April 19, 1959, Sec. VI, p. 24.

[197]Francis Herridge, New York Post, April 7, 1959.

[198]Wyatt, loc. cit.

[199]Harold Hewes, Saturday Review, April 25, 1959, p. 23.

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Bolton ordered his readers: "Go now, go soon, go quickly to see Hal Holbrook bring Mark Twain to utter and complete life." He labeled the production as "a prize for the season."[200]

Two critics had reservations. One thought actor Holbrook was so remarkable that he drew attention away from author Twain, but he recommended the production anyhow.[201] Another reviewer felt the program started to drag a little before each intermission, but overall, he found it a diverting show which allowed 1959 audiences to see "something that delighted earlier generations."[202] The praise of the critics apparently had a salutary effect on the box office. The day after the reviews appeared in most of the papers, Calta reported "a continuous line of twenty to thirty patrons seeking to buy tickets for the show."[203]

Acting

Most of the critics devoted the majority of their reviews to Mr. Holbrook's remarkable acting skill. The aspects of his presentation which seemed to be most impressive to the gentlemen of the press were his ability to portray and sustain the vocal and physical characteristics of a seventy-year-old man consistently throughout the two hour program, and the skill with which Holbrook was able to use those characteristics of age to achieve the maximum effect from Twain's comic lines.

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[200]Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegraph, April 8, 1959.

[201]Donald Malcolm, The New Yorker, April 18, 1959, p. 81.

[202]Nedi., loc. cit. [203]Calta, loc. cit.

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[204] Bolton,

[207] Kerr, lo

Bolton wrote, "He is Twain, he looks, walks, talks, snarls, whines, chuckles, and bumbles as Twain did, with every gesture intact and honest, every hitch of his galluses authentic, every slurch of his ill-fitting pants right and correct in the tradition."[204] The critic for Time noted the small, physical indications of age which Holbrook brought to bear on his subject. "Involuntary tremors ripple the stiffened fingers, the lower jaw nibbles spasmodically at the wisps of tobacco stained mustache, the shoulders twitch like marionettes in the invisible hands of time."[205]

Holbrook managed to achieve the "cracked and reedy" vocal quality of an old man.[206] When he came to the story of Huck Finn, his voice was that of an old man's imitating a boy's voice. Kerr found this extremely effective. "The new impersonation is all the more effective and literal, for having been filtered through a distorting glass that is slightly faded and slightly cracked but that gives to youth a fantastic, strangely real, form."[207]

Kerr was also taken with the way in which Holbrook used "an inexhaustable supply of crotchety dodges" to further enhance the humor of Twain's lines. He continually shrugged his shoulders as if his suit did not fit just right, which gave Kerr the impression he was "shaking jokes out of his sleeves."[208] The Variety critic pointed out Holbrook's mastery of "the strategic pause, the pointed inflection and the cross-stage shuffle" which served as devices to heighten the humor of Twain's lines.[209]

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[204]Bolton, loc. cit. [205]Time, loc. cit. [206]Beaufort, loc. cit.
[207]Kerr, loc. cit. [208]Ibid. [209]Nedi., loc. cit.

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Beaufort cited Holbrook's skillful application of his actor's art as he shifted positions, paused, consulted the dog-earred pages in his disorganized notebook, carefully checked his watch, fiddled with his cigar and lit a multitude of matches. Beaufort remarked that although these bits of business could be classified as "tricks," they seemed to be Mark Twain's own tricks, and consequently, rather than detracting, they added a sort of "verisimilitude" to the characterization of the "white-suited, white-maned literary lion of splendid intellectual verve and a superb platform manner."[210] Holbrook's exquisite sense of timing when delivering Twain's anecdotes was described by Malsolm as follows:

> It is Mr. Holbrook's practice, on these occasions, to act against the comedy. Having reached the ostensible end of his story, he gropes in a pocket with aged, trembling fingers and fishes out a cigar, as if merely waiting for the laughter to subside. Then, carefully snipping off the end of the cigar, he adds the next line, almost by way of an afterthought. When the audience has sufficiently recovered from its consequent spasm, he lights up and expels the final line with a casual cloud of amoke, through which his roguish eyes may dimly be discerned.[211]

Material

Part of the tremendous success of Mark Twain Tonight! was due to the fact, as Kerr pointed out, Holbrook had some pretty good material to work with.[212] All the material was Twain's, even the transitions from one aspect of the program to another. Holbrook recalled his main problem in assembling the material had been to

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[210] Beaufort, op. cit., p. 7.

[211] Malcolm, loc. cit. [212] Kerr, loc. cit.

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[213] Fuller, loc

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combine Twain's various works so that one excerpt blended into the next "without the seams showing," and yet to use only Twain's own words. Holbrook remembered spending as much as twenty-four hours looking for two lines to provide a transitional bridge.[213]

McClain noted most people were familiar with the "classical Twain" literature, but that the lecture material was relatively unknown. He thought this material revealed a "salty and wonderfully refractory attitude toward life."[214] There were thirty-one items listed in the playbill, and a forward announced that Mr. Twain's selections for the evening would come from the list, but the management had "been unable to pin him down as to which of them he will do."[215]

Most of the selections Holbrook used on opening night were humorous, although he did present a melodramatic scene from Huckleberry Finn.[216] A large portion of the material was taken from Twain's speeches and short stories.[217] Herridge was pleasantly surprised. She admitted she had expected something quite different, namely, an evening of literary readings.

> But quite the contrary. Aside from a colorful telling of an incident in "Huckleberry Finn" and the Golden Arm ghost story, no recital is apparent.
> Instead it is one amusing remark after another . . . . Twain's ironic barbs are aimed at religion, morals, social customs, reform movements and the whole of ideas. Some are whimsical, some are outrageous tall stories, some are gentle, others sharp, some explosively funny, but all are touched by that salty wisdom that cuts through sham and upturns stiffness.[218]

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[213]Fuller, loc. cit. [214]McClain, loc. cit. [215]Nedi, loc. cit.
[216]Aston, loc. cit. [217]Nedi, loc. cit. [218]Herridge, loc. cit.

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Chapman noted that the Twain humor was excellent for retelling because "the author was a master of timing--and a master of throwing away a line to make it funnier."[219] Bolton wrote of Twain, "He had a lusty and harpooning sense of humor and he knew how to dandle and handle a joke until it exploded before his audience like ketchup bursting into a man's face."[220]

Comparisons

Bolton noted that Mark Twain Tonight! was one of those "one-man shows . . . that most difficult and exciting of all forms."[221] McClain generalized that one-man readings were usually boring, but John Gielgud's evening with Shakespeare, and Hal Holbrook's Mark Twain program were difinitely exceptions to the rule.[222] Coleman was somewhat less dogmatic in his evaluation of one-man shows. He suggested that "a one-man show can be a bore or a delight," and noted New York had been delighted earlier in the season by Gielgud and Ages of Man, and now they had the opportunity to avail themselves of another delightful one-man show, Mark Twain Tonight![223] Herridge compared Holbrook's presentation to "something like a combination of Bob Hope and Jack Benny, with their superb timing, only with comments covering a wider and deeper field."[224]

Three of the critics pointed out similarities and differences between Holbrook's program and Emlyn Williams' three presentations.

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[219]Chapman, loc. cit. [220]Bolton, loc. cit. [221]Ibid.
[222]McClain, loc. cit. [223]Coleman, loc. cit.
[224]Herridge, loc. cit.

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[225] Clurman, loc
[226] Beaufort, l
[227] Wyatt, loc.
[228] New York Ti

Clurman observed Holbrook did more than just read Twain, as Williams had done in his Dickens and Thomas programs; Holbrook "acted out the man."[225] This comment is somewhat misleading. Williams did not "act out" Thomas, the author he was concerned with in his most recent production, but he had "acted out" Dickens, complete with costume and whiskers in 1952 and again in 1953. Beaufort's comment bears this out. "Nothing since Emlyn Williams' histrionically compelling impersonation of Charles Dickens can compare with Hal Holbrook in Mark Twain Tonight!."[226] Wyatt contrasted the Twain and Dickens performances as follows:

> Mr. Emlyn Williams' readings as Charles Dickens were a recent delightful and memorable event, largely dependent on Mr. Williams' expert projection of the rich material when the author became submerged in the interest of the story. Hal Holbrook in Mark Twain Tonight! has another approach. He is Samuel Langhorne Clemens all evening. With the exception of an incident from Huckleberry Finn and A Ghost Story, it was Mr. Clemens as a lecturer who was on the stage propounding his Mark Twainish fancies and philosophy with such inimitable dry humor.[227]

Mark Twain Tonight! enjoyed critical and popular success. Not only did the production receive the enthusiastic endorsement of the vast majority of critics, actor Holbrook received the Vernon Rice Award for Best Actor of the 1958-1959 season and the Outer Circle Critics' Award for the Outstanding Contribution of the 1958-1959 season.[228]

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[225] Clurman, loc. cit.

[226] Beaufort, loc. cit.

[227] Wyatt, loc. cit.

[228] New York Times, May 17, 1959, Sec. II, p. 1.

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[229] Stage News

[230] John McCla
NTNR, p. 245.

[231] Howard Ta

The World of Carl Sandburg

No group productions of a collection of an author's works were given until 1959, when The World of Carl Sandburg was presented at the University of California at Los Angeles as a tribute to Mr. Sandburg. The material was selected and arranged by radio dramatist Norman Corwin. Theatrical producer Armand Deutsch became interested in the commercial possibilities of The World of Carl Sandburg and made arrangements to send it on a nation-wide tour starring Bette Davis and Gary Merrill. However, due to marital difficulties, Mr. Merrill dropped out and Cameron Mitchell was signed to replace him. Mitchell never reported for rehearsals and Deutsch eventually filled charges against him with Actors' Equity.[229] Finally Leif Erickson joined forces with Miss Davis, and after a successful tour of the "outlands," The World of Carl Sandburg opened at the Henry Miller Theatre on September 14, 1960, for a "limited run."[230]

Setting and Accessories

The performers sat on cushioned stools in front of three plain screens and a black back curtain. Toward the back of the stage there was a regal red plush chair on a dias for the absent author, and at the foot of the chair were piles of the books he had written.[231]

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[229] Stage News, January 19, 1960.

[230] John McClain, New York Journal American, September 15, 1960, NYTCR, p. 245.

[231] Howard Taubman, New York Times, September 15, 1960, p. 44.

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[232] Robert Cole
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[234] Taubman, I

[235] Richard Wa
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[236] McClain,

[237] John Chap
NYTCR, p. 244.

Miss Davis wore a black velvet gown with an orange satin panel at the back during the first part of the evening, and a red, white and blue ensemble for the second portion of the program. Erickson and folk singer Allen wore dinner jackets. Erickson changed his maroon tuxedo jacket for a black jacket at intermission. Each performer had a lectern in front of him.[232]

Classification

Although Corwin insisted both he and producer Armand Deutsch had "shied away from the concept of a reading,"[233] nearly all of the critics described the production as some type of a reading. Taubman called it a "public reading,"[234] Watts characterized it as a "program of readings,"[235] and McClain thought it was "virtually a reading."[236] Chapman termed the proceedings "a little recitation" of Sandburg's works.[237]

According to Deutsch, Sandburg called it a "variety show of song, fun, sin and thinkum." Deutsch himself hoped the production would simply be called a "theatrical presentation." He admitted it was a difficult show to label and expounded on the various

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[232]Robert Coleman, New York Mirror, September 15, 1960, NYTCR, p. 247.

[233]Letter from Norman Corwin to the author, June 8, 1968.

[234]Taubman, loc. cit.

[235]Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, September 15, 1960, NYTCR, p. 246.

[236]McClain, loc. cit.

[237]John Chapman, New York Daily News, September 15, 1960, NYTCR, p. 244.

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things it was not. "It's not a reading a la Charles Laughton . . . . And it is not a play. It's not like Hal Holbrook's Mark Twain Tonight! and it does not have a setting like The Caine Mutiny Court Martial. It does not have the characters or the story line of say, John Brown's Body."[238]

Miss Davis was also displeased with the "reading" label. She felt the show was more than "just one of those 'reading.'" She pointed out the production had sets and movement.[239]

Manner of Presentation

Probably most of the critics insisted on calling the presentation a "reading" because of the scripts which were on the lecterns in front of the performers. Corwin recalled, "Nobody 'read'--the roles were memorized, rehearsed and performed exactly as though we were staging a play."[240] However, despite the fact the roles were memorized, the pages of the manuscript were turned from time to time, thus giving the impression the material was being read.[241]

A limited number of props were used: Mr. Erickson had a cigar which he puffed on from time to time, and Miss Davis wore a "vulgar boa of white feathers" for her recitation of "Elizabeth Umpstead."[242] The Variety critic thought Corwin's staging was excellent, with the "groupings, occasional movement, and the shifting, varied lighting"

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[238]Lewis Funke, New York Times, October 18, 1959, Sec. II, p. 1.

[239]Press release dated September 11, 1960, found in vertical files in Theatre Collection.

[240]Corwin, loc. cit. [241]Taubman, loc. cit. [242]Ibid.

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[246] Walter Ke
NYTCR, p. 244.

[247] Coleman,

making The World of Carl Sandburg an example of 'artful theatre."[243]

Verdict

Most of the critics endorsed the production, but several had definite reservations about it. Clurman thought the reading was "intelligently forthright rather than brilliant," but noted Sandburg's words were "all there and they have character." Consequently he recommended it as a pleasant, though hardly outstanding, evening.[244] Cooke found it a "worthwhile theatrical evening," though he doubted if it could be called "theatre" in the strictest sense of the word.[245] Kerr wrote of the presentation, "The poet requires no vote from me. And the people, yes."[246]

Coleman admitted the performers were talented and the material was good, but he felt The World of Carl Sandburg would have been "more at home in a hep expresso cafe."[247] Watts warned that prospective audiences should realize the presentation lacked dramatic power and was intended primarily as a tribute to a great man and his talent. Taken on these terms, he was sure they would find it "an impressive tribute, done with intelligence and respect."[248]

McClain cautioned his readers that Mr. Sandburg's world was not going to be everybody's world, but thought the production had

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[243] Variety, September 21, 1960.

[244] Harold Clurman, Nation, October 8, 1960, p. 236.

[245] Richard P. Cooke, Wall Street Journal, September 12, 1960.

[246] Walter Kerr, New York Herald Tribune, September 15, 1960, NYTCR, p. 244.

[247] Coleman, loc. cit. [248] Watts, loc. cit.

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been done with taste and skill, and as he phrased it, "you can't knock Miss Davis."[249] Chapman characterized it as an offering for those devoted to Sandburg, Miss Davis and Mr. Erickson, but not for those who were simply seeking beauty or theatrical emotion.[250] McCarten admitted there were some enjoyable selections offered, and offered well, but he did not think they offset the static quality of the presentation. "The play is still the thing, and no elocution lesson can provide a substitute."[251]

Acting

Bette Davis headlined the cast. She was supported by Leif Erickson, a star in his own right, and Clark Allen, who provided the music and occasionally did some of the reading. The critic for Theatre Arts observed actors were generally not effective reciters because they tended to "suffocate poetry in personality," but these performers were exceptions to that rule.[252] Coleman thought the blending of the three talents "proved highly effective in projecting the naive, earthy and paradoxical facets of the Sandburg potpourri."[253]

As was to be expected, Miss Davis attracted the greatest amount of critical attention. The reviewers paid tribute to her popularity and to her talent, but nearly all of them criticized certain aspects of her presentation. McClain found her outstanding in the poem

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[249] McClain, loc. cit. [250] Chapman, loc. cit.

[251] John McCarten, The New Yorker, September 24, 1960, p. 97.

[252] Theatre Arts, November, 1960, p. 10.

[253] Coleman, loc. cit.

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[258] Frank As
NYTCR, p. 246.

[259] Chapman,

"Elizabeth Umpstead," but thought there were times when she "overplayed the range of her inflections."[254] Kerr felt she occasionally reached too hard for an emotion, but paid tribute to her tremendous talent as he wrote:

> The moment anyone of Mr. Sandburg's homilies touches a localized nerve--perhaps a childless woman who is dying is clutching a borrowed rag doll, perhaps a proud Negress is watching herself get buried in a paid-for coffin--our heroine hears the little nuance, instantly. Her ear is in this sense perfect, and her instinct for slipping the sound of a person into the generalities of a poem is uncanny.[255]

Beaufort complained that Miss Davis' "highly individualized mannerisms of voice and diction" sometimes interfered with the "unquestionable sincerity and intelligence with which she approached the material."[256] Watts wrote that Miss Davis was "conceivably just a trifle mannered."[257] Aston thought she sounded "more like a teacher in advanced elocution than a stirring actress."[258] Chapman agreed that much of what Miss Davis did sounded like "well studied elocution," but thought her presentation of a Negro prostitute watching her own funeral was the emotional high point of the evening.[259] Taubman cited three of Miss Davis' selections as outstanding, "when, as if on a catlike feet, she makes "Fog" seem new: when she turns "Monkey of Start" into an island of magic, and when, wearing a proudly vulgar

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[254]McClain, loc. cit. [255]Kerr, loc. cit.

[256]John Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, September 17, 1960.

[257]Watts, loc. cit.

[258]Frank Aston, New York World-Telegram and Sun, September 15, 1960, NYTCR, p. 246.

[259]Chapman, loc. cit.

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[262] Chapman,

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[265] Aston, L

boa of white feathers, she summons to life "Elizabeth Umpstead," a negro woman who has been used but never daunted."[260]

The critics did not devote as much space to Mr. Erickson as they had to Miss Davis, but almost without exception, they gave him their unqualified endorsement. Aston selected Erickson as the most effective of the trio. "In terms of true theater (let's credit Mr. Allen to music and Miss Davis to personality) the affair plopped like a juicy Damson into the manly grip of Mr. Erickson, an actor's actor for sure." Aston was particularly impressed with Erickson's tribute to a harlot called "Bilbea," his tirade against war, and his short selections from The Prairie Years.[261]

Chapman decided Erickson had more warmth and theatrical ease than did Miss Davis, and he praised Erickson's rendition of Sandburg's Lincoln.[262] McClain was also struck by the effectiveness of the selection from The Prairie Years. He thought Erickson's "big voice and . . . sense of assurance . . . holds the faltering segments of the evening together."[263] Taubman and McCarten singled out Erickson's presentation of "The Unknown War" as his finest moment.[264]

The two stars were backed up by folk singer Clark Allen, whom Aston characterized as "a guitarist above reproach and a singer of the Ozark-style wails."[265] Besides providing interludes of Sandburg

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[260] Taubman, loc. cit.

[261] Aston, loc. cit.

[262] Chapman, loc. cit.

[263] McClain, loc. cit.

[264] Taubman, loc. cit.
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[265] Aston, loc. cit.

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songs, Allen provided music and sound effects to support several of his colleagues' numbers and helped with the reading. McClain noted Allen was "obviously not a veteran actor," but he had no complaints about his rendition of the poetry, and had praise for his work with the songs "By'm By" and "Ain't Goin' to Study War No Mo'."[266] Watts thought Allen did an admirable job with his readings as well as with the music.[267]

Material

The material for The World of Carl Sandburg was taken mainly from his poetry, although there were a few prose selections from his biography of Lincoln. The evening began with selections about infancy and youth, proceeded to thoughts about maturity, and then to reflections on death. Rather than end the program on such a somber note, adaptor-arranger Corwin chose to conclude with examples of Sandburg's whimsical humor and brief sections from The Prairie Years.[268]

Not all the critics were enthusiastic Sandburg devotees. Coleman, in discussing Sandburg as a poet, pointed out his tendency to write about common things from a "slightly cockeyed viewpoint," though often with a clever turn of phrase. He also noted Sandburg tended to oversimplify things and occasionally distorted fact with "poetic license." He thought the poet was sometimes reminiscent of a "coy James Thurber," while other times he resembled a "minor Whitman or Swift." Coleman described his philosophy and humor as "generally of the homely variety," and called Sandburg "a sort of unsophisticated sophisticate . . . . who's seen a lot, felt a lot, and

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[266]McClain, loc. cit. [267]Watts, loc. cit. [268]Ibid.

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used a lot of words to record his impressions."[269]

The critics agreed that the material, for the most part, was not dramatic. According to Watts, the three performers were content to treat the material for what it was, lyrical, philosophical, whimsical and imaginative, but not essentially theatrical. The second half of the program did contain material with more dramatic impact, most notably the poem "Elizabeth Umpstead," and the selections from The Prairie Years.[270] Taubman wrote of the material:

> The Sandburg talk . . . is mostly choice. If the saws are platitudinous and the jokes much more ancient than the octogenarian author, they are phrased with an innocent gusto that is nicely calculated. The poems may be more prosy than prose. But at its best the world of Carl Sandburg is dry in its wit, like a prairie philosopher, and passionate in its convictions, like one of the Lord's prophets.[271]

Corwin selected the material and wrote the connective bridges between the selections. Most critics found his choice of material acceptable, but several did not like his commentary. One critic maintained the connecting passages sounded as if the performers "were out to sell the man rather than sing him."[272] The Time critic thought some of Corwin's writing sounded "like Biblical commercials."[273] Taubman wrote of Corwin's connecting commentary, "though brief, it is often redundant. At times these introductory notes have the pear-shaped resonance of the talk of fulsome masters of ceremony."[274]

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[269] Coleman, loc. cit. [270] Watts, loc. cit. [271] Taubman, loc. cit.
[272] McCarten, loc. cit. [273] Time, September 26, 1960, p. 86.
[274] Taubman, loc. cit.

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Comparisons

Cooke classified The World of Carl Sandburg as a "reading" similar in nature to Don Juan in Hell and John Brown's Body.[275] Taubman devoted a Sunday article to a discussion of "Page or Stage." He noted the successes of the O'Casey autobiographical volumes which Shyre had dramatized, of Don Juan in Hell, and of the programs by Stickney, Williams, and Holbrook, but he did not think The World of Carl Sandburg had been that successful, and he offered a warning for those who were thinking of making future transfers from page to stage.

> Theatre people delude themselves if they think that simply to hitch their presentations to the work of an original, lively intelligence is an assurance of a wholly satisfying evening in the theatre.
>
> "The World of Carl Sandburg" is often provocative and diverting. It reflects a vigorous questing, humorous and honest mind. It shoots forth bursts of dazzling sense and delicious nonsense. As revealed by Bette Davis, Lief Erickson and Clark Allen at Henry Miller's Theatre, it contains laughter and emotion. But it is not, from beginning to end, pure theatre, and therefore, not without languors.[276]

Sandburg was in the audience on opening night. At the close of the performance, the performers brought him to the stage and the audience gave him a standing ovation.[277] The World of Carl Sandburg ran for twenty-nine performances. It had originally been announced as a "limited engagement," and whether the performers had other commitments or whether the production simply did not draw well is not known. It would seem that there should have been enough devotees of

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[275] Cooke, loc. cit.

[276] Howard Taubman, "Page or Stage," New York Times, September 25, 1960, Sec. II, p. 1.

[277] McClain, loc. cit.

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Sandburg and of Miss Davis to have warranted a longer engagement. Although the reviewers had not been very enthusiastic about the production, most of them had recommended it as a worthwhile venture.

Spoon River Anthology

In January of 1950, and again in October of that same year, character actor Daniel Reed presented a solo performance of Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology at New York's Town Hall. Both performances were well attended and both received favorable notices from the critics. Reed used no scenery, costumes or props as he evoked thirty-seven inhabitants of the Spoon River graveyard. The program was divided into three parts: "Eccentrics and Individualists," "Stories and Families" and "The Pioneers."[278]

The reviewers were impressed with Reed's versatility as he presented the "less-than-perfect departed."[279] Hawkins thought the program was one of the best amalgamations of talent and material he had seen on the stage, and he praised Reed for realizing "the imagination of an audience can be stimulated by suggestion as well as by a lot of equipment."[280] Garland felt the verbal presentation of Masters' brilliantly etched character portraits added an exciting new dimension to the anthology, and suggested Reed should make a recording of his Spoon River Anthology program.[281] However, apparently no

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[278]Robert Garland, New York Journal American, January 16, 1950.

[279]L.S., Brooklyn Daily Eagle, October 2, 1950.

[280]William Hawkins, New York World-Telegram and Sun, January 16, 1950.

[281]Garland, loc. cit.

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records were made and Reed did not repeat his performance again. It was more than twelve years before another Spoon River Anthology attracted the attention of the New York theatre critics.

Charles Aidman, a California writer and actor, first began to think about dramatizing Spoon River Anthology in 1945 while a student at Indiana University. However, it was not until 1962 Aidman actually started on the adaptation. Aidman, Betty Garrett, Joyce Van Patten, and Robert Elston presented a one hour version for an invited group of West Coast professional theatre people. Among those in the audience was Lamont Johnson, a director and board member of Theatre Group, a non-profit organization made up of professional actors and directors, and operating in cooperation with the University of California. Johnson liked the program and suggested if Aidman could expand it to a full evening, he would try to convince Theatre Group to produce it. Aidman took the suggestion and Spoon River Anthology opened May 2, 1963, at the University of California at Los Angeles. The actors were the same ones who had appeared in the one hour production, but two folk singers had been added, Stephen Pearlman and Naomi Caryl Hishhorn.[282]

A young New York producer, Joseph Cates, saw the UCLA production and decided to bring it to Broadway. Spoon River Anthology opened at the Booth Theatre on September 29, 1963. The cast, except for folk singer Hal Lynch, who replaced Stephen Pearlman, was the same. Four days after the show opened, its name was shortened to Spoon River. Producer Cates reported, "Too many educated and intelligent people had asked what anthology meant."[283]

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[282] Murray Schumach, New York Times, May 2, 1963, p. 40.

[283] New York Times, October 3, 1963, p. 28.

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[284] Letter f

[285] Ibid.

[288] Richard

Setting and Accessories

The set was very simple. A blue background, a lectern, three benches to the right of the lectern and three benches to the left. As Miss Van Patten recalled, "The benches had a rough hewn and folksy look that was the mark of our production." Each bench used by the actors had a sort of table, concealed from the audience, which contained various props, such as glasses, canes, fans, pipes, and scarves which were used by the actors to help characterize the many different people each performer was responsible for.[284]

The costumes carried through the "rough hewn and folksy look." The two actresses wore "earth colors"; Miss Garrett green, and Miss Van Patten brown and gold. Both had large shawls which were plain on one side and figured on the other. These they wore around their shoulders or over their heads, depending on what character they were portraying. The men wore corduroy suits of grey and brown.[285]

The lighting was a very important part of the production. When the show was produced in California, there were nearly 150 light cues,[286] and it seems reasonable to assume the New York production used as many. Miss Van Patten noted the lighting effects were "first rate" in both Los Angeles and New York.[287] Besides spotlighting the speaking performers,[288] the lighting was used to establish mood and to help create a sense of continuity between the episodes. Oppenheimer

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[284] Letter from Miss Van Patten to the author, June 11, 1968.

[285] Ibid. [286] Schmuach, loc. cit. [287] Van Patten, loc. cit.

[288] Richard P. Cooke, Wall Street Journal, October 1, 1963.

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[296] John Cha

NYTCR, p. 272.

[297] Richard

NYTCR, p. 270.

was particularly fascinated with the lighting of the backdrop which suggested, at least to him, at times a river and at times a starlit sky.[289] Kerr thought lighting director Jules Fisher made "twilight a warm and comfortable time of life."[290] Music was also an important aspect of the production and will be considered in a separate section.

Classification

Three of the critics described Spoon River as a "dramatic reading,"[291] one called it a "stage reading,"[292] and another termed it simply "readings."[293] McClain labeled it a "series of dramatized recitations,"[294] and Cooke called it a "series of vignettes."[295] Chapman characterized it as an "off-beat theatrical venture,"[296] while Watts conservatively referred to it as a "dramatic presentation."[297]

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[289] George Oppenheimer, Newsday, September 30, 1963.

[290] Walter Kerr, New York Herald Tribune, September 30, 1963, NYTCR, p. 271.

[291] Hobe., Variety, October 2, 1963.
Melvin Maddocks, Christian Science Monitor, October 2, 1963.
Time, October 11, 1963, p. 77.

[292] Arthur Sainer, Village Voice, October 10, 1963.

[293] Harold Clurman, Nation, October 26, 1963, p. 268.

[294] John McClain, New York Journal American, September 30, 1963, NYTCR, p. 272.

[295] Cooke, loc. cit.

[296] John Chapman, New York Daily News, September 30, 1963, NYTCR, p. 272.

[297] Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, September 30, 1963, NYTCR, p. 270.

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Oppenheimer decided it was "more a reading than a play,"[298] but Coleman warned his readers not to think the presentation was "just a reading."[299] Actress Van Patten felt the "reading" label was inappropriate, although she admitted people were always calling the production by some form of the term "reading." Her conception of a "reading" however, was a production with limited movement, and she thought Spoon River was "far too active and alive to be a reading."[300]

Manner of Presentation

More than seventy of Masters' characters stepped forward to briefly explain the circumstances responsible for their demises.[301] The selections were all quite short, many of them less than a minute, none more than a few minutes in length.[302] The lives of the virtuous and the not so virtuous were swiftly sketched in by the four performers, who used only limited props.[303]

There were no manuscripts, and the actors moved freely about the stage. Generally the performers worked alone, speaking directly to the audience while the other three remained still.[304] Occasionally two or three would function as an ensemble. Kerr was especially

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[298] Oppenheimer, loc. cit.

[299] Robert Coleman, New York Mirror, September 30, 1963, NYTCR, p. 271.

[300] Van Patten, loc. cit. [301] McClain, loc. cit.

[302] Chapman, loc. cit.

[303] Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegraph, October 1, 1963.

[304] Van Patten, loc. cit.

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taken with a vignette in which a starched, stuffy minister was hard pressed to maintain his righteous pomposity because his wife persisted in nibbling at his ear lobe.[305]

Verdict

The majority of the reviews were quite complimentary, though not quite as impressive as Producer Joseph Cates indicated in a large advertisement attempting to improve box office activity three weeks after the show opened. Cates wrote of Spoon River and its reception, "It received as exciting and enthusiastic a set of reviews as any hit I can remember."[306] This was an overstatement. Perhaps Cates could not remember back to the reviews for Gielgud's Ages of Man or for Holbrook's Mark Twain Tonight!, both of which appeared in 1959. The reviews for these two shows were almost unanimous raves. The response to Spoon River was favorable, and a few critics did rave, but there were others who had reservations.

Kerr thought the production was excellent, but he was not impressed with the material and he noted some "inevitable repetition" in the parade of characters.[307] The reviewer for Time liked some aspects of the presentation, but characterized the overall effect "spasmodic and ineloquent."[308] Hewes, writing for the Saturday Review, had seen Daniel Reed's solo presentation of Spoon River Anthology in

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[305]Kerr, loc. cit.

[306]Joseph Cates, New York Times, October 16, 1963, p. 51.

[307]Kerr, loc. cit. [308]Time, loc. cit.

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1950, and thought it had been more effective than the current adaptation.[309]

Cooke did not think the program was particularly outstanding, but he thought it had quite a bit of theatrical and literary interest in it.[310] Coleman termed it "absorbing theatre . . . for a special audience."[311] The Variety critic surmised that Spoon River was no exception to the general rule regarding dramatic readings: a few would find it extremely enjoyable, but the general public would not respond.[312]

Some of the critics were very enthusiastic about it, as was indicated by the titles of their reviews. The headline to Chapman's report read,"'Spoon River Anthology' Vivid, Offbeat Theatrical Experiment," and he expressed hope the production would find a large audience.[313] Oppenheimer's review was entitled, "'Spoon River Anthology' Moving, a Joy to Watch."[314] Watts labeled his critique "A Moving 'Spoon River Anthology,'" and described the presentation as a "touching and admirable contribution to the new theatre season."[315]

"Warm and Radiant Poetic Experience," sounded the keynote for McClain's review. McClain admitted he had been on record for several seasons as being mildly antagonistic to "readings" in Broadway theatres, but he was obliged to concede that while Spoon River was "merely a series of dramatized recitations with incidental music, it is an

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[309]Henry Hewes, Saturday Review, October 19, 1963, p. 30.

[310]Cooke, loc. cit. [311]Coleman, loc. cit.

[312]Hobe., loc. cit. [313]Chapman, loc. cit.

[314]Oppenheimer, loc. cit. [315]Watts, loc. cit.

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enormously warm and compelling experience in the theatre."[316] Taubman called it a "glowing theatre experience . . . a brooding and loving American folk poem brought to life on a stage."[317] Bolton wrote:

> When something is right in a theatre, utterly right, you feel it quickly. There is a kind of instant awareness, a swift brewing of appreciation and the conviction that what you are seeing and hearing is greatly right, delightfully right. It is that way with Joe Cates' presentation of "Spoon River Anthology," a stage version of the Edgar Lee Masters work.
>
> . . . . . .
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> Without the slightest hesitation or equivocation, it falls easily to me to urge you to see "Spoon River Anthology" at the Booth Theatre. It has that warm and thrusting spirit that created the Middle Western literature that long since has shaped our times and moved our national aims. It has the Masters magic, plus completely satisfying performances.[318]

Acting

Most of the critics thought the four performers had succeeded remarkably well in capturing the essence of the seventy-some characters. As Chapman observed, "Some of them appear for less than a minute, others for a very few minutes: but each of them is amazingly, arrestingly vivid . . . . It must be difficult indeed to establish a fully realized character in only a minute or two or three."[319] Kerr expressed great admiration for the four performers who portrayed the "trollops, boozers, hypocrites, and worthy citizens--all now lying side by side in eternal equality."[320] McClain pointed out all four players had to impersonate a variety of ages, accents and stations with only the

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[316] McClain, loc. cit.

[317] Howard Taubman, New York Times, September 30, 1963, p. 23.

[318] Bolton, loc. cit. [319] Chapman, loc. cit. [320] Kerr, loc. cit.

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[321] McClain,

[324] Taubman,

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1963, NYTCR, p. 27

[326] Maddocks

help of a few props.[321] Watts praised the cast for handling the large assortment of roles "with striking variety, humor and pathos and a fine sense of characterization."[322]

Clurman admitted the four presented the selections with spirit and appeared to be able and intelligent actors, but he complained they were "too blooming young to convey all the acrimony and crotchety anguish that was in Masters." He conceded that perhaps, in actuality, this was fortunate, as "the real thing" might have been too much.[323] Taubman thought he detected an occasional "fleeting hint of a suspicious accent or a theatrical gesture," but found the majority of the characterizations "unerring." He wrote that although Spoon River Anthology was not a drama, it was nonetheless dramatic, "because four fine and versatile actors constantly distill character."[324]

Nadel had to acknowledge not all the characterizations were "full blown," but he found most of them "remarkably complete, for the scant minute or two and the few dozen words permitted each." He was also impressed with the way the four attacked their parts "as if it were the geatest adventure of their careers."[325] Maddocks also noted the enthusiasm and obvious pleasure with which the actors approached their various roles.[326]

Miss Van Patten wrote that the members of the company established an unusually close rapport among themselves. Everyone was concerned

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[321] McClain, loc. cit. [322] Watts, loc. cit. [323] Clurman, loc. cit.

[324] Taubman, loc. cit.

[325] Norman Nadel, New York World-Telegram and Sun, September 30, 1963, NYTCR, p. 271.

[326] Maddocks, loc. cit.

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with the success of the play and people were anxious to help each other as much as they could. She reported there was absolutely no sense of rivalry or competition. Miss Van Patten played fourteen different characters. She tried to develop a life history of each of her women, based on what was disclosed in the poem, but going beyond the poem to fill in background and earlier incidents which might have shaped the characters. She recalled all four of the performers experimented with their people a great deal, trying them at different ages and with different accents.[327]

Music

The poetical epitaphs were set off by seventeen songs performed by folk singers Naomi Caryl Hirshhorn and Hal Lynch. Four of the songs were original and the rest were "traditional, but not familiar folk numbers." Aidman intended the songs to serve as a frame for the poetry, and to provide the correct emotional reference to lead the audience into or out of the different "areas of poetry."[328] With one exception, all of the critics who mentioned the musical interludes found them extremely effective. Patalsky admitted the idea of interspersing the poems with music was good, but he thought an attempt should have been made to put some of Masters' unused verses to music rather than using what he described as "irrelevant, tedious songs."[329] It is interesting to note at this point the folk songs

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[327]Miss Van Patten described Spoon River as "the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me." She loved playing the variety of characters, she found the audience response rewarding, she remembered the rehearsals and performances as great fun, and she married the folk singer, Hal Lynch.

[328]New York Herald Tribune, July 23, 1963.

[329]Gene Patalsky, Newark Evening News, September 30, 1963.

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gained the financial backing for the production. A music company, owned jointly by Warner Brothers and Peter, Paul and Mary put up the $25,000 needed to produce the show on Broadway so that the famous trio could record some of the Spoon River songs.[330]

The singers were dressed very simply, and when they were not singing they were seated on their respective benches "like silent figures in a frieze."[331] Oppenheimer thought the two added a great deal to the evening.[332] Coleman recalled the musical accompaniment set the mood for the different episodes,[333] and McClain described the music as "never obtrusive but extremely effective."[334] Kerr thought the folk songs were essential to the success of the program.

> When the evening threatens to break down into too many very short salutes to the puzzle that life was, musicians are ready to cut across the pattern with evocative folk tunes, using banjo, guitar, and fiddle to suggest the Saturday nights a whole town once may have shared and to offer them, with quickly strummed beat, a comprehensive embrace.[335]

Material

A few critics did not think Edgar Lee Masters was an especially good poet. Kerr thought there was too much obvious irony and a sort of sentimental cynicism. He did not get the feeling Spoon River was a real town. He complained, "Those curling little odors of actuality that make an instant environment for the lost souls of "Under Milk Wood," or that link Thornton Wilder's streets with

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[330] New York Herald Tribune, July 23, 1963.

[331] Taubman, loc. cit. [332] Oppenheimer, loc. cit.

[333] Coleman, loc. cit. [334] McClain, loc. cit. [335] Kerr, loc. cit.

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[336] Ibid.

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[341] McClai

streets you remember (or at least imagine you remember) are not here."[336] Hewes also complained about the lack of the "cumulative imaginary creation of a town in the mind's eye of the poet."[337] The Time critic admitted Masters had a "keen eye for the eccentric and the cantankerous, the wistful dreamer and the self-pitying failure," but complained Masters seldom succeeded in endowing his characters with any sense of tragic dignity, he could only provide them with a sort of ironic cynicism.[338]

Oppenheimer noted occasional "lapses into rather sticky sentimentality," but thoroughly enjoyed most of the material. He was amazed to find that the graveyard saga was never "goulish" or grim, but "filled with great humor, some of it in the vein of Mark Twain, some of it more bittersweet."[339] Watts admitted "the shock that accompanied the revelation of the whited sepulchers among the pillars of local society when the poems were first published" was a thing of the past, but he found the "stories of doomed dreams, secret cruelties, bitter frustations and private domestic hatreds" still were capable of evoking a sense of compassion and understanding.[340]

McClain characterized Masters' philosophy as "gentle and reassuring." He noted that Masters' people, despite all their problems seemed "curiously adjusted."[341] Taubman thought Masters was optimistic about life, although fully aware that the promised life was frequently not fulfilled.

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[336] Ibid. [337] Hewes, loc. cit. [338] Time, loc. cit.
[339] Oppenheimer, loc. cit. [340] Watts, loc. cit.
[341] McClain, loc. cit.

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> He appreciated the comedy and tragedy around him. His denizens of Spoon River chortled and guffawed, suffered and sorrowed, schemed and aspired. They were cussed and generous, cynical and trusting, false and true.
>
> They make amusing and touching company--those sinners and sinned against of Spoon River. Masters stripped them clean in a few words, as he let them look back wistfully or ironically on lives misspent or fulfilled . . . . But brooding over his spectral anthology is an unswerving fidelity to the motives and relationships of people as they are.[342]

The Variety critic felt Spoon River suffered from the lack of a story or "even a continuity thread."[343] Several of the reviewers thought Aidman had done an excellent job of selecting and arranging the material. Bolton credited him with a superb job of "routining . . . making certain that one vignette did not rasp on its successor, did not jolt or jar, but rather, kept the flow in motion."[344] Kerr observed that whenever there was any relationship between excerpts Aidman had put it to good use.[345] Taubman pointed out while many of the epitaphs had intense conflicts within themselves, it would have been impossible to draw any sort of a unified theme from a series of them. He praised Aidman for not attempting to make the material into something it was not. "He has been content to let it speak for itself, depending on the actors to give fullness and emotion to each bit, and counting on the production as a whole to establish and sustain a mood worthy of Masters and his America."[346]

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[342] Taubman, loc. cit. [343] Hobe., loc. cit.

[344] Bolton, loc. cit.

[345] Kerr, loc. cit. [346] Taubman, loc. cit.

Comparisons

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[347] Kerr, loc

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Comparisons

Five critics noted the similarity of Spoon River Anthology to Thornton Wilder's Our Town.[347] Kerr was also reminded of Dylan Thomas' Under Milk Wood,[348] as was Oppenheimer, who wrote, "There too a town came to life, a Welsh town peopled with fascinatingly strange characters. Here the people are not so odd, but rather inhabitants of any American village of the period."[349]

As noted previously, Hewes compared the 1963 Spoon River with the one Daniel Reed had presented in 1950, and found the later one less satisfactory.[350] Two critics made generalized comments about oral interpretation productions. McClain admitted he was mildly antagonistic towards the form,[351] and Sainer observed that Spoon River was like "all such works . . . both enriched and limited" by its careful adherence to the original material.[352] The longest discussion of this form of presentation came from the Variety critic who wrote:

> Dramatic readings of poetry are apt to be a special dish, a treat for a limited following and a shoulder shrug for the general theatre public.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Corwin's Sandburg show, and to some extent the Dylan Thomas verse drama have exploited this field, however, and "Spoon River" thus suffers from seeming something of an oft-told tale. The one substantially successful dramatized poetry reading that comes to mind at the moment is "John Brown's Body," and perhaps significantly

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[347] Kerr, loc. cit.
McClain, loc. cit.
Bolton, loc. cit.
Chapman, loc. cit.
Oppenheimer, loc. cit.

[348] Kerr, loc. cit. [349] Oppenheimer, loc. cit. [350] Hewes, loc. cit.

[351] McClain, loc. cit. [352] Sainer, loc. cit.

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that had a fairly well defined story, with a Civil War background, no less, and had Tyrone Power and Judith Anderson (later Anne Baxter) as leads.[353]

The lack of box office names hurt the production when it first opened. Despite the favorable reviews, business was quite poor the first three weeks. The first week the production lost about $2,000. The second week it made a profit of twenty-six dollars. An intensive and expensive advertising campaign was launched during the third week, but sales were very slow to pick up. Actually, the show's break-even point was quite low for Broadway, $13,000 a week.[354]

Gradually business improved, but then it became necessary to transfer Spoon River from the Booth to the Belasco Theatre, a move which cost the production $5,500.[355] The show was still having financial troubles in late November, when a woman in Massachusetts who had seen the play earlier in the fall sent Aidman a check for $500 and offered further financial help to keep the production going.[356]

Finally box office demand increased, and by the time Spoon River closed on January 4, 1964, after 111 performances, it had achieved financial as well as critical success. A London producer decided to present the show in England, and after considerable legal maneuvering brought on because Masters' wife and adapter Aidman did not feel British players could faithfully portray American small town life,[357]

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[353] Hobe., loc, cit.

[354] Louis Calta, New York Times, October 18, 1963, p. 34.

[355] Sam Zolotow, New York Times, November 12, 1963, p. 42.

[356] Calta, New York Times, November 29, 1963, p. 50.

[357] New York Times, January 13, 1964, p. 24.

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Spoon River opened in London on February 13, 1964. A London reviewer reported that the impact of Spoon River on a London audience "was of the kind that a recital of William Barnes' Dorset dialect poems might receive in Peoria, Ill."[358]

The Theatre of Peretz

On November 5, 1963, slightly more than five weeks after Masters' collection of epitaphs opened on Broadway, an anthology of short stories by Yiddish author Isaac Loeb Peretz made its debut at the small off-Broadway Gate Theatre. The Theatre of Peretz was comprised of Jewish folk tales and fables adapted for the stage by Isaiah Sheffer. Sheffer also acted in the presentation, along with Zvee Scooler and Nancy Franklin.

Setting and Accessories

The production used three chairs, a bench--which became a desk and a bed--among other things, a lectern, a table, and a kind of peg-board on which were hung a large array of hats and capes and coats.[359] The clothing served as props, with the actors, as in the case of Spoon River, using slight variations in costume to portray a wide range of characters. Actress Nancy Franklin provided the musical interludes and accompanied herself on an autoharp. The only mention of lighting was the observation of one of the critics that costume changes were made "under a blue light."[360]

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[358] B.A. Young, New York Times, February 15, 1964.

[359] Norman Nadel, New York World-Telegram and Sun, November 6, 1963.

[360] James Davis, New York Daily News, November 6, 1963.

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Bolton called the evening's fare "dramatizations."[361] Nadel and the critic for Variety wrote of "dramatized stories,"[362] and Watts mentioned "dramatized selections."[363] Davis described the proceedings as a "program of readings,"[364] and Sainer complained that Sheffer had been unable to make up his mind as to what he was trying to create. Consequently it was "neither a staged reading of the Peretz stories nor a dramatization of them, but something which wavers between and never becomes any recognizable thing."[365]

Manner of Presentation

Most of the stories used a narrator to tell part of the story while the two other performers provided the action and the dialogue.[366] Occasionally the narrator would also become involved in the action and dialogue. Each story had a different setting and different characters. The change in character was indicated, as noted earlier, by slight changes in costume.[367] The different settings were suggested by rearranging the furniture.[368]

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[361] Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegraph, November 7, 1963.

[362] Nadel, loc. cit.
Kenn., Variety, November 11, 1963, p. 64.

[363] Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, November 6, 1963.

[364] Davis, loc. cit.

[365] Arthur Sainer, Village Voice, November 14, 1963.

[366] Lewis Funke, New York Times, November 6, 1963, p. 35.

[367] Martin Gottfried, Women's Wear Daily, November 6, 1963.

[368] Sainer, loc. cit.

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Verdict

Of the twelve reviewers who critiqued The Theatre of Peretz, only two gave it an unqualified endorsement. Palatsky reported the Peretz parables and humor "came alive" in a "polished, affecting performance."[369] Nadel, one of the three "first line" critics to attend the production, found the evening full of wisdom and warmth, and the people in the stories as amiable and as colorful as any who had appeared on stage that season.[370]

Mitchell, substituting for McClain, warned his readers the anthology was less than perfect, but thought it provided a droll and delightful introduction to a "writer who has something worthwhile to say in a rather unique way."[371] Watts declared Peretz was a charming author, but that his stories simply were not dramatic, and consequently they provided a "slender evening."[372] The critic for the Villager reported the acting was excellent and most of the stories were appealing, but The Theatre of Peretz simply was "not theatre."[373] Davis liked the players, but gave no evaluation of the over-all effectiveness of the production.[374]

Kerr felt the stories suffered from being dramatized. He found it "pleasanter to listen to Nancy Franklin sing a few poems in Yiddish than to have the fables, in English, stretch out so."[375] Sainer liked

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[369]Gene Palatsky, Newark Evening News, November 6, 1963.

[370]Nadel, loc. cit.

[371]John Mitchell, New York Journal American, November 6, 1963.

[372]Watts, loc. cit.

[373]Villager, November 7, 1963. [374]Davis, loc. cit.

[375]Walter Kerr, New York Herald Tribune, November 6, 1963.

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the performers and found charm in the tales, but thought the total effect "might be compared to the frustration experienced in the attempt to partake of a good strong chicken noodle soup on a crowded subway train."[376] The critic for Variety surmised the Peretz stories were more enjoyable to read than to see.[377]

Bolton, who normally responded favorably to oral interpretation presentation, reluctantly vetoed The Theatre of Peretz.[378] Gottfried warned his readers the evening was of "dubious theatre value to anyone but the most ardent seeker of Jewish culture."[379] Funke was sure Peretz belonged on the printed page and was dissatisfied with the performers.[380]

Acting

Funke was the only reviewer to find fault with the players. Several other critics admitted the three had not been successful in their efforts to make the stories come alive, but they blamed the non-theatricality of the material for this rather than the actors. Funke complained that Zvee Scooler rolled his eyes too much and that his voice was monotonous. He was willing to acknowledge Nancy Franklin's attractiveness, but he did not like her interpretations of the characters she was supposed to represent. Funke disliked Sheffer's acting talents and liked his directorial abilities even less. He thought the narrator-pantomime-dialogue technique had a "travelogue quality" about it, and was completely unsuccessful.[381]

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[376]Sainer, loc. cit. [377]Kenn., loc. cit. [378]Bolton, loc. cit.
[379]Gottfried, loc. cit. [380]Funke, loc. cit. [381]Ibid.

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Sainer found the performers "likeable," but complained they had so much to do that it was impossible for them to develop a character. He felt the donning of hats and cloaks for each different character and the shifting of chairs around for each different scene was unnecessary. He recalled seeing Dylan Thomas' Under Milk Wood at the Kaufmann Auditorium. In that production, many scenes and characters were created by actors simply sitting on stools. Sainer also objected to the players shifting back and forth between narrator and character. "It is inexcuseable to have an actor performing a line of dialogue, then stepping out of character to tell the audience, 'then he stepped over the bed,' and then stepping back into character to move to the bed."[382] Kerr thought the performers faced insurmountable odds.

> Once you have put an actor on stage, and he has begun to pretend that he is a man, you expect certain things of him: weight, mobility, displacement, command. But no sooner has one of our three players at the Gate begun to characterize a rabbinical student, a pious pussycat, or a devil in red horns than the role is snatched away from him--by narration, or by the need to become another character.
>
> After all, he was not really a character. He was a face sketched in charcoal, quickly drawn and quickly discarded, as a ruefully smiling spinner of conceits had need for him.[383]

Bolton described the actors as "overworked."[384] Davis mentioned the "quiet reverent warmth" with which the players approached their material.[385] The Variety critic also noted the reverent approach of the performers, but felt that despite this, they "failed to make the Peretz characters believeable or compelling."[386]

The other critics liked the performances. Palatsky had special words of praise for Zvee Scooler, who usually portrayed the main

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[382]Sainer, loc. cit. [383]Kerr, loc. cit. [384]Bolton, loc. cit.
[385]Davis, loc. cit. [386]Kenn., loc. cit.

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character in the stories, often a rabbi or a scholar. "He can be pixyish or profound, wistful or hilarious, changing moods by use of melodic vocal intonation or a lifted eyebrow." He also approved of Nancy Franklin as a "tolerant housewife, a charming seductress and finally a 'pious pussycat.'" (She portrayed an abused horse as well.) Palatsky thought her vocal renditions of Peretz's verses were admirable.[387] Mitchell also liked the "pious pussycat" and wrote that "superiority is evident when lovely Nancy Franklin sings the Yiddish songs."[388]

Gottfried admired Franklin's pussycat but did not like her singing at all. He was quite impressed with Scooler's wide range of rabbis.[389] Watts agreed with Gottfried's evaluation of Scooler, credited Sheffer with presenting several roles "expertly" and found Nancy Franklin charming as an actress and as a singer.[390] Nadel liked all three performers but singled out Scooler as an excellent example for "other acting folk" to emulate.[391]

Material

In addition to the eleven stories, two of Peretz's letters served to open and close the evening, and several of his verses had been set to music and were sung by Miss Franklin. No one seemed to have any quarrel with the material itself. The problem, as expressed by Sainer was, "All manner of things have their time and place," and the place for the Peretz stories was not in the theatre.[392] The Variety critic thought the stories would be much more effective to read because, while they all had affection and humor, they were all

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[387] Palatsky, loc. cit. [388] Mitchell, loc. cit.

[389] Gottfried, loc. cit. [390] Watts, loc. cit.

[391] Nadel, loc. cit. [392] Sainer, loc. cit.

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non-dramatic. Their endings were so gentle they were "anticlimactic" and while this would be fine in a story one was reading, it was disconcerting in a story one was watching on the stage.[393] Kerr complained that the stage was "unfair" to the stories.[394] Bolton wrote:

> The words and wisdom, the aphoristic and gentle observations of Isaac Loeb Peretz are for the armchair . . . rather than for the swift transitions of the stage.
> Peretz needs contemplation and thought. You read him, you absorb as you go on, you come to an end and you stop to think. You say to yourself: "Well, now, that is a fine point of view and I like it and the reasons I like are [sic.] . . ." And you think about it, musingly, and weigh it and favor it and even re-read a passage that particularly [sic.] delighted or touched you. It is in the nature of Peretz, of his writing and philosophy.
> But in a theatre, with three--two men and a woman--enacting the Peretzian work, there is need to hasten, to change too swiftly for comfort from one character to another. There is no time for contemplation.[395]

Funke agreed with Bolton, noting the stories were mainly "fragile bits and pieces that leave little mark or impression. On the printed page they weave their spell. Exposed on the stage they seem no more than shadows."[396] Mitchell complained several of the scenes were too moralistic and folksy. He compared the success of these scenes to the success of a "pork salesman in a kosher delicatessen."[397]

Comparison

Davis compared The Theatre of Peretz to Brecht on Brecht, and decided the warm and quiet approach the Peretz players used on their material was superior to the "noisy, maudlin treatment accorded Brecht."[398] Sainer, as noted earlier, was reminded of the reading production of Under Milk Wood, which he remembered as

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[393]Kenn., loc. cit. [394]Kerr, loc. cit. [395]Bolton, loc. cit.
[396]Funke, loc. cit. [397]Mitchell, loc. cit. [398]Davis, loc. cit.

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having been much more effective in its presentation of a large number of characters and situations than was The Theatre of Peretz.[399] No mention was made of Spoon River, which was running simultaneously.

Although the critics thought most of Peretz's tales were delightful and the actors were skillful, the majority of the reviewers did not like The Theatre of Peretz. The consensus seemed to be that the stories were not dramatic and lost their intimacy and quiet humor when placed on the stage. Despite the reservations of the reviewers, The Theatre of Peretz enjoyed a run of 102 performances.

Summary

Taken as a group, the six productions which featured a collection of the works of a single author were much more successful than the six productions which presented an anthology of works from various authors. Emlyn Williams' Dickens program, Mixed Bill, Hal Holbrook's Mark Twain Tonight!, Sir John Gielgud's Ages of Man, and the adaptation of Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology all received very enthusiastic endorsements from the majority of the critics.

The Theatre of Peretz, which was the one production to attract more negative than positive reviews, won popular favor and ran for more than 100 performances. Mark Twain Tonight! and Spoon River Anthology also played over 100 shows. Interestingly enough, the presentations which had shorter runs featured well-known performers; Emlyn Williams and Sir John Gielgud in solo presentations, and Bette Davis and Leif Erickson in The World of Carl Sandburg. These productions apparently had "limited runs" by choice rather than because

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[399] Sainer, loc. cit.

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Two of the solo shows, Williams' presentation of Dickens and Holbrook's presentation of Mark Twain are included in this chapter, and in this study, with certain reservations. Both Williams and Holbrook used make-up and costuming to impersonate the author whose works they were presenting. Much of the attention they attracted was due to their ability to present a realistic portrait of their respective author. The purpose of the production seems to have been the recreation of a man in the eyes of the audience, rather than the recreation of a literary experience in the minds of the audience. The inclusion of the Dickens program can be justified to some extent because Williams presented Dickens as a reader presenting his own works. He was thus impersonating Dickens attempting to recreate a literary experience for his listeners. Holbrook however, presented Mark Twain primarily as a platform lecturer. Consequently, it would be very difficult to classify his performance as an attempt to recreate a literary experience, even in a secondary sense. Nevertheless, because these productions are frequently referred to in reviews of later productions, which do fit the definition of oral interpretation presentations, they have been included so that the reader might be familiar with them.

The performers in Spoon River and The Theatre of Peretz used slight changes of costume and a few props to present many diverse characters. The critics thought this device worked well in Spoon River, but not in The Theatre of Peretz. The main difficulty with the Peretz anthology was the material. Although nearly all the

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reviewers praised the stories for their charm and wit, they pointed out this charm and wit was a very gentle, quiet sort of thing which did not come across on the stage. The World of Carl Sandburg was also criticized for its lack of dramatic material. Spoon River lacked dramatic continuity, but the individual selections were extremely dramatic. Mark Twain Tonight! relied primarily on Twain's humor as exhibited in his short stories, essays, and witicisms. Williams' selections from Dickens were all very theatrical, and most of Gielgud's material came from the plays of Shakespeare.

Music played an important role in the three group presentations. Manuscript or books were in evidence in all the productions except Spoon River, although there was never any actual "reading" done. All six of the settings were quite simple. The manner of presentation varied a great deal. For example, The Theatre of Peretz used a narrator, pantomime and dialogue; Williams impersonated Dickens impersonating the people in his stories; and Sir John Gielgud stood by a lectern and presented the Shakespearean sonnets and scenes directly to the audience.

The critics were not in agreement as to whether or not the productions in this chapter should be considered "theatre." Krutch thought Emlyn Williams' Mixed Bill, from Dickens' works illustrated "that old saying about two planks and a passion" being the only prerequisites for theatre."[400] Watts described the presentation as "authentic theatre, and drama of a high order and almost

[400]Joseph Wood Krutch, Nation, February 23, 1952, p. 189.

universal appeal."[401]

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McClain and Nathan expressed the opposite viewpoint. McClain acknowledged Williams' talent, but objected to the price and asked, "Is this THEATRE?"[402] After Williams returned the following year with his adaptation from Bleak House, McClain was forced to admit that "whether or not this constituted theatre in the strict sense of the word, the fact remained that he had a successful run here and elsewhere throughout the country."[403] Freedley wrote of Williams' performance on the "contemporary lecture platform--we won't call it a stage."[404] Nathan admitted Williams gave a skillful performance, but informed his readers that "listening to a single performer reciting, with histrionic embellishments, excerpts from a celebrated author is not, I fear, my idea of theatre or drama."[405]

Sir John Gielgud's presentation, Ages of Man, moved Driver to rhapsodize, "Sir John has carried out Robert Edmond Jones' dictum that we should learn, on the stage, to do 'more with less and less . . . .' This reading is a theatrical event which no one who cares about the theatre should miss."[406] Clurman questioned Ages of Man as "theatre". Clurman had seen Gielgud in regular productions of several Shakespearean plays and found his readings

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[401] Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, February 5, 1952.

[402] John McClain, New York Journal American, February 5, 1952.

[403] _____, April 21, 1953.

[404] George Freedley, New York Morning Telegraph, April 24, 1953.

[405] George Jean Nathan, Theatre in the Fifties, p. 216.

[406] Tom F. Driver, New Republic, February 2, 1959, p. 20.

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407 Harold C

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NYTCR, p. 247.

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NYTCR, p. 244.

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far less satisfactory. "Gielgud is an actor of high rank, but his readings are readings: they are not acting. By themselves they are certainly not theatre."[407]

In his review of Mark Twain Tonight!, Coleman stated his position on readings: "We are among those who go for 'readings' from the literary repertory when they are persuasively dramatized."[408] Chapman found the presentation delightful, but thought the $4.60 price was rather steep for "a one-man recitation."[409]

Several critics did not feel The World of Carl Sandburg should be considered as theatre. Coleman liked certain things about the production, but felt that it "would have been more at home in a hep expresso cafe" than in a theatre.[410] Chapman characterized it as a rewarding offering for devotees of Sandburg, Davis or Erickson, but not for those "in quest of beauty or theatrical emotion."[411] Taubman reported the production "was not drama and occasionally it was not theatre."[412] McCarten maintained, "The play is still the thing, and no elocution lesson can provide a substitute."[413] Cooke admitted the production could not be called "theatre" in the

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[407] Harold Clurman, Nation, January 10, 1959, pp. 39-40.

[408] Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, April 7, 1959.

[409] John Chapman, New York Daily News, April 10, 1959.

[410] Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, September 15, 1960, NYTCR, p. 247.

[411] John Chapman, New York Daily News, September 15, 1960, NYTCR, p. 244.

[412] Howard Taubman, New York Times, September 15, 1960, p. 44.

[413] John McCarten, The New Yorker, September 24, 1960, p. 97.

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[419] John McC

NYTCR, p. 272.

strict sense of the term, although he liked the presentation and advised his readers there were "lots of worse forms of theatrical entertainment than the 'readings' which have appeared on Broadway from time to time in recent years."[414]

Cooke also liked Spoon River Anthology, which he described as an event of considerable theatrical as well as literary interest."[415] Oppenheimer wrote of the production, "Above all--despite its lack of scenery and dramatic form, 'Spoon River Anthology' is altogether theatrical."[416] Coleman warned his readers not to think that it was "just a reading . . . . It's absorbing theatre for a special audience."[417] Taubman, in his summary of the 1962-1963 season, noted there had been several "non-plays, a sure sign of a shortage of good plays." Among these were Spoon River and In White America, which Taubman described as "powerful theatre prices."[418] McClain confessed he had long been opposed to readings in Broadway theatres at Broadway rates, but although he admitted Spoon River was "merely a series of dramatized recitations with incidental music," he recommended the production to his readers as "an enormously warm and compelling experience in the theatre."[419]

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[414] Richard P. Cooke, Wall Street Journal, September 12, 1960.

[415] _____, October 1, 1963.

[416] George Oppenheimer, Newsday, September 30, 1963.

[417] Robert Coleman, New York Mirror, September 30, 1963, NYTCR, 276.

[418] Howard Taubman, New York Times, June 28, 1964, Sec. II, p. 1.

[419] John McClain, New York Journal American, September 30, 1963, p. 272.

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None of the critics thought The Theatre of Peretz succeeded as "theatre." Gottfried complained the adaptations of the stories lacked "theatrical dimensions" and were of dubious theatrical value."[420] The critic for the Villager declared the presentation was "not theatre."[421]

Some of the critics seemed willing to accept oral interpretation productions as "theatre" if they were exceptionally well done. Other critics, although they questioned whether or not the presentations should be thought of as "theatre," were willing to endorse those productions which they thought were outstanding.

Having progressed, in terms of material, from anthologies of the works of several authors to collections of a single author's works, the next chapter will consider those programs which present the author's life as well as his works. This was the most popular category in terms of the number of productions, although presentations of an author's works, on the whole, enjoyed greater critical and popular success than did presentations of an author's life and works.

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[420] Martin Gottfried, Women's Wear Daily, November 6, 1963.

[421] Villager, November 7, 1963.

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[2]Stephen W
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[3]Arthur Ge
New York Times,

CHAPTER VI

AN AUTHOR'S LIFE AND WORKS

Nine productions dealing with the life and works of an author were considered in this chapter. Four of these were solo productions and five presented by groups.

Four well known theatrical personalities, Emlyn Williams, Dorothy Stickney, Michael MacLiamoir and Margaret Webster were responsible for the four solo presentations. Each performer selected and arranged a variety of material by and about his particular author. Most of the material was not originally intended for the stage. Two of the performers, Miss Stickney[1] and Mr. MacLiamoir[2] cited a long standing admiration for their particular author as the reason for their decision to present his (or her), life and works.

Special interest in an author also precipitated at least four of the five group productions. Paul Shyre thought O'Casey's six volume autobiography was a literary masterpiece with more drama and dramatic characters than in most plays, and so he proceeded to adapt it for the stage, volume by volume.[3] Donald Hall had been facinated

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[1]Letter from Miss Dorothy Stickney to the author June 19, 1968.

[2]Stephen Watts, "On Wilde's World," New York Times, March 12, 1961, Sec. II, p. 1.

[3]Arthur Gelb, "Campaigner in the Cause of Sean O'Casey," New York Times, September 25, 1960, Sec. II, p. 1.

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[6] James Re
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by Robert Frost and his poetry for many years.[4] George Tabori had worked with Brecht,[5] and it would seem reasonable to assume he was motivated to compile Brecht on Brecht by a special interest in the German playwright, although he did not state his reasons.

Four of the productions appeared for regular runs in Broadway theatres, and a fifth, Pictures in the Hallway, was presented in Sunday matinee and evening performances for two months in a Broadway playhouse. The other four were done off-Broadway. Although the critical reaction to all of the productions was largely favorable, only three productions ran for more than a hundred performances.

A Boy Growing Up

Three productions in memory of Dylan Thomas were given in England in 1954. Each production included a concert reading of at least part of Under Milk Wood and a performance by Emlyn Williams of some of Thomas' prose. These memorial productions stimulated Williams to compile a variety of Thomas' works into a theatrical entertainment which he called Dylan Thomas Growing Up.[6] He first tried out his program at the Bath Festival in 1955, and then at London's Globe Theatre. The critics were impressed and the production enjoyed a healthy run. Early in 1957, Sol Hurok, who had presented Williams in his Dickens' programs, announced that he would bring Williams and his Thomas

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[4] Martha MacGregor, New York Post, October 17, 1965.

[5] Louis Calta, New York Times, November 15, 1961, p. 52.

[6] James Reive Lindsay Linn, "A Historical Study of Oral Interpretation in London, 1951-1962 as a Form of Professional Theatre" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1964), pp. 195-196.

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8 Ibid.

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presentation, now entitled A Boy Growing Up, to New York for a "limited run" early in the 1957-1958 season.[7] The show opened at the Longacre Theatre on October 7, 1957.

Setting and Accesories

The stage was bare except for a black drape at the back, a brown screen at the center of the stage with the signature of Dylan Thomas scrawled on it, and a chair in front of the screen. In his previous readings, Williams had used costume and makeup to impersonate Dickens. This time he did not attempt to impersonate the subject of his program. That would have "required him to look like 'an unmade bed'-- a description someone once applied to Mr. Thomas' appearance."[8]

He wore a navy blue suit, a white shirt, and a red tie. He carried notebooks similar to those in which Thomas had written his poems. These were used as props.

Classification

The critics were very inconsistent in their selection of labels for A Boy Growing Up. Kerr called it a "solo exercise,"[9] Fields termed it a "solo entertainment,"[10] and the Variety critic described it as a "one-man show."[11] The reviewer for Time apparently did not want to leave out any possibilities. He noted that Williams was

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[7]Lewis Funke, New York Times, March 3, 1957, Sec. II, p. 1.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Walter Kerr, New York Herald Tribune, October 8, 1957.

[10]Rowland Field, Newark Evening News, October 8, 1957.

[11]Geor., Variety, October 9, 1957, p. 68.

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"reciting or interpreting or impersonating Dylan Thomas."[12] Aston wrote of the "readings,"[13] and Clurman called the proceedings "dramatic readings."[14] Atkinson avoided labeling the production itself, but referred to Williams as a "public readers."[15]

Perhaps one of the reasons why more critics did not call A Boy Growing Up a "reading" was because of an article Williams wrote, "My Unfavourite Word is 'Reading.'" In the article Williams explained that he personally could not imagine paying money to hear a person actually "read," regardless of how well he might read. Consequently, in his Dickens program he used the books "purely as a dramatic aid." He looked at them at certain times and occasionally turned the pages, but he never read from them. He was therefore, somewhat dismayed to have people congratulate him on his "Reading." Most of the people he talked to were aware he had the material in mind, but they said they called it a reading because he occasionally picked up the books and turned the pages. And, as one lady asked, "What else would you call it?"[16] Williams had to admit he did not know.

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[12] Time, October 21, 1957, p. 56.

[13] Frank Aston, New York World Telegram and Sun, October 8, 1957.

[14] Harold Clurman, Nation, October 26, 1957, p. 290.

[15] Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, October 8, 1957, p. 41.

[16] Emlyn Williams, "My Unfavourite Word is 'Reading,'" October 7, 1957, p. 33. (The source was not identified. The article was found in the clippings on A Boy Growing Up in the Theatre Collection. The writer thinks perhaps it was in the Playbill, as some of the critics mentioned it in their reviews.)

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[17] Ibid.

[19] John Cha

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[21] Atkinso

> 'I enjoyed your performance'? Sounds like a play. 'Your show'? I like it when people do say that; it makes the 'show' sound fun, but many people would only apply it to a variety act, a flower show, a horse show . . . . 'Your recital'? Much too highbrow, too forbidding. Somebody did once say they had been to my 'concert' but to describe a solo as a concert is, you'll agree, a little misleading. 'Recitations'? Heaven forbid. 'Monologue'? Over my dead body.[17]

Williams was sure he had solved the problem of the "reading" label in his Thomas presentation. He did bring in notebooks and say they were the stories, but then he put them on the floor and never looked at them again. However, once more he was complimented on his "Reading" and again, when he inquired, he found people realized he had the material memorized. The problem remained--what else can you call it? "A one man marathon? A solitary symposium? A monodrama of moods? A Cymric kaleidoscope? A farcial fandago? A lone-wolf welter? Anything--anything, please, rather than a Reading!"[18]

Manner of Presentation

At the beginning of the evening, the curtain rose on an empty stage except for a chair, some notebooks, and the screen with Thomas' name on it.[19] Two and a half hours later, the curtain came down as Williams left the stage quoting "Death Shall Have No Dominion" and the spotlight focused on Thomas' notebooks laying on the chair.[20] In between, Williams presented Dylan Thomas, "story-teller, poet and buffoon."[21] Although Williams made no overt attempt at impersonation,

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[17] Ibid. [18] Ibid.

[19] John Chapman, New York Daily News, October 9, 1957.

[20] Henry Hewes, Saturday Review, October 19, 1957, p. 53.

[21] Atkinson, loc. cit.

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[25] Chapman,

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[30] John Ga
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1960), pp. 287-

several of the critics thought the two Welchmen soon merged into one.[22] Not only did Williams become Thomas, he also became many of the characters.[23] There was plenty of movement in the production. As Williams wrote, "I sit, jump up, lie down, pull faces, walk, run, wink, laugh, cry, play the piano, and paddle in the sea."[24]

Verdict

The critics were in agreement that A Boy Growing Up was an attraction to be enthusiastically recommended. Chapman described it as "an evening of pure charm,"[25] Clurman found it "brilliant,"[26] and Field thought the entertainment was "completely delightful."[27] Atkinson thought Thomas' genius for story telling and Williams' genius as a reader were well met in A Boy Growing Up.[28] Some of the critics had slight reservations, but even they thought, taken as a whole, the evening was quite satisfactory. The Time reviewer noted the material had some weak moments and Williams occasionally had some "slightly too showy" moments, but concluded the good parts outweighed the not so good parts.[29] Gassner thought Williams occasionally overacted, and he complained the evening lacked dramatic unity, but he still thought it was superb.[30]

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[22] E.V.R. Wyatt, Catholic World, December 1957, p. 228. Tom F. Driver, Christian Century, October 30, 1957, p. 1289. Atkinson, loc. cit. Aston, loc. cit. Fields, loc. cit.

[23] Driver, loc. cit. [24] Williams, loc. cit.

[25] Chapman, loc. cit. [26] Clurman, loc. cit. [27] Field, loc. cit.

[28] Atkinson, loc. cit. [29] Time, loc. cit.

[30] John Gassner, Theatre at the Crossroads: Plays and Playwrights of the Mid-Century American Stage (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), pp. 287-288.

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Acting

Most of the critics spent the majority of their reviews talking about Williams' remarkable talents.[31] Several of them were impressed with the variety of people Williams created. There was the uncle "whose suspenders groaned around his huge girth like hawsers . . . the shifty-eyed Bob the Fiddle, whose smile was like a razor. And the woman who had two buck teeth, one of them gold, who looked like a well-to-do rabbit."[32]

Wyatt was amazed to discover Williams could portray five distinctly different people at the same time.[33] Kerr wrote:

> At one lunatic point in Emlyn Williams' new three-part salute to the ribald, rose-colored, runaway prose of Dylan Thomas, the performer is to be seen simultaneously impersonating three extremely energetic people. The first of these is gaily rocking in a rocking chair that is perched on a horsehair sofa, the second is regularly ascending toward the ceiling from his base on an inner-spring mattress, and the third is wandering wildly through a Lewis Carroll world with a beer-bottle stuck on his finger. There is a fourth person present, but she is momentarily out of sight on the floor somewhere.
>
> The three we're talking about are very much in sight. Their boozy flights through space are perfectly charted, drawn with such swift and sweeping strokes by a single player that we can not only tell them apart when they are spouting individual insanities, we can continue to identify them when they are all but crashing into one another. Thus is the actor in Mr. Williams triumphant.[34]

Field recalled that Williams' gestures ranged from "the delicate raising of the hand to the constriction of the entire body."[35]

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[31] Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegraph, October 9, 1957. Bolton paid tribute to Williams' versatility as he noted, "He writes, directs, acts, counsels other dramatists and for all I know designs settings."

[32] Justin Gilbert, New York Daily Mirror, October 8, 1957.

[33] Wyatt, loc. cit. [34] Kerr, loc. cit. [35] Field, loc. cit.

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Hewes wrote that Williams indulged in all sorts of movement, flapping his arms, hopping up and down, strutting about the stage, but never giving the impression that he was indulging in pantomime just for the sake of pantomime.[36] Gassner was not so sure. He found the flapping of Williams' hands to simulate flight "embarrassing."[37]

Bolton was impressed with the mileage Williams got out of the single chair. It not only served as an entire room full of furniture, Williams also stalked it, sat on it, balanced it on two legs, and ignored it.[38] Chapman paid Williams a great compliment when he wrote that one was hardly aware of his presence as an actor. "He makes the hustle and rowdydow of the ordinary stage seem frantic, footless, and foolish."[39]

Particularly impressive to some of the critics were the vivid illusions Williams was able to conjure up out of the Thomas writings. Using only the chair, Williams created "a hill top in Wales, a rock at the beach, a rocking chair, a bath tub, and a lady's lap."[40] According to Kerr, Williams brought to life concrete physical images "of a boy dreaming he is a bird, a dainty aunt delicately setting a mousetrap, and a grim family visitor 'smiling like a razor.'"[41]

Material

Williams used thirteen excerpts from Thomas' childhood memories. The most popular selections were the story of the outing in which the

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[36]Hewes, loc. cit. [37]Gassner, op. cit., p. 288.

[38]Bolton, loc. cit. [39]Chapman, loc. cit.

[40]Geor., loc. cit. [41]Kerr, loc. cit.

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en of Thomas' village traveled from pub to pub drinking themselves nto a "state of complete joyousness," and the recitation of the oet's first visit to London when he got his finger caught in the eck of a beer bottle, met all sorts of people in a bizarre rooming ouse, sat on the bath tub rim and drank brandy out of a tooth glass ith a girl who "looks prettier when she takes her glasses off." tkinson thought the segment was "like Pickwick written by James Joyce."[42]

Aston thought the material was exceptionally fine and that the haracters provided Williams with ample opportunities to show his rowess. "The characters dream a lot and fuss some; they afford ich insight into moods of boyhood and adolescence; they are often ascinating in their personal eccentricities; and above all they eep bursting forth with something hilarious."[43] Atkinson agreed he material was interesting, but he thought "only a very imaginative eader could see in it the healthy, humorous glory that Mr. Williams nds in the fantasy of the stories and the allusiveness of the prose."[44]

The critic for Theatre Arts wrote that the material had always ld charm and pungency, but that "in Emlyn Williams' hands, the ories become rare and vivid experiences in living."[45] The effec- veness of Williams-Thomas combination was further attested to by lbert, who described the program as:

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[42] Atkinson, loc. cit. [43] Aston, loc. cit.

[44] Atkinson, loc. cit.

[45] Theatre Arts, December, 1957, p. 27.

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> . . . a rich, glowing resurrection in which Thomas emerged, through the vivid recreative powers of Emlyn Williams as a sensitive yet often droll youngster who used words as Fourth of July sparklers . . . . It was akin to watching the gripping performance of a spirit medium.
>
> Thomas entered his body almost from the first moment. Words which must unquestionably lose a dimension when reduced to cold print, were amplified, animated by a mere rise or fall in voice. Simple gestures spotlighted by slight illumination clothed meanings with ruddy flesh.[46]

Gassner agreed the "all day carouse" and the London trip were most enjoyable, but felt that some of the smaller scenes "tended to dribble out as sketches are wont to do." He also complained there was no unity to the recitation other than the presence of young Thomas. Furthermore, he thought the program lacked a beginning, middle, and end. He credited the success of the evening to the skill of the performer because "the literary material seemed to be put together with virtually no dramaturgy at all."[47]

Comparisons

Several of the critics mentioned Williams' earlier Dickens readings, and pointed out that he had not tried to physically impersonate Thomas as he had Dickens. Williams himself had noted the Thomas production was much more informal than his previous ones, with no pretense of reading and with much greater use of movement and gesture.[48] Kerr thought the Thomas program was more sensitive and subtle than the Dickens readings had been.[49]

Mention was also made of the O'Casey readings, specifically I Knock at the Door, which was playing at the same time as A Boy

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[46]Gilbert, loc. cit. [47]Gassner, op. cit., p. 288.

[48]Williams, loc. cit. [49]Kerr, loc. cit.

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Growing Up. The Theatre Arts critic thought the two were quite similar. "As in the O'Casey dramatization, this is an example of artistry wedded to genuine dedication to worthy subject matter. This is a hard combination to beat."[50] Driver enjoyed both productions, but found the O'Casey one "more completely satisfying."[51] Wyatt felt that the O'Casey prose had more warmth and rhythmic beauty, but thought Williams' skill made up for this.[52] Gassner preferred I Knock at the Door because it had more unity than A Boy Growing Up did.[53]

In his summary of the 1957-1958 season, Chapman labeled A Boy Growing Up as "one of the artistic delights of the season." He credited Williams with evoking "more of Thomas than a large company evoked in Under Milk Wood later in the season."[54]

Despite the endorsement of all the critics, the "limited engagement" proved to be quite limited. A Boy Growing Up closed after seventeen performances. No explanation was found as to why the run was so short. Before Williams opened, Producer Hurok announced that the production would make a brief tour following the New York engagement.[55] Perhaps tour commitments prohibited longer engagement. One would have thought that a performer of Williams' stature and talent presenting material from an author who,

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[50] Theatre Arts, op. cit., p. 82. [51] Driver, op. cit., p. 1288.

[52] Wyatt, loc. cit. [53] Gassner, loc. cit.

[54] John Chapman, Broadway's Best, 1958 (Garden City, New York: Bleday and Company, Inc., 1958), p. 169.

[55] Funke, loc. cit.

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A Lovely Light

Dorothy Stickney, known to many theatre patrons as "Vinnie"
the long-running Life With Father, had loved the poetry of
na St. Vincent Millay since she was a girl. When Miss Millay's
tters were published in 1952, Miss Stickney was enthralled with
em and with the way "they revealed in an entirely unselfconscious
y a poignant story of the life of a very special person."[56] She
ied to think of how the poetry and the letters might be combined
drama. It was seven years before she succeeded in achieving
e effect she had hoped for. The result was A Lovely Light.

According to Dan Ross, a writer for the New York Herald Tribune,
ss Stickney's original conception "was an elaborate one, with
merous characters, many props, scenery, music, and off-stage
ces." Ross went on to report that, several years ago Miss Stickney
talked with Emlyn Williams, who, on the basis of his experience
n Charles Dickens, recommended she keep things as simple as
sible.[57]

According to a letter received from Miss Stickney, she had
seen any productions which influenced her to stage A Lovely Light

[56] Letter from Dorothy Stickney to the author, June 19, 1968.

[57] Don Ross, New York Herald Tribune, February 7, 1960.

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as she did. She did mention that she was acquainted with Williams, but gave no indication in her letter that she had ever sought his advice.[58]

In January of 1959, a note in the New York Times theatre column announced Sol Hurok, who had managed Emlyn Williams' United States travels, would arrange Miss Stickney's itinerary for her program about Edna St. Vincent Millay, entitled A Lovely Light.[59] The theatre critic for Time reviewed the production at Purdue University in July, and wrote that the show would appear in New York in an off-Broadway theatre after a straw-hat tour.[60] However, when it reached New York in February 8, 1960, it opened on-Broadway at the Hudson Theatre for a two-week engagement.

Setting and Accessories

The setting was quite simple; black drapes, a desk and chair, a large red chair, and a garden bench atop a small platform. According to Miss Stickney, it was her intention to suggest, rather than actually reproduce, the physical environment of the major period of Millay's life and works.[61] Lee Watson designed the setting and was responsible for the lighting, which was characterized as imaginative and helpful.[62] Kerr mentioned the effectiveness of "gently

[58] Stickney, loc. cit.

[59] Lewis Funke, New York Times, January 11, 1959, Sec. II., p. 1.

[60] Time, July 13, 1959, p. 44.

[61] Dorothy Stickney, in undated, unidentified clippings found in the vertical file on A Lovely Light in the Theatre Collection.

[62] Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegraph, February 10, 1960.

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[63] Walter K

WTCR, p. 376.

[64] Brooks

[65] Ross, L

[66] Lewis R

[67] Letter

[69] Hobe., France Robert Kennet Kerr,

dimming and glowing spotlights."[63]

Miss Stickney's costume was "a plain blue serge dress and jacket with white collar and cuffs, designed by Helene Pons in the simplest New England tradition."[64] One critic quoted Miss Stickney as saying she made no attempt to imitate the poet's appearance or dress,[65] but another critic claimed the dress was "inspired by a photograph of the poet."[66]

Classification

Miss Stickney admitted that she never really knew how to describe her performance and ended up calling it a "dramatization" for lack of a better term. She was pleased with what Aileen Talmay, a writer for Vogue, called it--"an interior biography." Miss Stickney felt this described what she had hoped to achieve.[67]

Her husband, Howard Lindsay, declared that it was not a reading; it was a dramatization which had everything a play had except that it only had one character.[68] Most of the critics called the production either a "solo show" or a "one-woman show."[69] Atkinson and Chapman

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[63] Walter Kerr, New York Herald Tribune, February 9, 1960, NYTCR, p. 376.

[64] Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, February 9, 1960, p. 27.

[65] Ross, loc. cit.

[66] Lewis Funke, New York Times, February 7, 1960, Sec. II, p. 1.

[67] Letter from Dorothy Stickney, loc. cit. [68] Ross, loc. cit.

[69] Hobe., Variety, February 10, 1960, p. 70.
Frances Herridge, New York Post, February 9, 1960, NYTCR, p. 376.
Robert Coleman, New York Mirror, February 9, 1960, NYTCR, p. 375.
Kenneth Tynan, The New Yorker, February 20, 1960, p. 104.
Kerr, loc. cit.

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70 John C

p. 374.

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oke of it as a "dramatization."[70] It is interesting to note that ne of the critics referred to it as a "reading."

nner of Presentation

Although it was not described as a "reading," Miss Stickney used manuscript, but "only as a stage device to make an audience believe at I was actually reading the letters--in other words, to give it kind of visual immediacy. Of course, I knew it by heart."[71]

Her movement, as staged by Lindsay, was limited. As Dash re- lled, "Miss Stickney attempts no histrionic flourishes. In a quiet in she glides from sofa to bench . . . to desk."[72] There was some sagreement among the critics as to whether Miss Stickney appeared a devotee reading Miss Millay's works, or as Miss Millay reading r own works. This will be discussed more fully in the section ncerning acting.

rdict

Of the seven major New York newspaper critics, five of them proved of A Lovely Light and two did not. McClain entitled his view "A Dim View is Taken of Stickney Readings," and complained at Miss Stickney had failed "to capture the abandon which was in rt responsible for the talents of the woman she recreates."[73]

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[70]John Chapman, New York Daily News, February 9, 1960, NYTCR, 374.

Atkinson, loc. cit.

[71]Stickney, loc. cit.

[72]Thomas Dash, Women's Wear Daily, February 9, 1960.

[73]John McClain, New York Journal American, February 9, 1960, TCR, p. 374.

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[76] Coleman

[79] Frank A
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[80] Melvin

[81] Hobe.,

[82] Henry

erridge had no complaint about Miss Stickney, in fact she thought he actress dramatized the material effectively, but she was displeased ith the choice of material which she felt illustrated only one ide of Millay.[74]

The other critics thought the evening was excellent. Atkinson ound A Lovely Light "tender and beautiful."[75] Coleman wrote that iss Stickney gave "a lovely performance . . . . in a delightful ortrait of a fascinating woman."[76] Kerr enjoyed the material and as utterly captivated by Miss Stickney,[77] as was Chapman who wrote hat "an audience which had come to cough quickly became mouse-still s it fell under the spell wrought by the actress."[78] Aston admitted he evening was quite different than what Broadway and those in the urrent commercial theatre were use to, and that its appeal was ecessarily limited; however, he personally found it "enchanting."[79]

Among the other critics, Maddocks found "a beguiling absence f theatricality, a touchingly honest sense of frail lyricism."[80] orrison called it a "beguilling show" which enthralled the first-ight audience.[81] Hewes was not satisfied with the selections, but e enjoyed the program anyhow.[82] Tynan heartily disliked the selections nd Miss Stickney's presentation of them.

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[74]Herridge, loc. cit. [75]Atkinson, loc. cit.

[76]Coleman, loc. cit. [77]Kerr, loc. cit. [78]Chapman, loc. cit.

[79]Frank Aston, New York World Telegram and Sun, February 9, 960, NYTCR, p. 375.

[80]Melvin Maddocks, Christian Science Monitor, February 13, 1960.

[81]Hobe., loc. cit.

[82]Henry Hewes, Saturday Review, February 27, 1960, p. 27.

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Tynan complained that Miss Stickney wandered around the stage ith her face contorted and sounding "like the tinnier sort of oman's club lecturer, and behaving in general like a patient hostess ecently widowed."[83] The only other critic to take issue with the cting was McClain, who hastened to qualify his censure as he wrote:

> I will defend Miss Stickney's stature as an actress to my last tattered typewriter ribbon, but I do not believe she was well advised in casting herself as Miss Millay. Neither by depth or range of voice, nor in her almost prim approach to the subject does she capture the abandon which was in part responsible for the talent of the woman she recreates.[84]

McClain and Tynan were definitely in the minority with their riticisms. Aston headlined his review "Dorothy Stickney Excells s Millay" and wrote of the images she evoked.

> Through her the audience saw a mountain top, an island, a fireside, One pictured a table holding newly filled Mason jars with sunbeams streaming through the ruddy contents. There was a slope leading down to a stormy surf, and in the chill spray a man was listening as she called him back from the chilly dangers.[85]

Maddocks praised her for brilliantly underplaying the "slightly lamboyant rhetoric" of Miss Millay's verse, and with managing to ve her letters an "unassuming, almost girlish authenticity."[86] err decided that there were "approximately ten Dorothy Stickneys n the stage, each of them nicer and more accomplished than the thers."[87]

Aston was convinced the actress impersonated Millay. He wrote, She was Edna St. Vincent Millay."[88] Funke thought her dress

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[83] Tynan, op. cit., p. 102. [84] McClain, loc. cit.
[85] Aston, loc. cit. [86] Maddocks, loc. cit. [87] Kerr, loc. cit.
[88] Aston, loc. cit.

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ggested that she was "impersonating her heroine."[89] McClain compared
r performance to the "impersonation" of Mark Twain by Hal Holbrook.[90]

Miss Stickney wrote, "I did not try to impersonate Millay, but
parently the character came over clearly to the audience through
e authenticity of her own words."[91] Atkinson's impression was that
ere was no attempt at impersonation and he praised Miss Stickney
r being able to stand "sufficiently aside to see what she is enjoying.
e is aglow with wonder, but she preserves the independence of the
nscious artist."[92] Chapman thought Miss Stickney could be compared
a medium who "summoned" Miss Millay into the theatre. He wrote of
ss Stickney, "She never thrusts herself upon the audience or hides
e lovely light of the woman of whom she speaks: She is so very
tful that she seems artless."[93]

The performance was obviously a labor of love for Miss Stickney.
en asked how she would compare the personal satisfaction gained
om A Lovely Light with that of a "normal" role, she responded,
s an actress I received greater satisfaction from doing this one-
man show than from playing any role in any play, even including
fe with Father."[94]

terial

The poetry and letters were arranged in three acts and each
was epitomized by a quotation from Millay. The title of the
oduction was taken from one of her early poems:

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[89]Funke, loc. cit. [90]McClain, loc. cit. [91]Stickney, loc. cit.
[92]Atkinson, loc. cit. [93]Chapman, loc. cit.
[94]Stickney, loc. cit.

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95 Ibid.

My candle burns at both ends;
It will not last the night;
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends--
It gives a lovely light!

The first act, ("The world stands out on either side,/ No wider
n the heart is wide."), dealt with Miss Millay's early years.
two, ("I known not how such things can be!/ I breathed my soul
k into me."), concerned her marriage and life with Eugen Jan
ssevain. The third act, ("The soul can split the sky in two/ And
the face of God shine through."), was about the final years; her
band's death, her lonely life after his death and finally, her own
th in 1950. Miss Stickney felt the three act structure and the
secutive story presented by the poems and letters made the presen-
ion more closely akin to a play than to a reading.[95]

Chapman thought Miss Stickney's selection and arrangement of
material was superb. "By artfully mingling some of Miss Millay's
ters and some of her most personal verse, she has made a gentle
infinitely touching story of the poet's life, with its loves,
sunny spots, its aches of heart and body and its tragedies which
common to us all."[96] As Kerr pointed out, the material selected
, for the most part, "not the resonantly showy stuff of which
o evenings are normally composed." He conceded some of the verse
rather flashy, but noted that the letters were slight, restrained
ces, concerned with "vanishing summers and the curious French
trust of blackberries" as well as with the important events in
life. "Nearly everything that is done, said, or intimated is
entially lyrical, not passionately dramatic; and it is up to

[95] Ibid. [96] Chapman, loc. cit.

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[100] Kerr

ss Stickney to find all the sudden turnabouts and compounded emotions at will keep us riveted to a fragile thread."[97]

The material was quite diverse, including such things as an static ode to nature; witty notes back home, (one of them that she uld not be allowed to graduate publicly from Vassar because of a lly escapade and that her diploma would be shipped to her "like a dfish"[98]); a bitter and sarcastic letter of protest to a woman's ub for their snub of Elinor Wylie; a cajoling request for money om her publisher, ("Spring is here--and I would be very happy, cept that I am broke. Would you mind paying me now instead of on blication for those stunning verses of mine which you have? . . . . S. I am awfully broke. Would you mind paying me alot?"[99]); letters d verses showing her obvious love for her husband and her delight th their Berkshire farm; and poignant lines written after his death. st of the critics had no quarrel with the material that was selected, ough Kerr did comment on Miss Millay's "slight tendency to carmelize thusiasms,"[100] and McClain did not think the letters were "all t brilliant or funny"[101]), but several of the critics thought s Stickney failed to show enough of the "other side" of Millay. ridge wrote,

> But there is only a suggestion of the Greenwich Village Bohemian who burned her candle at both ends, no indication of her social and political thoughts, her early pacifism, her later interventionism, her intellectual opinions.
>
> From the point of view of her writing, this may be just as well, since she is at her best in her personal poetry. But we do get a somewhat one-sided portrait of her as a woman with a mind, as well as heart and eye.[102]

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[97] Kerr, loc. cit. [98] Ibid. [99] Time, loc. cit.

[100] Kerr, loc. cit. [101] McClain, loc. cit. [102] Herridge, loc. cit.

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Tynan claimed that, by her selection, Miss Stickney was pre-
nting Miss Millay as "a pretty non-combatant, a delicate fashioner
pathetic parlor verse" rather than a "ravaged observer of human
ight."[103] Bolton admitted the selection of material carefully
oided "the depth and dimensions of some areas of Miss Millay's
istence," but he found it captivating and illuminating anyhow.[104]
e critic for Time also enjoyed the production, but he regretted
at, while actress Stickney had treated the material with love and
spect, the material had limited and restricted the poet.

> Only glimpsed through chinks is that mingled poet and woman who during the 1920s crystallized an attitude and epitomized an era . . . .
>
> There was something of a distaff Byron about her, and on the stage of the '20s she was one kind of romantic leader as Scott Fitzgerald was another. Gallant, windblown, untidy, she was at once genuine and a little gimcrack, gifted and overly-facile, bohemian and childishly boastful about her candle burned at both ends.
>
> In A Lovely Light the candle burns at one end only, and so ladylike that it could grace a dinner table. The important thing is less that many piquant and pertinent facts in Edna Millay's story are lacking as that, because they are, there is lacking a kind of glowing fiction--and a whole period legend.[105]

Miss Stickney confessed the elimination of material was the
st difficult thing to do in the whole production. She left out
y of her own "very favorite poems" to attain the simplicity she
ieved would best show the "essence of what was Edna St. Vincent
lay" and at the same time, fit into the framework of the story.[106]

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[103] Tynan, op. cit., p. 104. [104] Bolton, loc. cit.

[105] Time, February 22, 1960, p. 100.

[106] Stickney, loc. cit.

Comparisons

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parisons

A Lovely Light was compared to the solo shows of Emlyn Williams Hal Holbrook. However, as Morrison pointed out, it was not done the "simulated lecture style of the Williams and Holbrook pro- tions."[107] McClain admitted that it might not be a fair comparison, he thought Miss Stickney fell short "of the impersonation given a season ago of Mark Twain by a young man named Hal Holbrook."[108] an complained that due to the restricted material, comparison the Dickens and Thomas programs was impossible.[109]

A Lovely Light ended its "limited engagement" after seventeen formances. It was endorsed by most of the critics and featured ell-known and talented star presenting the life and works of one merica's popular poets. The main criticism was that the choice aterial was not truly representative of Miss Millay's life and sonality. After the close of the two week run, Miss Stickney ed the country intermittently with her production and returned ew York in January of 1964,[110] at which time A Lovely Light was ented at the off-Broadway theatre, the Mayfair for a "limited of thirty-two performances.

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[107] Hobe., loc. cit.

[108] McClain, loc. cit.

[109] Tynan, loc. cit.

[110] Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegraph, January 22, 1964.

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The Importance of Being Oscar

Michael MacLiammoir had been interested in Oscar Wilde ever ce he received The Happy Prince as a present on his twelfth thday. MacLiammoir had considered doing a one-man show on Wilde many years and had occasionally discussed the possibilities with friend and partner in the Gate Theatre, Hilton Edwards. In 1955, talked with Emlyn Williams, (who was in Dublin playing Dickens preparing his Dylan Thomas program), about one-man shows and ut authors who might lend themselves to the format. In the rse of the discussion, Wilde was mentioned as a possibility and liams thought MacLiammoir would be the perfect actor to portray . It was not until early 1960 however, that the Irish star found e to work out a program on Wilde. He first presented The Importance Being Oscar at the Dublin International Festival in the summer of 0.[111] Sol Hurok, who produced the Williams and Stickney programs Broadway, brought Michael MacLiammoir and The Importance of Being ar to the Lyceum Theatre on March 14, 1961.

ting and Accessories

The stage was framed with a black drape, and the setting sisted of a couch, a table, a flower stand with a vase, and a raight-backed armchair. Designer-director Hilton Edwards visualized setting as "an empty, elegant space instead of a room."[112] MacLiammoir appeared in a dinner jacket and black tie. Flowers e used to symbolize the changing moods of the evening. Calla

[111]Stephen Watts, loc. cit. [112]Ibid.

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[113] Howard

[114] Walter
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[115] Frank
1961, NYTCR, p

[116] Whitr

[117] John
NYTCR, p. 327

[118] Robe
Taub

lies were in the vase in the first act and MacLiammoir fixed a green rnation in his lapel which "sums up the wonderful, jeweled, witty eciosity of the splendidly successful part of Wilde's life."[113] the curtain falls at the end of the first part of the evening, e carnation is dropped to the floor--indicative of Wilde's fall om grace.[114] Autumn leaves replaced the lilies after the inter- ssion

The lighting effects changedoccassionally throughout the pro- ction to indicate different times and places,[115] but the most riking lighting was at the beginning of the second part of the ogram. Wilde's trial supposedly took place during intermission and, the curtain rose on the final half of the program, MacLiammoir ood "in a serious half kind of light that is neither all dark nor l light, but as stern as a pointing finger."[116]

assification

Only one of the seven critics for the major newspapers labeled e production a "reading."[117] Two called it a "one-man show,"[118]

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[113]Howard Taubman, New York Times, March 15, 1961, p. 45.

[114]Walter Kerr, New York Herald Tribune, March 15, 1961, NYTCR, 330. Kerr thought the "too solemn business of a gay green carnation opped forlornly to the floor" was rather excessive.

[115]Frank Aston, New York World-Telegram and Sun, March 15, 61, NYTCR, p. 328.

[116]Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegraph, March 16, 1961.

[117]John McClain, New York Journal American, March 15, 1961, TCR, p. 327.

[118]Robert Coleman, New York Mirror, March 15, 1961, NYTCR, p. 328. Taubman, loc. cit.

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[128] Cole

ile the others described it as a "one-man evening,"[119] "a one-man ibute,"[120] a "solo performance,"[121] and "an enormous solo of ormous value."[122] The Variety critic termed it "a one man performance readings,"[123] and Hewes agreed with the majority, characterizing as a "one-man show."[124]

nner of Presentation

Despite the overwhelming desire of the critics to avoid the rm "reading," MacLiammoir referred to books from time to time, d pretended to read "brief passages as, for example, the opening o sentences of De Profundis, [sic.] the letter written from prison Wilde to Lord Alfred Douglas."[125] He made no pretence of appearing Wilde, but occasionally he did impersonate Wilde as well as other aracters connected with Wilde's life.[126] Generally he was content create "an aura of his [Wilde's] flamboyant personality, brilliance, ity and underlying sentimentality and at the end, his hard learned se of resignation and compassion."[127] There was plenty of movement. e critic wrote, "It is in no sense a conventional reading, but rather ull-blooded, witty and moving stage performance."[128]

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[119] Kerr, loc. cit.

[120] Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, March 15, 1961.

[121] John Chapman, New York Daily News, March 15, 1961, NYTCR, p. 329.

[122] Aston, loc. cit. [123] Variety, March 22, 1961, p. 70.

[124] Henry Hewes, Saturday Review, April 1, 1961, p. 32.

[125] Letter from Michael MacLiammoir to the author, July 4, 1968.

[126] Taubman, loc. cit. [127] Variety, loc. cit.

[128] Coleman, loc. cit.

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The critical endorsement was overwhelmingly favorable, although veral of the reviewers acknowledge the show would have a limited peal. Taubman found it a "vivid and memorable evening in the eatre."[129] Watts called it "a theatre event of striking and distinguished interest."[130] Kerr thought there were "a few excesses" in terial and in presentation, but assured his readers they would ind the actor and the evening thoroughly rewarding."[131]

McClain was quite sure that not all of his readers would find e evening rewarding. He judged the reading by "the same yardstick" would have applied to a conventional dramatic production and decided would appeal to only a select audience, but that those who were lde enthusiasts would find the production "richly rewarding."[132] wes drew some rather interesting associations as he suggested to s readers that if they liked aquariums, they might also like museums, d if they liked museums, The Importance of Being Oscar was a narkable one.[133] Coleman admitted the production was special, rhaps even "caviar" for the general public, but he found it fascizing.[134] The Variety critic wrote:

> As a rather special offering, it should do well . . . . It is a tour de force that should appeal to audiences with intellectual or literary interests, but there's little in it for the public that favors the sort of big brash musicals and comedies and the lurid shock dramas generally associated with Broadway. On its own basis, it's a touching tribute to a brilliant tragic artist and it offers a rewarding evening.[135]

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[129]Taubman, loc. cit. [130]Richard Watts, loc. cit.

[131]Kerr, loc. cit. [132]McClain, loc. cit. [133]Hewes, loc. cit.

[134]Coleman, loc. cit. [135]Variety, loc. cit.

Acting

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Nearly all the critics paid tribute to MacLiammoir's skillful rformance. Besides delivering sections from Wilde's prose and etry, he also presented his own editorial comments on the material d on Wilde's life. Watts praised MacLiammoir for "re-creating the od and spirit of a fascinating, perverse and eventually lost and happy man, with understanding, critical insight and remarkably ving dramatic forcefulness."[136]

McClain called his performance "masterful," and observed that was, "in his own right, a superlative actor."[137] Aston wrote cLiammoir was "an instinctive and soundly trained actor," with remarkably versatile voice, who knew how to move with grace and amatic impact.[138]

Several of the critics thought the "flair and flourish"[139] MacLiammoir's acting was superbly tailored to Wilde's rather amboyant material. Coleman characterized his style as "acting the grand manner."[140] The Newsday reviewer described him as engaging and skillful actor who is not afraid to use the grand ner or the artificial drawing room style when they are called for."[141]

r wrote:

> Mr. MacLiammoir likes to take a stance, as though Atlas had been born half-Irish. He is quick with an index finger, thrusting it at us in such urgent passion that we are apt to forget ourselves

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[136] Richard Watts, loc. cit. [137] McClain, loc. cit.

[138] Aston, loc. cit. [139] Richard Watts, loc. cit.

[140] Coleman, loc. cit. [141] Newsday, March 28, 1961.

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and murmur a quiet 'not guilty.' His always arched hands are rarely tucked in his tuxedo pockets. They are far more likely to be found curled at his forehead, alarmed palms outward, in a gesture suitable to the stunned Leontes in A Winter's Tale. More than once you may catch him, if you are able to divorce what he is doing from what he is saying, with one arm flung up as though to ward off a specter and the other crooked back against a shuddering shoulder, for all the world like those engravings you have seen of Edwin Forrest at the height of his powers.

And yet, and yet. The manner is linked to something that is being spun out of the intensity of his intelligence and the fire of his feeling for Oscar Wilde.[142]

terial

The majority of the criticism was directed at the choice of terial. The first half of the program began with Wilde leaving eland for London, where polite Victorian society provided a rvelous target for his wit; showed him as the lionized dandy of at society; touched on his successes as a playwright and as a cturer in Leadville, Colorado, where he failed to impress the minors ch his learning but gained their admiration for his remarkable lity to consume hard liquor; and closed with his unfortunate cision to sue the Marquis of Queens for libel. The trial and the urtroom details were relegated to the intermission. The second f was much more somber, featuring "De Profundis," the "Ballad of ading Gaol," Wilde's unhappy exile in France, and finally, his ath.[143]

The Time critic regretted there had not been more of "the most zzling talker of modern times" and less of the "scarred and suffering le" of Wilde.[144] Watts, of the New York Post, admitted the first

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[142] Kerr, loc. cit. [143] Taubman, loc. cit.

[144] Time, March 24, 1961, p. 52.

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was the most enjoyable.[145] Kerr thought "De Profundis" and the
Lad of Reading Gaol" would have been more effective had they not
so long.[146] McClain also thought the selections would have
fited from some editing.[147]

Mr. MacLiammoir, besides being a renown actor, was also a
ited playwright, and the program profitted from his literary
its. He provided a biographical and literary commentary to bridge
various excerpts. McClain found many of his editorial asides
able."[148] Watts said of his narrative, "Being a brilliant writer
elf, as well as a perceptive critic, Mr. MacLiammoir's observations
Ilde's life and character and works are eloquent, appreciative,
atic and compassionate, and they are too witty to fall into any
ss of hero worship."[149]

The only commentary on the suitability of the material for this
er of presentation concerned the compatability of Mr. MacLiammoir's
e of acting with the literary style of Mr. Wilde, which has been
ussed in the preceding section on acting. As Coleman wrote:

> It all adds up to an amusing and deeply touching omnibus of
> the best of Oscar . . . . It is wonderful to have an actor who
> can really act bringing to life so volatile and gifted a writer
> as Wilde . . . .
> It just goes to show that you don't need a lot of expensive
> scenery to display an actor of sensitivity and quality at his best.
> Particularly when that actor is dramatizing exciting prose and
> poetry.[150]

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[145] Richard Watts, loc. cit. [146] Kerr, loc. cit.

[147] McClain, loc. cit. [148] Ibid. [149] Richard Watts, loc. cit.

[150] Coleman, loc. cit.

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It was a tribute to both material and performer that several
cs mentioned the creation of a mood or spirit of a man and of
e. Taubman spoke of the production's evocation of "the spirit
mauve decade."[151] The Variety critic praised the creation of
's "flamboyant personality"[152] and Bolton noted the "man's
mood."[153]

risons

It is interesting to look at the comparisons drawn between
mportance of Being Oscar and other productions. Bolton remarked:

> The difficult and exquisite art of one man evoking the whole
> f another man's life and professional work in the breadth of
> ne evening, along [sic.] on a stage has reached a demanding
> lateau. Its recent practitioners have been men who are not only
> ine actors, but men of literary cultivation. Emlyn Williams,
> or example, brought Dickens perfectly into focus . . . .[154]

Taubman pointed out that Mr. MacLiammoir's production differed
"other one-man shows devoted to recalling the person and creative
of a renowned writer," in that no attempt was made to assume
ubject's appearance.[155] Similarly, Chapman noted that, unlike
Williams as Dickens and Hal Holbrook as Mark Twain, MacLiammoir
ot try to achieve a physical resemblance to his subject.[156]
The reference to Twain is not surprising, but the reference to
ams and his Dickens programs seems rather odd. Williams appeared
e Dickens' readings in 1952 and again in 1953. He then appeared
57 with his program on Dylan Thomas in which he did not attempt
hieve a physical resemblance to his subject. This was a more

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[151]Taubman, loc. cit. [152]Variety, loc. cit.
[153]Bolton, loc. cit. [154]Ibid. [155]Taubman, loc. cit.
[156]Chapman, loc. cit.

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cent production and would seem to have been more like the Wilde
ogram, but none of the critics mentioned it. Also, no mention was
le of Dorothy Stickney and her Millay readings which had appeared
Broadway a little more than a year before the MacLiammoir production.

Although The Importance of Being Oscar had the approval of
rly all the critics and had an outstanding actor presenting the
erial of a well-known and witty author, it was a financial failure.
critics had been afraid the production would have a limited
eal, and their fears apparently were justified. The show closed
er four weeks with an estimated $20,000 loss.[157]

The Brontes

Margaret Webster first presented The Brontes for the ANTA
inee series at the Theatre de Lys on October 29, 1963. A capacity
se attended, and the critics who reviewed the production suggested
deserved a longer run. On December 20, 1963, The Brontes opened
a "limited engagement" at the off-Broadway Phoenix Theatre.[158]

ting and Accessories

The setting approximated the parlor of a dreary Victorian
sonage.[159] Miss Webster wore a full length black gown.[160]

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[157] Variety, April 12, 1964.

[158] Norman Nadel, New York World-Telegram and Sun, December 21, 1963.

[159] Louis Chapin, Christian Science Monitor, December 24, 1963.

[160] Edith Oliver, The New Yorker, January 4, 1964, p. 61.

Classification

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ssification

The program note which appeared in all of the newspaper reviews led the production a "dramatic portrait," and the majority of tics used this description. Exceptions were Herridge and Bender, called it a "one-woman show"[161] Thompson, who termed it a nodrama";[162] and the Variety critic, who referred to it as a amatic reading."[163]

ner of Presentation

Miss Webster called The Brontes a "performance." She knew the erial by heart and used manuscript "only as a 'prop' to differente methods of projection and because the whole thing is 'set up' a 'Family Album,' from which I am showing the audience letters, tographs, diaries, excerpts etc."[164] Chapin mentioned Miss ster's "discreet stage movement" and her use of characterization dialogue.[165]

dict

Only two of the "major" critics wrote reviews of the production both of them approved of it. Herridge found it an "excellent" w and recommended it especially, though not exclusively, to Bronte s.[166] Nadel characterized the material as "more conversational

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[161] Francis Herridge, New York Post, December 22, 1963.
William Bender, New York Herald Tribune, December 21, 1963.

[162] Jack Thompson, New York Journal American, December 21, 1963.

[163] Variety, January 11, 1964.

[164] Letter from Miss Margaret Webster to the author, July 1, 1968..

[165] Chapin, loc. cit. [166] Herridge, loc. cit.

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n theatrical," but thought Miss Webster did it beautifully.[167]

Funke admitted The Brontes might not be for the general public, described the program as "rich and moving and bound to please the erary minded."[168] Thompson told his readers, "You won't find a e rewarding evening around town."[169] Bolton "heartily and sincerely" ommended The Brontes.[170]

None of the critics rejected the production completely, but a were not enthusiastic about it. Sainer thought the evening was dramatic, affecting at some moments and tedious at others," and concluded that the theatre had been "neither helped nor hindered this sensible and unmotivated collation."[171] Bender found Miss ster charming, but thought her attempts to recreate the story of talented but ill-fated family sounded more "like a fond aunt's embrances."[172] Oppenheimer noted a lack of much in the way of racterization or dramatic impact, but was sure the Bronte enthu-sts would enjoy themselves, as would all "who cherish the work a dedicated and intelligent actress."[173]

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[167] Nadel, loc. cit.

[168] Lewis Funke, New York Times, December 21, 1963, p. 17.

[169] Thompson, loc. cit.

[170] Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegraph, December 23, 1963.

[171] Arthur Sainer, Village Voice, December 26, 1963.

[172] Bender, loc. cit.

[173] George Oppenheimer, Newsday, December 23, 1963.

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The critics all had praise for Miss Webster's talents, though hey did not all agree on how successful her performance had been. he critic for the Villager wrote of her, "Miss Webster conveys the rt of the story-teller who weaves a spell that is never broken."[174] ppenheimer, writing for Newsday, noted her commanding presence, emarkable voice, and outstanding skill, but complained that, despite er proficiency, "there is little characterization to be had."[175] liver found it hard to accept her as either a Bronte sister or a eroine."[176] Sainer thought she was trying to do too much when she retended she was Mrs. Gaskell "pretending she is Charlotte reading rom Jane Eyre."[177]

Other reviewers felt that Miss Webster had succeeded in her ttempts to bring the Brontes to life. "It requires not only magination, but taste and gentility to recreate, on stage, the tmosphere of three bright and bookish girls of a century ago. iss Webster does it beautifully."[178] Herridge wrote that her erformance was so convincing one could see the trio developing s if they were characters in a play.[179] Bolton thought she managed o probe deeply into the "essence" of the three girls.[180] Chapin dmitted Miss Webster's somewhat genteel delivery did not lend tself to "mercurial impersonations or sudden insights," but thought hat it also served to avoid "any vestige of sentimental indulgence."[181]

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[174] Villager, December 5, 1963. [175] Oppenheimer, loc. cit.
[176] Oliver, loc. cit. [177] Sainer, loc. cit. [178] Nadel, loc. cit.
[179] Herridge, loc. cit. [180] Bolton, loc. cit. [181] Chapin, loc. cit.

Funke wrote:

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wrote:

> An actress of striking and captivating stage presence, blessed besides with a voice of many colors and resonance, Miss Webster succeeds in rendering a stage biography of the Brontes that rarely falters. She evokes in tender and tragic moods the stories of Charlotte, Emily and Anne and manages wherever possible, to convey their humor, restrained though it may have been. The audience sat in mismerized silence, a superb compliment to a worthy achievement.[182]

rial

The material was a pastiche taken from poems, diaries, letters, books by the three sisters, as well as writings of those who knew particularly Mrs. Gaskill, who wrote The Life of Charlotte Bronte. evening covered forty years, beginning with the arrival of the te family at Haworth in 1820, and ending with the death of the er Rev. Patrick Bronte, the last surviving member of the family.

The material touched on the childhood and miserable school riences of the three, their experiences as governesses, the other y members, the girls' early literary ventures under male pseudo- Charlotte's ill-fated involvement with one of her professors, a charming account of her later courtship by Arthur Bell Nichols. ols, her father's assistant, had been on the verge of emigrating ustralia and, as Charlotte wrote, "Mr. Bronte not only gained a but recovered a curate.")[183]

Much of the material was personal, dealing with the ambitions, rations, fears, and everyday experiences of the three. Excerpts taken from Janes Eyre, Wuthering Heights, Agnes Grey, and other heir writings. Oppenheimer and Funke found these selections the

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[182] Funke, loc. cit.

[183] Chapin, loc. cit.

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satisfying.[184] Miss Webster wrote that she had not originally ıded for the presentation to be so biographical, "but as I read deeply into and around the Brontes themselves, I found their story more interesting and fascinating even than their books; so ɔgressively cut down on the excerpts and concentrated on the le."[185]

Bender complained the material was too all-encompassing and day-to-day narrative lacked focus. He thought the evening would been more effective had Miss Webster centered her attention on character or one particular event. He pointed out the events owed each other so rapidly there was no time for the audience to any dramatic involvement, though there were many episodes which potentially dramatic.[186]

arisons

Oppenheimer began his review, "What Emlyn Williams did for les Dickens and Dylan Thomas, and Dorothy Stickney for Edna Vincent Millay in their one-man dramatic portraits, Margaret ser in The Brontes has done for Charlotte, Emily, Anne and, to ıser degree, their bibulous brother Branwell."[187] This was the comparison made by a reviewer.

It would seem that Miss Webster had carried the portrayal of tist's life and works a bit further to present a family's life orks. Although no complaints were heard concerning this, one question how representative the material selected was of the

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[184]Oppenheimer, loc. cit., and Funke, loc. cit.

[185]Webster, loc. cit. [186]Bender, loc. cit.

[187]Oppenheimer, loc. cit.

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time limit she had announced at the beginning of the run, and
ed after twenty performances.[188]

Pictures in the Hallway

There were five group productions of an author's life and
s. Three of these were about O'Casey, the fourth was on Brecht,
the fifth concerned Frost. The O'Casey programs were the work
aul Shyre, who, as a senior in high school had read Juno and the
ock for a class assignment. Shyre became extremely interested
he playwright and in his works and eventually dramatized the first
e volumes of Sean O'Casey's autobiography.[189]

On March 1, 1956, an item appeared in the daily theatre column
he New York Times announcing that the first volume of O'Casey's
iography, I Knock at the Door, had been adapted for the stage
aul Shyre and would premiere on March 18 at the Kaufmann Audi-
um.[190] The Sunday afternoon and evening performances were well
cized and well attended. Among the critics in attendance was
s Atkinson, who enthusiastically endorsed the presentation and
led the fact there were no more performances scheduled. He
gly suggested steps be taken to correct this.[191]

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[188] New York Times, December 27, 1963, p. 15.

[189] Arthur Gelb, "Campaigner in the Cause of Sean O'Casey," ork Times, September 25, 1960, Sec. II, p. 1.

[190] Louis Calta, New York Times, March 1, 1956, p. 37.

[191] Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, March 19, 1956, p. 27.

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On May 27, 1956, the second volume of the O'Casey autobiography, es in the Hallway, was presented for two performances at the an auditorium. Once again critical response was enthusiastic kinson wrote, "Pity that these wonderful readings have to ear before they have fairly started."[192]

Shyre originally had hoped to present Pictures in the Hallway nday afternoon and evening performances either on or off ay. He estimated the production could be capitalized at .[193] No producer was forthcoming however, and the production ven in the Kaufmann auditorium instead. Atkinson was not the ne to see future possibilities for the readings. The Variety prophesied, "Sometime soon somebody is going to mount these ographical segments commercially . . . the results should be ry."[194]

Staats Cotsworth, who served as narrator in both productions the following letter to the editor of Variety.

Knock at the Door and Pictures in the Hallway are in the sual position of having already won the critics without having st won a producer . . . . If a play being tried out in a mer theatre were to receive such kudos, it would have little ible reaching Broadway in short order, yet I am told by Shyre t no specific Broadway offer has been forthcoming. The iculously small sum needed to put these performances on Sunday rnoons and evenings, considering their already established larity and rave notices make it look like a good gamble for ody. It is a pity the actors can't do it themselves. There many lovers of drama and literature who share Atkinson's and s' belief that, since the death of Shaw and O'Neill, the test dramatic writer in the English language is O'Casey. Where these folks hiding.[195]

Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, May 23, 1956, p. 23.

Variety, April 18, 1956, p. 83. [194]Variety, May 30, 1956, p. 58.

Staats Cotsworth, Variety, July 4, 1956, p. 56.

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Pictures in the Hallway finally found financial backing at the inning of the 1956-1957 season. Sunday afternoon and evening formances at the Playhouse were scheduled September 16 through ober 7.[196] Reviews were generally favorable and the attendance sufficient to warrant holding the production over an extra month.[197]

ting and Accessories

The setting was very simple; a blue cyclorama, six stools, and lecterns. Music and lighting played an important part in the sentation. Chapman singled out master electrician Bernie Norton a very important member of the company, whose work contributed obtrusively toward dramatic effect."[198] Scene changes were indi-ed by turning the lights on the cyclorama off and on. Special hting effects were used to highlight individual characters. The hting varied in intensity according to the mood of each scene.[199]

Music also contributed to the mood. Flute music was heard n the wings, and the readers occasionally broke into snatches of . When the Irish folk music was not available, O'Casey himself the songs into a tape recorder and sent them to Shyre.[200]

sification

The critics had some difficulty deciding exactly how to describe hybrid, though most of them used the term "reading" in their

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[196]Sam Zolotow, New York Times, July 22, 1956.

[197]Paul Shyre, "O'Casey's Pictures Come to Life," Theatre Arts, 1957, p. 32.

[198]John Chapman, New York Daily News, September 17, 1956.

[199]John Gassner, Theatre at the Crossroads, op. cit., p. 285.

[200]Shyre, loc. cit.

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s, or some form of "reading." Chapman called it a "narrative
g,"[201] Kerr described it as a "partially staged reading,"[202]
ie Variety critic used the term "concert reading."[203] Atkinson
red to it at one point as a "staged reading" and later noted
in the trade, it was known as a "concert reading," although
sliked the term.

Can't we rid ourselves of that commercial cant? For the
roduction of Pictures in the Hallway is theatre. After a routine
eginning it does the things that good theatre does. It creates
haracters. It defines situations. By stimulating the imagination
t brings alive the humor and pathos of a group of people who
re trying to fit themselves into the scheme of life. It expresses
point of view.[204]

Narrator Staats Cotsworth described the production as a "staged
ng."[205] McClain settled on "a group of people reading from, and
ionally acting out bits of biography."[206] Gassner described it
dramatic presentation of selections.[207]

of Presentation

The performers had manuscripts on lecterns in front of them but
t always refer to them. According to Shyre, the parts were
lly memorized, but the pages of the scripts were constantly
to remind the audience of the reading format. One actor

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[201] Chapman, loc. cit.

[202] Walter Kerr, New York Herald Tribune, September, 17, 1956.

[203] Variety, April 18, 1956.

[204] Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, September 23, 1956, Sec. II, p. 1.

[205] Letter from Staats Cotsworth to the author, June 9, 1968.

[206] John McClain, New York Journal American, September 17, 1956.

[207] Gassner, op. cit., p. 284.

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ed as the narrator; another read the part of Johnny. The other
ors interpreted a variety of characters.[208]

As Cotsworth recalled, "Movement and gesture were strictly
trolled and minimized to produce a somewhat stylized suggestion
action or reaction, with the actors either remaining on their
ols or standing down before them."[209] It is interesting to note
difference of opinion between two critics as to the amount of
ement used by the performers as they depicted the various characters.
es, in reviewing the initial performance at the Kaufmann Auditorium,
te that the director had encouraged his readers to use pantomime.
specifically cited Aline MacMahon as "wagging her arms and kicking
one leg as she impersonates a vulgar, noisy woman."[210] Atkinson's
cription of the same performance would seem to be more in line
h Cotsworth's recollections of the manner of presentation.
inson noted the actors vividly characterized people although they
e "confined to reading scripts from lecterns."[211]

According to Cotsworth, the reading was carefully rehearsed to
ear casual but to give the fullest value to O'Casey's words.[212]
nson thought the production was very formal. When the curtain
raised at the beginning of the evening, the actors appeared
silent black silhouettes against a glowing background," while
ite played off-stage. Thus, according to Atkinson, the playgoer

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[208] Shyre, loc. cit. [209] Cotsworth, loc. cit.

[210] Henry Hewes, Saturday Review, June 16, 1956, p. 32.

[211] Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, May 28, 1956, p. 23.

[212] Cotsworth, loc. cit.

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transported into an imagined world where the performers were
note and irrelevant before a word is spoken." The audience was
ckly made aware that this was not to be a chummy session with
ood book, i.e. Don Juan in Hell. This was to be a production
ch would address the audience with classical formality.

> Once the introduction is over, Mr. Vaughan lights the faces of the actors, and at the proper moment, Staats Cotsworth, the narrator, sets the scene of the first episode by reading dramatically from the manuscript . . . . Everything has been planned. The responsiveness of the lighting, the deliberate tones of the voices, the sparing movement, the brief exchanges between the characters are meticulously stylized.[213]

dict

The critical reaction to Pictures in the Hallway was favorable.
oks Atkinson devoted a Sunday article to the reading which concluded
h the announcement that the production "was not just a pleasant
day reading but a fresh and original work of art." Lewis Funke
cribed it as "a theatre interlude of pure delight" and "something
cherish."[214]

Chapman was pleased with the presentation and suggested that
adway was badly in need of some "special performances of special
ngs."[215] In a similar vein, John Gassner commented that it was
icative of the general impoverishment of serious theatre "that
eading occasionally overshadowed current plays in amplitude and

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[213] Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, September 23, 1956, Sec. II, 1.

[214] Lewis Funke, New York Times, September 17, 1956, p. 23.

[215] Chapman, loc. cit.

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" with the most notable example being Don Juan in Hell. He
ick to caution that readings were by no means to be considered
tutes for theatre, but thought that Pictures in the Hallway
reading with a difference" which could definitely be termed
sing theatre.[216]

Critics Kerr and McClain took issue with that description,
both of them approved of the production in general. Kerr
t the power of a play--especially in terms of dialogue--was
cuously absent, although he admitted the presentation had
arkable knack of catching you up in quick, vivid strokes."[217]
n bluntly stated that "it is not exactly theatre," but pointed
did not claim to be. He thought any devout O'Casey fan would
t "an amiable and rewarding evening."[218]

The six performers in Pictures in the Hallway were: Rae Allen,
Brenlin, Aline MacMahon, Paul Shyre, Robert Geiringer, and
Cotsworth. The critics were quite pleased with the perfor-
of the actors, though they did not discuss them individually
detail. Atkinson thought the acting was "superb".[219] Funke
ed all the actors seemed to be thoroughly enjoying O'Casey's
language and they were all to be highly commended for their
mances.[220]

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[216]Gassner, op. cit., pp. 284-285.

[217]Kerr, loc. cit. [218]McClain, loc. cit.

[219]Atkinson, loc. cit. [220]Funke, loc. cit.

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Chapman thought the company was admirable, and that Miss MacMahon wonderful. He labeled her "hard old biddy who deals in damaged kery" as "outstanding." He also singled out Mr. Cotsworth's ative abilities and George Brenlin's "disarming and heartwarming" ormance of Johnny Cassidy in his early teens.[221]

Kerr was also very impressed with Miss MacMahon, but thought role as a saleslady of damaged crockery was definitely secondary ier role as Johnny's mother. George Brenlin, as Johnny, did not ress Kerr. He complained Brenlin's "spurts of Shakespeare-worship, owed by howls of outrage in the face of human injustice seemed to ontrived out of hearsay rather than genuine heat. All the neces- signals are sent up; but the substance of passion, the personal olvement is missing."[222]

erial

Nearly all of the critics paid tribute to O'Casey's excellence writer. McClain wrote of the various episodes; the first job, discovery of literature and of girls, and the dawning of an reness of the political passions and prejudices of Ireland as in O'Casey's "often stark though lyrical turn of phrase." oncluded that, although only fragments were presented, somehow formed a whole which gave "a poignant impression of the man his times."[223] Chapman observed that, whether the fragments

[221] Chapman, loc. cit.

[222] Kerr, loc. cit.

[223] McClain, loc. cit.

were buoyant or bit

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ouyant or bitter, they were beautiful, "for no man can match

y in making a song out of words."[224]

Gassner described O'Casey's autobiographies as "one of the

ne testaments of the human spirit in English prose," and their

as "one of the three or four major playwrights the English

ng world has had since the 17th century." He wrote:

> It is one of the marvels of Pictures in the Hallway that its ompassionately comic account of a Dublin boy's encounters with he injustice of man and the love of woman makes such genuine heatre . . . . it became the occasion for one of the most reative stage productions we have had in recent seasons.[225]

Atkinson characterized the autobiography as "a tumultuous

ng narrative" and O'Casey as "our most gifted writer of English."

aised Shyre for having done an admirable job of selecting from

lth of material and for achieving a nice balance of O'Casey

and O'Casey belligerence. "Pictures in the Hallway is about

r from naturalization as a piece of literature can get; and the

of a stylized reading becomes it well."[226]

Kerr credited Shyre with making "a crisp, fluid, and intelligent

ng of Sean O'Casey's second scrapbook of memories," but was not

nced of the suitability of the material for the form of presen-

n.

> One of the real handicaps in this business of slicing up a an's autobiography and presenting it as a partially-staged eading is the fact that, since the work wasn't conceived as rama in the first place, we are doomed to wait in vain for full-bodied scene. The reminiscent snippets may be beauti- ully laced together; but how are they to break open into the ustained sound and fury, and the rich satisfaction of the all- ut bout of dialogue?[227]

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[224] Chapman, loc. cit. [225] Gassner, op. cit., p. 285.

[226] Atkinson, loc. cit. [227] Kerr, loc. cit.

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The only other reservation regarding the suitability of the rial and the manner of presentation came from Hewes. In general, pproved of the material and its presentation, but he took issue the scenes of sexual play which he felt were "better just ening or being read about privately than described aloud."[228] rently he was the only critic to have his sensibilities thus nded, as no other mention was made of the scenes.

arisons

Naturally, much of the comparison was between the two O'Casey biographies. Hewes and Atkinson compared the two after I Knock the Door and Pictures in the Hallway had both appeared at the fmann Auditorium. Hewes thought those who had seen the first matization, (I Knock at the Door), might be somewhat bored at repetition of certain dramatic situations such as near-fatal ness and the constant struggle against poverty and religious otry. However, he thought the second production had more ex- ing incidents and an overall happier mood.[229] Atkinson disagreed. felt the subject matter in Pictures in the Hallway was "slightly s inspired" than the first volume, though he was sure the audi- e would still find much to enjoy.[230] Atkinson also compared tures in the Hallway to Don Juan in Hell and concluded: "There more showmanship in the Don Juan in Hell reading. There is art here." Atkinson noted that Pictures in the Hallway was ork of art that has its own esthetics."[231] Unfortunately he

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[228] Hewes, loc. cit. [229] Ibid.

[230] Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, May 28, 1956, p. 23.

[231] _____, New York Times, September 23, 1956, Sec. II, p. 1.

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Pictures in the Hallway received critical endorsement, and, ght of the fact the presentation was extended an extra "month ındays," one might assume that it was a reasonable success ıcially. However, its companion piece, I Knock at the Door ıot produced commercially for over a year.

I Knock at the Door

On September 29, 1957, eighteen months after its initial ɔrmance at the Kaufmann Auditorium, I Knock at the Door opened ıe Belasco Theatre. Unlike Pictures in the Hallway, which had exhibited the previous season only on Sunday afternoons and ıngs, I Knock at the Door was scheduled for a six-week run.

The setting was the same as for the previous production; a blue ɔrama, six chairs, and six stools. Music and lighting were ı used to enhance the mood and clarify the focus. Nearly all the ıcs classified the production as some variety of a reading. who apparently wanted to be sure he included all possibilities, ıed it a "staged concert reading."[232] The manner of presentation ıned the same.[233]

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[232] Arthur Gelb, New York Times, September 30, 1957, p. 27.

[233] Since Pictures in the Hallway and I Knock at the Door used same setting and the same manner of presentation, the writer ded not to consider these aspects in detail again. The same ɛrue concerning the classification by the critics. There were ıgnificant differences.

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[234] Walt
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ict

The majority of the reviewers liked the production. Kerr, who complained about the lack of dramatic dialogue and dramatic axes in Pictures in the Hallway, was quite enthusiastic about ock at the Door.[234] Coleman found it an evening of "rewarding tre."[235] Aston thought the excellent performance provided the ence with "a rewarding experience."[236] Gelb termed the production nning," and wrote that it definitely deserved to be on Broadway.[237]

Herridge told her readers, "Here is rich, stirring theatre for its economy of set, costume, and movement."[238] Gassner praised production as "engrossing theatre,"[239] and credited it with ting a continuously dramatic effect. The critic for Time found reading version of the first volume of O'Casey's autobiography roughly engaging,"[240] while the Variety reviewer described it "fluid, persuasive performance."[241]

The Theatre Arts critic concluded his review by generalizing , while the reading was not as interesting as a play, it was very

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[234]Walter Kerr, New York Herald Tribune, September 30, 1957, R, p. 247.

[235]Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, October 3, 1957, R, p. 247.

[236]Frank Aston, New York World Telegram and Sun, September 30, , NYTCR, p. 248.

[237]Gelb, loc. cit.

[238]Francis Herridge, New York Post, September 30, 1957, NYTCR, p. 248.

[239]Gassner, op. cit., p. 287.

[240]Time, October 14, 1957, p. 88.

[241]Hobe., Variety, October 2, 1957, p. 72.

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to like.[242] McClain, who had expressed doubts as to whether ures in the Hallway could be classified as theatre, was the only ic to come out against I Knock at the Door. The headline of his ew read: "Charming Tale--But It's Not Theatre!" He had words raise for the material and for the performers, but, while he med he did not object to the form, (which he described as a led reading), he did not think it belonged in a legitimate tre. He reasoned that people attending legitimate theatres a right to expect dramatic productions, and this presentation, complained, was "a far cry from any such."[243]

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The critics were unanimous in their praise of the performers. McClain conceded the pace and precision of their presentation outstanding.[244] Gassner called the six a "vivid group of actors" credited them with providing a "variety human dimension and full r of voices to the narration."[245] Herridge classified all six uperb, and found Aline MacMahon particularly moving.[246] Gelb impressed with the manner in which the actors were able to slip nd out of the various roles, creating vivid characterizations in ry brief period of time.[247]

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[242] Theatre Arts, December, 1957, p. 25.

[243] John McClain, New York Journal American, September 30, 1957, R, p. 248.

[244] Ibid. [245] Gassner, op. cit., p. 286.

[246] Herridge, loc. cit. [247] Gelb, loc. cit.

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NYTCR, p. 2

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Chapman thought the company of six was splendid and singled out
:hor man" Cotsworth for his performance as the narrator.[248]
.nson was particularly impressed with Miss MacMahon, but felt that
six had done an excellent job.[249] Aston had kind words for every-

> But let the praise fall where it belongs: On the versatile six. On Aline MacMahon for the power she creates in her understated [sic.] mother and on George Brenlin, an adult, for behaving so completely like a kid. On Staats Cotsworth for holding it nicely together as narrator, as well as contributing several bits. On Rae Allen for the girls she brings forth, and on Paul Shyre and Roy Poole for the variety of characters they pull out of nowhere and present as being absolutely real.[250]

Several of the critics wrote of the striking illusionary effects
ited by the performers. One of the more enthusiastic critics mused:
e wonders at the thousands spent on set and costume when six actors
stools can conjure so graphically a poverty-stricken boyhood."[251]
ther reviewer wrote that "A mere six people, on a stage bare of
rything but stools, manage to project one episode after another--
irth, a funeral, a visit to the hospital, a classroom caning, with
n more vivid detail than a realistic stage version could have
veyed."[252]

The caning segment was the example most frequently cited as
icative of the illusion creating capacities of the form of presen-
ion which was used. Kerr spoke of a ruler that was neither seen

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[248] John Chapman, New York Daily News, September 30, 1957, CR, p. 248.

[249] Atkinson, loc. cit. [250] Aston, loc. cit.

[251] E.V.R. Wyatt, Catholic World, December, 1957, p. 227.

[252] Herridge, loc. cit.

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or heard, but brought to mind by "a sizzling descriptive sentence in
downward arc that has a slashing rhythm of its own. The effect is
s startling to us as it must have been to the half-starved, half-
lind gosling O'Casey. The childhood moment comes cracklingly alive."[253]
ston and Gelb also cited the caning scene and reported the audience
as so caught up in the action that they burst into applause when
ne enraged youngster clouted the bullying schoolmaster over his
ald head, and again when his mother finally told the obnoxious
ergyman to leave her son alone.[254]

McClain, again in the dissenter's spot, claimed the illusions
ere shattered by the performers having to portray too many parts,
id by a narration which he described as "necessarily abrupt."[255]
ost of the other reviewers felt the performers gave life to the
any characters and to the times. After viewing John Brown's Body,
ne critic had suggested that one criterion for judging an oral
nterpretation production might be the ability of the production to
ake the audience create their own mental images.[256] It would seem
hat some of the critics felt I Knock at the Door had accomplished
his.

aterial

As had been the case with Pictures in the Hallway, the reviewers
ere most appreciative of O'Casey's writing. This time however,

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[253] Kerr, loc. cit. [254] Aston, loc. cit., and Gelb, loc. cit.

[255] McClain, loc. cit.

[256] Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegraph, February 17, 1953.

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siderably more mention was made as to how well the method of staging the material. One critic called it a "felicitous method of ging fragments."[257] Another reviewer wrote there "could be no er way to bring the full force of O'Casey's poetic prose to the tre."[258] Atkinson was perhaps the most enthusiastic in his rsement.

According to the rules, when form and content are perfectly matched, a classic is born. From this esthetical point of view, and perhaps from a less mechanical point of view, the concert reading of I Knock at the Door is classical. There is no mal-adjustment between material and performance, nothing omitted, nothing left over.[259]

Kerr also thought the manner of presentation was admirably ed to the material. In trying to explain why, Kerr wrote:

> . . . the method at hand has a curious rightness for the evocation of childhood itself. Shafts of overheard speech come tumbling at random from undefined, almost unseen sources; thoughts trail off into music, grow sleepy and then wake with a start; bits and pieces of life get tangled, cross each other, assert themselves when no one seems to be listening. The fragmentary, disjointed, half-assimilated bursts of sound and color that lodge at random in a youngster's head are tossed directly at us in a rich, tumbling, kaleidoscopic free-for-all. This, you remember, is the way it did sound.[260]

The critic for Time thought perhaps some of the "inward glow lost," but felt the story gained "in outward color from snatches ong or the interplay of street voices."[261] The Theatre Arts iewer maintained the presentation lacked the interest of a stage y, but acknowledged it "caught the youthful flavor of the material."[262] lain admitted the charm of the material, but insisted one could t as well do his own reading, "sitting in a comfortable chair, in

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[257] Chapman, loc. cit. [258] Herridge, loc. cit.

[259] Atkinson, loc. cit. [260] Kerr, loc. cit. [261] Time, loc. cit.

[262] Theatre Arts, loc. cit.

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t of the fire."[263] With the exception of McClain's negative and the somewhat qualified endorsement of the reviewers for and Theatre Arts, the critics were delighted with the material the method the performers used to present it.

Despite the favorable reaction from the majority of the critics, popular response proved to be disappointing. The production cost 000 to open, and needed to take in approximately $11,500 a week reak even.[264] At the end of the six-week run, I Knock at the Door ed with a loss of $15,000 for its forty-eight performances.[265]

Gassner had complained about the production being housed in the sco theatre, which seated over a thousand people. He pointed that, when a production is entirely dependent on words to reach audience, a sense of rapport between the readers and the listeners essential, and noted that the proscenium arch and the large, er theatre presented a barrier which was difficult to overcome.[266] ough he was the only critic to comment on the choice of theatre, observations seem valid.

Drums Under the Windows

Shyre apparently was undaunted by the commercial failure of ock at the Door. He announced plans to adopt the third volume he O'Casey autobiography, Drums Under the Windows, using the same at and hopefully, the same cast.[267] However, he changed his mind

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[263] McClain, loc. cit. [264] Variety, October 2, 1957.

[265] Variety, November 13, 1957. [266] Gassner, op. cit., p. 287.

[267] Arthur Gelb, New York Times, April 13, 1959, p. 34.

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t a year later and decided the material required a manner of
uction different from what he had used for the first two volumes.
escribed the form he now planned to use as a "kaleidoscopic
tization," somewhat akin to the style of U.S.A., his adaptation
the Dos Passos novel which was then enjoying a successful run.[268]
Drums Under the Windows opened October 13, 1960, at the Cherry
Theatre in Greenwich Village. The only returning cast member
eorge Brenlin, who again played the young O'Casey. The production
uite different in terms of setting and manner of presentation
the two previous productions.

ng and Accessories

The set consisted of the bare brick walls of the theatre itself;
ndescript railing along the back of the stage; a streetlight;
ner railing down stage right which served "as a bedstead, a bar
, or what-have-you"; and a pile of stones which represented
t anyplace."[269] Kerr wrote of the setting, "And the nearly empty
e is beautifully lighted, laced now and again with an odd and
ative railing or lamp-post."[270] Most of the time the setting
esented a Dublin street early in the century, but it also served
such places as a field of corn, the inside of an insane asylum,
the Garden of Eden. Outside the proscenium arch on stage left
a desk and a chair for the narrator.[271]

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[268] New York Times, May 1, 1960, Sec. II, p. 1, U.S.A. is discussed in Chapter VI.

[269] Tom F. Driver, Christian Century, November 9, 1960, p. 1320.

[270] Walter Kerr, New York Herald Tribune, October 14, 1960.

[271] Driver, loc. cit.

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Costumes were worn, and slight changes of costume were used to dicate changes from one character to another. Martyn Green, who rnished the narration and impersonated O'Casey as an older man oking back on his youthful days in Dublin, wore a colored skull p, a black turtle-neck sweater, tweeds, and silver rimmed spectacles.[272] had been the case in the two earlier presentations, music added ntinuity to the proceedings.[273]

assification

The critics who, for the most part, had used some derivative the term "reading" for the first two O'Casey volumes, seemed to be a loss as to how the dramatization of the third volume should be assified. Shyre called Drums Under the Windows a "staged reading," compared to simply a "reading," which was the term he applied to e first two productions.[274] Tallmer agreed that the production ould formally have to be called a 'staged reading'," but thought at in reality, it was "half way between the pure 'reading' as such hich is never actually a reading) and the actual play."[275] Driver s the only other critic to speak of it as a "reading."[276]

The critic for Newsday labeled the presentation "a series of amatic incidents,"[277] while Davis, writing for the Daily News, termed

[272]Howard Taubman, New York Times, October 14, 1960, p. 26.

[273]Kali., Variety, October 26, 1960, p. 56.

[274]Letter from Paul Shyre to the author June 13, 1968.

[275]Jerry Tallmer, Village Voice, October 20, 1960.

[276]Driver, loc. cit.

[277]Newsday, October 19, 1960.

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"dramatization."[278] The Variety reviewer described it as
eandering excursion through the rhetoric of the book."[279]
ator Martyn Green suggested the production should be called a
ading' with 'staged illustrations'"[280]

Some critics found it easier to say what it was not. Coleman
it was "not a play in the literal sense of the word."[281] Taubman
ed that it was "not a proper play."[282] Bolton admitted, "Never
thousand years of trying, using the loosest of measurements,
d any one call Drums Under the Windows a play."[283] The critic
The New Yorker decided it was "not a play but a curious hybrid,"
proceeded to discuss the various aspects of the production.[284]

er of Presentation

He characterized the manner of presentation as a combination
dramatic recitations" by the actors, with "dramatic readings"
he narrator. "The narrator reads, then gives way to the actors,
re's a movie-type dissolve, the narrator returns, and so forth."[285]
wrote of the narrator, who provided the background material and
setting, and of the six other actors, who enacted "pivotal scenes."[286]

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[278] James Davis, New York Daily News, October 17, 1960.

[279] Kali, loc. cit.

[280] Letter from Martyn Green to the author July 2, 1968.

[281] Robert Coleman, New York Mirror, October 14, 1960.

[282] Howard Taubman, loc. cit.

[283] Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegraph, October 15, 1960.

[284] The New Yorker, October 22, 1960, p. 90.

[285] Ibid. [286] Thomas Dash, Women's Wear Daily, October 17, 1960.

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The play began when narrator Martyn Green walked over to the esk, switched on the lamp, laid out a book, and started to read.[287] r. Green recalled that he "actually read" his lines, because he was raid if he memorized them, he would not have been able to create the llusion that he was reading.[288]

Shyre, who directed Drums Under the Windows as well as providing he adaptation, described the manner of presentation as a "sort of arrative panorama rather than as a formal reading."[289] The actors ere not on stools or behind lecterns as they had been in the two revious adaptations. Instead, there was considerable movement as he seven actors portrayed sixty roles in thirty-two scenes.

erdict

Most of the critics enjoyed the production, although several id not think it quite measured up to the previous ones. The critic or Newsday was quite displeased with the change in manner of presen- tion and decided that Drums Under the Windows was not as successful the first two had been.[290] Dash, writing for Women's Wear Daily, id not think Drums was "as incandescent as its two predecessors," t thought it was still very enjoyable.[291] Aston called the presen- tion "a spellbinder," but admitted he had liked the other two etter.[292] Coleman did not think the third Shyre adaptation was as tstanding as Pictures in the Hallway, but still described it as

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[287]Frank Aston, New York World-Telegram and Sun, October 14, 1960.

[288]Green, loc. cit. [289]Gelb, loc. cit. [290]Newsday, loc. cit.

[291]Dash, loc. cit. [292]Aston, loc. cit.

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ne of the most rewarding evenings we've spent in the showshops is semester."[293] The critic for Christian Science Monitor felt at Drums Under the Windows was the least successful of the O'Casey daptations, but advised his readers it was still worthy of their ttention.[294]

On the other hand, Tallmer reported that he found the third olume "no less lovely than the two which have preceded it."[295] cClain called Drums Under the Windows "the most compelling installment this series." He "strenuously" recommended the production as "one those small and selective off-Broadway offerings that justifies e southbound safari."[296]

Taubman told his readers they would not "hear anything more loquent in any theatre in town."[297] Driver called it a "priceless reasure."[298] The critic for The New Yorker thought the impression e received from the production could be compared to "swimming in rtle soup," which he seemed to think would be a very enjoyable xperience.[299] Bolton, who had suggested that the presentation ould 'never in a thousand years of trying" be considered a play, d not see how any one, "in another thousand years could . . . call anything but delightful."[300] However, a few of the critics did.

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[293] Coleman, loc. cit.

[294] Christian Science Monitor, October 22, 1960.

[295] Tallmer, loc. cit.

[296] John McClain, New York Journal American, October 14, 1960.

[297] Taubman, loc. cit. [298] Driver, loc. cit.

[299] The New Yorker, op. cit., pp. 91-92.

[300] Bolton, loc. cit.

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Kerr found that "the drums under these particular Dublin dows are often muffled and sometimes obscure."[301] Davis enjoyed fantasy episodes, but confessed he was somewhat confused and a tle bored by the more factual vignettes. He complained Shyre had en it for granted everyone had read the autobiography.[302] Watts ditted the evening's entertainment might puzzle a "stranger to asey and Ireland," but he was sure any one who appreciated O'Casey ld enjoy the production.[303] The critic for Variety thought the duction was well done, but predicted its appeal would be "academic l limited" because "the average American ear is not accustomed to sh verbosity."[304]

ing

As previously noted, George Brenlin was the only performer in e cast who had been in the early productions. Other members of the st included Martyn Green, William Windom, Dana Eclar, James Kenney, othy Patten and Pauline Flanagan. Martyn Green, who appeared as e older O'Casey and functioned as narrator, had lost a leg in an cident the year before and was making his first stage appearance ce then. Most of the critics talked about his performance at some gths. The only unfavorable comment about Green's performance e from the reviewer for The New Yorker who noted that Green occa-nally muffed his lines.[305]

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[301] Kerr, loc. cit. [302] Davis, loc. cit.

[303] Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, October 14, 1960.

[304] Kali., loc. cit.

[305] The New Yorker, loc. cit.

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Pauline Flanagan received praise for her roles as a local souse
d a would-be seductress.[306] William Windom was singled out for
s performance as "a grinning madman being led to his asylum
ison."[307] Taubman thought the variety of roles were handled smoothly
all performers, but he commented that the Irish accents employed
ere a bit scrambled."[308]

terial

The third volume of the O'Casey autobiography presented vig-
ttes of the poet's experiences when he was a young man in Dublin.
ese included his discovery of the pleasure and satisfaction of
rd physical work; the impoverished death and funeral of his sister;
s brother-in-law's incarceration in the paupers' lunatic asylum;
e degrading charity offered his nephew by the Protestant orphans
ciety; his seduction by a neighbor woman whose husband was out of
wn; and several other incidents. There was also an episode in the
rden of Eden in which Adam and Eve, G. K. Chesterton, and Father
own discussed past events and speculated on the future, while
nosaurs wrestled in the background. The thirty-two scenes ranged
length from a few seconds to more than ten minutes.[309]

Driver described the material as "a chronicle of growth . . .
eply moving because it has the ring of truth, the sort of simple
uth in which multitudes can share. 'We are too human to be afraid,'
has Eve say, 'and we are too human to let fear stop us.' Or, as

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[306] Ibid. [307] Driver, loc. cit. [308] Taubman, loc. cit.

[309] The New Yorker, op. cit., p. 90.

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shouts to a doctrinaire socialist, 'There's more in the world
n woe.'"[310] Taubman touted the O'Casey prose as being more
tic than the verse of many poets. He admitted that not every
sode was dramatic, but maintained there was "a kind of exhilaration"
the O'Casey words, and that Shyre had wisely relied on the words
evoke the needed images. Taubman thought Shyre's use of the
sonality of O'Casey as the unifying aspect of the vignettes was
ingenious device.[311]

Watts noted that Shyre's "arrangement of his mass of material
sn't always work out dramatically, but the important thing is that
much of the O'Casey spirit is there."[312] The reviewer for the
istian Science Monitor felt the book had "apparently presented
oluble problems for Mr. Shyre."[313]

Shyre, in discussing the material and its suitability for the
ticular form of presentation, noted the first two volumes of the
obiography were concerned with O'Casey's family and were rather
timental, while the third volume had "more Dublin and less O'Casey."
also had a great deal of fantasy and a great deal of philosophizing
ut the influence of Yeats, Shaw, and Darwin. Shyre did not think
could deal with these aspects successfully in "a conventional
ding which, in itself, imposes limitations."[314] He also felt
re was too much action in Drums Under the Windows to present it
the same manner he had used for the preceding two productions.[315]

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[310] Driver, loc. cit. [311] Taubman, loc. cit.
[312] Watts, loc. cit. [313] Christian Science Monitor, loc. cit.
[314] Gelb, loc. cit. [315] Shyre, loc. cit.

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reviewer for The New Yorker, musing about the material and the ner of presentation wrote:

> Perhaps the only way to stage a largely unmanageable rhapsody like Sean O'Casey's third autobiographical novel Drums Under the Windows is simply to place a sluice gate between book and stage and raise the sluice gate at judicious intervals until enough material has been released to fill a couple of hours, hire a narrator and some actors who can handle the burning monotone of O'Casey's prose without becoming overheated, and let 'em go. At any rate, that's pretty much what Paul Shyre has done with his version of the book.[316]

The only critic who did not think the manner of presentation suitable for the material was the Newsday reviewer.[317] The critic the Newark Evening News found the switch "to live action in pre- ting the text" a most welcome change, and well suited to the asey prose.[318] Taubman wrote that the material and the manner of sentation were skillfully combined to capture "the O'Casey glow."[319]

parisons

The only comparisons made about Drums Under the Windows were n the two previous dramatizations of the O'Casey life story. se comparisons have been interspersed with the discussions of ting, manner of presentation, verdict and material. To use re's terminology, the first two productions were "readings," le Drums Under the Windows was a "staged reading."[320] Instead the cyclorama, stools, and lecterns; a multipurpose set was used depict a variety of settings. The performers wore costume and,

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[316] The New Yorker, loc. cit. [317] Newsday, loc. cit.

[318] Rowland Field, Newark Evening News, October 14, 1960.

[319] Taubman, loc. cit. [320] Shyre, loc. cit.

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pt for the narrator, did not use scripts. The narrator provided ective commentary while the six other performers acted out the ettes and assumed the roles of a variety of characters.

Drums Under the Windows was the most successful of the Shyre-sey combinations in terms of audience response. It ran for 109 ormances. It should be pointed out that this was the only one ne three to be housed in an off-Broadway theatre, which was aps a more suitable environment for the O'Casey adaptations.

Shyre commented in September of 1960, that he was planning the tation of O'Casey's fourth autobiographical volume, Inishfallen, Thee Well, and hoped eventually, to adapt the fifth and sixth nes.[321] However, as of the 1966-1967 season, no further install-s had reached the stage.

Brecht on Brecht

On November 15, 1961, Brecht on Brecht, His Life and His Art, presented at the Theatre de Lys for the ANTA Matinee Series. e Tabori selected and edited the material, and Gene Frankel ted the production. The performers included Viveca Lindfors, e Voskovec, Michael Wagner, Lotte Lenya, Dolly Haas, George s, Eli Wallach, and Anne Jackson. The audience was larger the seating capacity of the theatre, so the program was sched-for an additional performance on November 20. Nadel, one of ew major critics to cover the ANTA matinee, reported that it ost unfortunate that the actors' other commitments prevented

[321] Gelb, loc. cit.

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onger run, because the production was exceptionally fine.[322]

About a month later, Zolotow reported that a revised version of ANTA presentation, to be called simply Brecht on Brecht, would be duced by Cheryl Crawford beginning January 3, 1962, at the Theatre Lys for a limited engagement. Only six actors were featured in s version. They were: Lotte, Lenya, Anne Jackson, Viveca Lindfors, rge Voskovec, Michael Wagner, and Dane Clark.[323] Clark was the y performer who had not appeared in the original production.

ting and Accessories

The setting, designed by Wolfgang Roth, featured an enlarged tograph of Brecht, staring at the audience, situated near the r of the stage, some high stools, and a bench. The picture of ght, with "eyes wily and skeptical, lips sealed in a self-mocking le, peasant fingers clenched around a cigar--a complex blend of y and passion," dominated the stage.[324] No mention was made ny special lighting effects, and no costumes were used. A tape rding of Brecht singing "Mack the Knife" from his Threepenny Opera of his answering questions put to him by the House Un-American ivities Committee was a special feature of the production.[325]

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[322]Norman Nadel, New York World Telegram and Sun, November 15, 1961.

[323]Sam Zolotow, New York Times, December 15, 1961.

[324]Time, January 12, 1962, p. 50.

[325]Thomas Driver, Christian Century, March 7, 1962, p. 296.

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Only a few of the critics attempted to classify Brecht on Brecht. ubman described the proceedings as a "living anthology,"[326] while Conner labeled it "a series of readings and acted-out little sketches."[327] o critics called the production a "staged reading."[328]

nner of Presentation

The reluctance of other critics to classify Brecht on Brecht is ther surprising in view of the fact all the performers read, or etended to read, from notebooks in the first part of the production. st of the time they sat on the stools and took turns presenting the lections.[329] During the second half of the program they were not closely restricted to their stools. They occasionally worked gether in groups of two or three to dramatize some of the scenes.[330]

rdict

Most of the critics endorsed Brecht on Brecht as a fine theatrical perience and a painless introduction to Brecht, although there were o very adamant dissentors from the majority opinion. Taubman told s readers that, despite the fact the production used a minimum of age trappings and was not a "proper play," it was a "marvelously hilarating and pungent evening in the theatre."[331] Driver called

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[326]Howard Taubman, New York Times, January 4, 1962, p. 26.

[327]Jim O'Conner, New York Journal American, January 4, 1962.

[328]Kenn, Variety, January 17, 1962, p. 72.
Robert Brustein, New Republic, January 22, 1962, p. 23.

[329]Driver, loc. cit. [330]O'Conner, loc. cit.

[331]Taubman, New York Times, January 14, 1962, Sec. II, p. 1.

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on Brecht "an evening of theatrical excellence."[332] The Time termed it "an arresting example of off-beat off-Broadway."[333] The Villager reviewer described it as "theatre of the highest , enlightening, illuminating, deeply moving and unexpectedly g, and witty, revealing the genius and scope of Brecht as a right, poet and satirist."[334] Oliver thought the production was plete success, and found it an interesting and useful introduction echt's works.[335] Morgenstern cautioned his readers it was an lectual evening that demanded close attention, but he found it cinating "act performed by six magicians who pull off a trick ore difficult than making a man disappear. They make him ear."[336]

Three of the reviewers did not endorse the presentation. dge found it "delicious for a while . . . . but not very or satisfying for an entire evening of theatre."[337] The other ritics were much more vehement in expressing their opposition. Brustein accused Tabori of "castrating" Brecht for the ANTA s, and found the acting, with the exception of Lotte Lenya's rmance, revolting.[338] Simon was also outraged at the "cas- on" which had been performed on Brecht's material in what

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[332] Driver, loc. cit. [333] Time, loc. cit.

[334] Villager, January 11, 1962.

[335] Edith Oliver, The New Yorker, January 13, 1962, p. 64.

[336] Joseph Morgenstern, New York Herald Tribune, January 4, 1962.

[337] Francis Herridge, New York Post, January 4, 1962.

[338] Brustein, loc. cit.

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considered an unfortunate and ill-advised attempt to make
palatable to the general American public.[339]

Three critics were also dissatisfied with the actors. Driver
nt the acting, except for the performance of Lotte Lenya, was
pointing, although the cast was an outstanding one.[340] Brustein
the acting worse than disappointing:

> The actors in this staged reading wink, smile, and twinkle
> t each other so much that I wanted to throw my coat at them.
> nd when they are not nodding sanctimoniously over the old
> hilosopher's sage apothegms, they are undermining Brecht
> hrough their interpretations of his works: one throwing fits
> f hysterics in The Jewish Wife, another turning Galileo into
> sentimental dullard, still another dripping molasses over an
> nborn child in a scene from The Good Woman. Only Lotte Lenya--
> old, metallic, seemingly detached from the proceedings--conveys
> ome of the steel and ice that were in Brecht. But even her
> resence fails to authenticate this factitious attempt to make
> recht fashionable.[341]

Simon was horrified to find the performers "flying in the
of both Brecht's ideas on theatre and any valid non-Brechtian
ices." He indicted them with indulging in "such a concert
efabricated smirks and stances, such gazes of mutual self-
ation and other cutenesses masquerading as impromptu responses,
make the late unlamented quiz shows seem by comparison orgies
ontaneity."[342]

Generally, however, the response to the acting was quite positive.
described the performers as "pros all," and noted that all of

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[339] John Simon, Theatre Arts, March, 1962, pp. 60-61.

[340] Driver, loc. cit. [341] Brustein, loc. cit.

[342] Simon, loc. cit., p. 60.

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had "their innings." He singled out Lotte Lenya singing a song
Mother Courage and Viveca Lindfors as a Jewish wife who decides
eave her non-Jewish husband at the beginning of Hitler's reign,
xceptionally fine.[343] Hipp also wrote at some lengths of
Lindfors' excellent performance in the scene from The Private
of the Master Race, although he selected Miss Lenya as his
vorite" performer.[344]

Oliver praised all the actors, but singled out Lotte Lenya as
"star."[345] Hewes considered Miss Lenya the production's greatest
et, and advised his readers that her performance alone was worth
price of admission. He noted that she had known Brecht well
ugh to be able to perform his works without awe, while some of
other performers accorded his works a somewhat worshipful treat-
t.[346]

erial

The selection of material precipitated the most violent
ections to the production. Brecht on Brecht was a collection of
German playwright's poems, songs, plays, letters, essays, memories,
observations. The bits and pieces were selected and assembled
eorge Tabori, who had worked with Brecht in 1947.[347] The material

[343] Rube Dorin, New York Morning Telegraph, January 5, 1962.

[344] Edward Hipp, Newark Evening News, January 28, 1962.

[345] Oliver, loc. cit.

[346] Henry Hewes, Saturday Review, March 24, 1962, p. 34.

[347] Calta, loc. cit.

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vided into "Life" and "Theatre" and had frequent changes of from bite to belly laugh." Some selections were short little ges such as: "'There is only one way to fight authority. that? To out live it.' 'Unhappy is the land that breeds ro. No, unhappy is the land that needs a hero.'"[348] Other nts were considerably longer, such as the previously mentioned from Brecht's Private Life of the Master Race.

Taubman acknowledged the anthology was "only a glimpse into eart and workshop of the poet and playwright," but he thought owed Brecht's humor, quickness of mind, ability to laugh at lf, and, "above all his cool and flaming command of the theatre." mitted he found the second half of the evening, with its emphasis echt's theatre the most exciting, but characterized the entire ology" as very rewarding. He mused that, "Until we can have t's finest plays in New York, Brecht on Brecht will do. For fragments from his life and works merge into a warm and ic portrait that assumes haunting immediacy on the stage."[349] Bolton thought Tabori had chosen skillfully from the vast sion of Brecht's writings.[350] Driver credited Tabori with g together "a sufficient sample of Brecht's writing to trate that Brecht saw life steadily."[351]

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[348] Hipp, loc. cit.

[349] Taubman, New York Times, January 4, 1962, p. 26.

[350] Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegraph, November 16, 1961.

[351] Driver, loc. cit.

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Other critics took issue with Tabori's selections. One com-
ed that Tabori had chosen too carefully and, as a result, the
ng did not provide a full and honest representation of the man.
were no "dull observations" which the critics felt sure Brecht
occasionally have made, and no incorrect prophecies had been
ded. Everything was witty, and all the forecasts were correct.
ought Brecht came across as too good to have been true.[352]
Brustein protested Tabori had edited and arranged the material
ast a warm glow," and as a result, Brecht came out as "a liberal,
Nazi humanitarian, discomforted only by the plight of the poor,
ispossessed, and the persecuted." He complained that Brecht was
st indistinguishable from Thornton Wilder."[353] Simon charged
the Brecht offered at the Theatre de Lys "could easily pass for
Rogers, Norman Vincent Peale, Hal Holbrook doing Mark Twain,
Parr, or who ever the currently recognized middlebrow humorioust"
be. He went on to lable the production "a miracle of dentistry"
ich Tabori had extracted every one of Brecht's sixty-four teeth.[354]
Simon questioned whether or not there was any justification for
g pieces of a man's life, prose, verse and song, pasting them
her, and "tossing the whole mess out into the auditorium,"
cularly when there was no honest attempt made to present the most
sentative aspects of the author. Simon argued that Brecht
d have been shown "spewing his brilliant, deadly satire on the
n man, the rich man, the organization man, the artist, America,
racy, liberalism, religion, and what ever else is enshrined in
ngton and Cooperstown, at the YMCA and the New York Times," as

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[352] O'Conner, loc. cit. [353] Brustein, loc. cit. [354] Simon, loc. cit.

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nitted this might have offended some of the audience, but he
ained that:

> . . the purpose of theatre is not to accommodate ignorant udiences, nor to drum up trade for ANTA, Cheryl Crawford and eorge Tabori, nor yet to make Brecht well-liked by the American ublic. Its purpose is to offer us the best truth a serious uthor is capable of. And however misguided Brecht may have een in some ways, however snarlingly unfair, he was still a housand times the thinker and artist than those responsible or Brecht on Brecht are. There may be some injustice in cattle aisers gelding their livestock, but it is a much more serious atter if the livestock get together to castrate their masters.[355]

risons

Simon compared Brecht on Brecht to Emlyn Williams' productions e works of Dickens and Dylan Thomas, pointing out that the ams presentations were much more unified and that they presented n more representative picture of the authors. He also noted issimilarities of the Tabori arrangement to the Don Juan in Hell ction, which featured a "single, seldom performed, nearly pmous part of a play in concert fashion."[356]

The reviewer for the Villager wrote that the stools on stage 'reminiscent of the setting made popular by the Don Juan in Hell ngs of several years ago."[357] Another critic found the posi- ng of the performers on high stools similar to the technique in Don Juan in Hell and John Brown's Body, although he pointed he actors in the Brecht production had been provided with some g space.[358]

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[355]Simon, op. cit., pp. 60-61. [356]Simon, op. cit. p. 60.

[357]Villager, loc. cit. [358]Hipp, loc. cit.

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It is unfortunate that McClain, Coleman, Kerr, and Atkinson
ot review the presentation. On the basis of the reviews avail-
it would appear most of the critics, including Taubman and Nadel,
Brecht on Brecht. Hewes was not entirely satisfied, and two
e lesser-known critics violently disliked it. The objection
d by these two regarding the choice of material would seem to
some validity, if one accepts the idea that the theatre should
de an honest picture of life--or of the life of a man.

However, the public found the material and the production to
liking, regardless of whether it was representative or mis-
sentative of Brecht. Less than two weeks after it opened for
limited run," an article appeared in the New York Times reporting
"business was booming." The production's "break even figure"
5,600 a week and the 299-seat theatre could gross $10,000 a
which meant a sizeable profit if the house was full.[359]

A London version, with Lotta Lenya, opened in September of 1962.
gent for the Brecht estate reported that twenty countries had
ssed an interest in staging Brecht on Brecht, and that fifty
ge and university groups had requested permission to produce it.[360]

The "limited run" finally came to an end more than a year after
gan. 424 performances of Brecht on Brecht were given before the
ork production closed.[361]

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[359] Zolotow, New York Times, January 15, 1962, p. 22.

[360] Milton Esterow, New York Times, August 4, 1962, p. 11.

[361] Zolotow, New York Times, June 27, 1963, p. 25.

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An Evening's Frost

Poet Robert Frost served on the faculty of the University of igan as a visiting lecturer shortly before his death.[362] Also he University of Michigan at that time were Marcella Cisney, who connected with the University's Professional Theatre Program, Don Hall, a writer and teacher. Hall had first met Frost when as sixteen and the poet was seventy-one, and he had been fascinated he man and his poetry from then on. After Frost's death, Hall d all of the poet's works and all the material he could find about man himself. From Frost's letters, conversations, biographies, poetry, he assembled An Evening's Frost.[363] On February 10, 1965, s Cisney directed Jaqueline Brooks, Donald Davis, Will Geer, and ats Cotsworth[364] in An Evening's Frost which was presented in Arbor, Michigan, as a part of the University of Michigan's atre Program. Mention was made at that time of a possible New York earance.[365] An Evening's Frost opened on October 11, 1965, at off-Broadway Theatre de Lys. Except for the substitution of i Randolph for Staats Cotsworth, the cast was the same one that presented the production at University of Michigan.

Once again the writer finds in necessary to justify the inclusion a production which does not readily fit the definition of oral

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[362] New York Times, October 12, 1965, p. 56.

[363] Martha MacGregor, New York Post, October 17, 1965.

[364] Cotsworth also appeared in I Knock at the Door and Pictures he Hallway.

[365] New York Herald Tribune, February 9, 1965.

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rpretation used in this study. Manuscript was used, but only
a prop by the narrator. There was a setting and the actors
e costumes and impersonated characters. Director Cisney de-
ibed it as a "fully staged production." However, she went on
state that it differed from a regular production in that the
ience "was asked (in effect) to use creative imagination and
centration" as the material presented outlined the life and
k of the poet from his youth to his old age.[366] Miss Brookes
ke of the "creation of Frost's world," and noted the demands
e by this sort of presentation on the audience, requiring them
use their imagination to fill in the form."[367]

The critics were not sure how to classify the production and
eral of them fell back on some form of the term "reading." This
ter admits An Evening's Frost is a long way over on the continuum
ards a "regular theatrical performance," but in view of the
nasis placed on the necessity for the audience to use their
gination, the critics' uncertainty as to what it was, and the
that the manuscript was used, though only symbolically, the
er felt it would be wiser to include the production, with
rvations, than to leave it out. Certainly in terms of material,
nould be considered in this chapter.

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[366] Letter from Miss Marcella Cisney to the author, June 10, 1968.

[367] Letter from Miss Jacqueline Brookes to the author,
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The setting, according to Miss Cisney, "was designed to
ly suggest an atmosphere related to the painting of Andrew
, using spare, New England architectural elements, a cyc and
and a constant flow of mood lighting."[368] Nadel thought
et, which he described as consisting only of platforms and
the-turned post," represented a farm kitchen.[369] Kupferberg
ned tables and chairs and "a simple background that suggests
ngland." He also noted a solo flute accompaniment "that creates
toral wistful mood."[370] Miss Cisney reported that the music
ritten by the composer who had done the score for Marat Sade.[371]

ification

There was no consensus of opinion among the reviewers as to
n Evening's Frost should be classified. Oliver found it "more
ital than a play."[372] Kupferberg entitled his review "Robert
Reading," but used the term "recital" in his discussion of
roduction.[373] Bolton decided to call it "a recitation of
ts."[374] Sherman wrote of a "dramatized compilation,"[375]

[368]Cisney, loc. cit.

[369]Norman Nadel, New York World-Telegram and Sun, October 12, 1965.

[370]Herbert Kupferberg, New York Herald Tribune, October 12, 1965.

[371]Cisney, loc. cit.

[372]Edith Oliver, The New Yorker, October 23, 1965, p. 98.

[373]Kupferberg, loc. cit.

[374]Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegraph, October 13, 1965.

[375]Susan Sherman, Village Voice, October 21, 1965.

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Tallmer labeled it a "portrait of the poet."[376] The reviewer
ıe New York Times termed it a "dramatization."[377] The critic
ıe characterized the proceedings as "dramatic readings,"[378]
the Variety reviewer discussed the "stage reading in two
"[379] Gottfried wrote:

> It's time that producers stopped palming off readings as heatre just because some lighting and a prop or two have een added. Surely there are enough people interested in ecitations of autobiographies, poetry and assorted literary ric-a-brac without any need for false pretentions. "An vening's Frost," which opened last night at the Theatre e Lys, is not a theatrical presentation.
> But for that matter, it isn't a reading either. Not so ong as it is dotted with artificial and unnecessary theatri- al equipment.[380]

r of Presentation

The narrator provided the "chronological links," while the three actors functioned in "little groups that bring a poem fe or recreate an episode in Frost's career, or provide a f historical perspective."[381] Will Geer played the older ; Donald Davis was Frost as a young man and played the male in the narrative poems; Jacqueline Brookes portrayed Frost's nd the women in his poetry; and John Randolph was the or. Geer recalled that the performers "talked to the

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[376] Jerry Tallmer, New York Post, October 12, 1965.

[377] New York Times, October 12, 1965.

[378] E.L., Cue, October 23, 1965.

[379] Kenn., Variety, October 27, 1965, p. 71.

[380] Martin Gottfried, Women's Wear Daily, October 12, 1965.

[381] Kupferberg, loc. cit.

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ıce as did the Greeks via a narrator helping the actors."[382]

Some of Frost's poems were read in toto, others only in part. Brookes reported the narrative poems such as "Home Burial" Death of the Hired Man" were acted "like plays . . . but very y . . . . it was selective, [sic.] small things had to mean suggest much." There was less movement than in an ordinary but "every move was essential, and a suggestion rather than t." Director Cisney allowed the performers to be spontaneous eir gestures, but the spontaneity had to be "within the frame-- ıtaneous gesture had to be an economical one." Miss Brookes to create a character for each of the poems. As she was antly shifting parts, the characterizations "had to be bold elective."[383]

Oppenheimer spent a considerable portion of his review dis- ng the manner of presentation. He thought it was too literal id not leave enough to the audience's imagination. He wrote ss Cisney's direction:

> She has not been content to let Frost's poems sing for nemselves, but has imposed a literalness upon their imagery. ne picture of the orchard wall that separates two fields, ne climbing of a birch tree, the vision of a rainbow are ontained so perfectly in the poetic lines that they need o embellishment. Yet, again and again, the actors indicate wall, pantomine [sic.] the climb, and look toward the back- rop as a rainbow is projected on it. Frost's magic words o not require a magic lantern.
>
> The evening is at its peak when Mr. Geer sits quietly on bench and recites a poem, or when Mr. Randolph tells of ome incident, gay or sad, in the life of the poet . . . .

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[382] Letter from Will Geer to the author, June 22, 1968.

[383] Brookes, loc. cit.

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he direction also seemed too intrusively busy. Coats are onstantly being put off and on, steps are mounted and de-cended, the stage is crossed and recrossed in the middle f a poem that would much better be spoken in immobility.[384]

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As might be surmised from the above quotation, Oppenheimer ot care for An Evening's Frost. Gottfried also was not ably impressed. He found it "a perfectly dull evening in atre (not the theatre)."[385] Kupferberg liked some parts of t complained that, despite an excellent cast and fine direc- "the evening remains a struggle."[386]

Tallmer described it as a skillful portrait of a man and a show, if over-reverent."[387] Sherman decided that, although roduction was "not terribly exciting," it provided a consist- pleasant, and occasionally moving evening.[388] Dust charac- ed it as a "'talkie' offering," but suggested to his readers alk was worth listening to.[389] Cooke recommended the program ell worth a Frost fan's time."[390]

Other critics were more enthusiastic. Nadel found An Evening's "an evening to cherish."[391] Bolton headlined his review ning's Frost' Is Superb," and urged his readers to go see it.[392]

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[384]George Oppenheimer, Newsday, October 12, 1965.

[385]Gottfried, loc. cit. [386]Kupferberg, loc. cit.

[387]Tallmer, loc. cit. [388]Sherman, loc. cit.

[389]Don Dust, Newark Evening News, October 12, 1965.

[390]Richard P. Cooke, Wall Street Journal, October 13, 1965.

[391]Nadel, loc. cit. [392]Bolton, loc. cit.

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critic for the New York Times began his review by reporting, Evening's Frost' isn't the least bit chilly. It is a warm rayal of Robert Frost, an evening when the poet spins out his story, the sweet and the following bittery, [sic.] the tragedy triumph, in words creating laughter, but even more often tears."[393]

MacGregor noted An Evening's Frost opened to "good to enthu-ic reviews," and reported that she cast her vote in the enthu-ic category.[394] Hewes found the presentation "an admirable pt to offer the essence of the poet's verse."[395] The Variety c labeled the program "a rewarding experience, and the first while production of the off-Broadway season."[396]

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The majority of the reviewers were favorably impressed by the performers. Mr. Geer, as the elder Frost, attracted the most tion. Two critics had objections to his performance. Nadel ained Geer occasionally "chews his gums--a common practive tors playing old men--so that his highly individual Frost es, in those intervals, no different from all stage grand-rs." For most of the evening however, Nadel thought the and the character were "close enough to become one, which is should be."[397] Gottfried grumbled that Geer's recitations sometimes unintelligible, while at other times they were lent.[398]

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[393]New York Times, loc. cit. [394]MacGregor, loc. cit.

[395]Henry Hewes, Saturday Review, October 30, 1965, p. 74.

[396]Kenn., loc. cit. [397]Nadel, loc. cit. [398]Gottfried, loc. cit.

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Oliver thought Geer's performance was quite impressive. She
ted if even "the original himself could have played Frost with
depth or style or relish." She liked Geer's reaction when,
rost, he listened to his poems being presented by Mr. Davis
Miss Brookes. She thought the most effective parts of the
ing were those in which "Mr. Geer is most directly in touch
the audience."[399] Dust was pleased to note Geer conveyed
n the warmth and cynicism of Frost."[400] Oppenheimer wrote
dominated the evening not only because of his impersonation
rost, but also because of the "directness and fidelity of his
ing and acting."[401]

Kupferberg was impressed not only with Geer's physical resem-
ce to Frost, but also with his "way of enhancing a poetic
's meaning with a gesture, a shrug, or a smile. He gives a
and believable performance."[402] Fellow performer Jacqueline
kes wrote of Mr. Geer, "I cannot tell you what a delight it
just to sit and listen to Will Geer in all his material. He
't recite poetry, you see, he made Birches [sic.] Mending Wall,
. This was what the production tried to do, and he succeeded
rably."[403]

Miss Brookes was recognized by several of the critics for
contributions in the distaff roles. Nadel liked the quality

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[399] Oliver, loc. cit. [400] Dust, loc. cit.

[401] Oppenheimer, loc. cit. [402] Kupferberg, loc. cit.

[403] Brookes, loc. cit.

quietness she brought to her role as the poet's wife, and was pressed with her rendition of the long poem, "The Witch of Coos."[404] lton wrote of her, "Miss Brookes has a vibrant voice, made for esy."[405] Gottfried reported that "Jacqueline Brookes, a marvelous tress, is marvelous."[406] Cooke felt that she had done especially ll in "Home Burial" and "Death of the Hired Man."[407]

The other two performers received less notice. Davis was ted for his "fine voice,"[408] but Oppenheimer, while agreeing s voice was eloquent, declared "his very sonorousness, a quality l too rare in our theatre, detracted from the simplicity of those ems that sang of pastoral and homespun themes." He thought ndolph "narrated forthrightly and well."[409] Sherman disliked ndolph. She described him as "a cross between Bennet Cerf and t Linkletter," and complained he was "too kind, too gentle, and ly too smoothly persuasive."[410]

terial

Hewes praised Hall's selection of "poems and excerpts from ings Frost said, and had said to and about him." He noted the rical moments in the program were less exciting than the humorous d dramatic ones, but acknowledged they added to one's appreciation the wide variety of Frost's poetry.[411] The critic for Variety

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[404] Nadel, loc. cit. [405] Bolton, loc. cit.
[406] Gottfried, loc. cit. [407] Cooke, loc. cit. [408] Ibid.
[409] Oppenheimer, loc. cit. [410] Sherman, loc. cit.
[411] Hewes, loc. cit.

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elt the success and the power of the evening lay "in Frost's own oems and remarks. They're full of beauty, wit and wisdom."[412]

he reviewer for Life wrote:

> The theatrical quality that comes to light in Frost lies mainly in the poems themselves. He finds dramatic significance in the most common place things: a fork in the road calls up the fateful posibilities of human choice; a tuft of flowers left standing in a mowed field bespeaks the unspoken brotherhood of man; the old chimney of a ruined house evokes the evanescence of all life. These images are so enhanced and heightened by Frost's verbal stage craft that they seem to be picked out by a spot light.[413]

A few of the critics had reservations about the material. herman decided the poetry was more dramatic when read silently han when it was on stage. "The conversational quality of Frost s emphasized to the detriment of real poetic feeling in his work. e are presented with the image rather than the poem, the masthead ther than the poet."[414] Kupferberg took issue with some of the sser-known selections which were included, and pointed out "too ften the narrator has to fall back on the thought that no matter at happened, whether literary setbacks or family deaths, Frost pt right on writing poetry."[415] Oliver was satisfied with the lance of familiar and unfamiliar poems, and found the connecting terial "appropriate and lively." However she wondered if perhaps me of the connecting material was "too appropriate--might indicate, other words, that the poems a man writes are more overtly or

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[412] Kenn., loc. cit.

[413] Tom Prideaux, Life, March 4, 1966, p. 15.

[414] Sherman, loc. cit. [415] Kupferberg, loc. cit.

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e." As an example, she pointed out the news of the death of one
Frost's children was followed immediately by the recitation of
me Burial."[416]

mparisons

The only critic to make a comparison between An Evening's Frost
d another oral interpretation production was Oppenheimer, who "was
minded of the rich drama of John Gielgud's Ages of Man when, with
arcely a move, he evoked the majesty, the tragedy and the comedy of
kespeare's plays and sonnets." He wished that Geer would have
stricted his movements as Gielgud had done.[417] Miss Cisney recalled
at she was influenced "to some general degree," by Spoon River and
der Milk Wood.[418] Geer thought the form of the production was
milar to his FOLKSAY productions of Whitman, Twain, London and
ier authors.[419] An Evening's Frost ran for 132 performances.

Summary

The four solo productions in this chapter were performed by
person who selected and adapted the material. Paul Shyre, who
pted three volumes of the O'Casey autobiography, acted in the
st two presentations, and directed the third. George Tabori,
echt on Brecht), and Don Hall, (An Evening's Frost), were the
y adapters not directly connected with the actual performance.

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[416]Oliver, op. cit., pp. 97-98. [417]Oppenheimer, loc. cit.
[418]Cisney, loc. cit. [419]Geer, loc. cit.

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A variety of material was used. Some productions featured a
ure of an author's work: his songs, quips, essays, letters,
plays; as in the case of Brecht. Others used excerpts from
one type of the author's literary efforts, such as Millay's
ry or Thomas' short stories. These excerpts were fitted to-
her with bibliographical data which was supplied by the author
elf, in the form of letters or recollections, or which was
ered from biographers or contemporaries of the author. Some-
s editorial comments were made by the adaptor about the person
about his works. The dramatization of the three volumes of the
sey autobiography were different in that the material used was
author's own story of his early life as well as an example of
lyrical writing.

Selection of the material presented difficulties for some
the adaptors. Three of the solo performers dealt with most
the artistically productive life of their particular author,
did An Evening's Frost. Tabori's adaptation of Brecht's life
works also included Brecht's views of life.

Williams limited his consideration of Dylan Thomas to Thomas'
ood years. Shyre was fortunate in that each volume of the
biography concerned a segment of O'Casey's early life. There-
, Shyre and Williams did not have the same type of problem as
others in selecting material which was representative of all
cts of an author's life.

None of the solo performers attempted to assume the appearance
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ecame" the author he was presenting. The acting in both the solo
d the group productions was praised by most of the critics.

An Evening's Frost and Drums Under the Windows used fairly
aborate settings--for oral interpretation productions, and used
stume. The actors in the third segment of O'Casey's life acted
t vignettes, while the performers in An Evening's Frost acted
t his narrative poems and segments of his life. Drums Under
e Windows was decidedly different from its two predecessors,
ere the actors wore street clothes and were restricted to stools
d lecterns in front of a cyclorama. According to adaptor Shyre,
e change was necessary because the material required more flexi-
lity than the production method used in the previous two allowed.
Brecht on Brecht, the manner of presentation varied according
the needs of the material; with the actors using scripts and
mited movement for part of the evening, and then abandoning
e stools and scripts to act out scenes from Brecht's plays.

Three solo productions used pieces of furniture to suggest
terior settings. The setting for the Thomas program consisted
a chair and a spotlighted screen with Thomas' signature on it.
e featured item in the Brecht on Brecht presentation was a large
otograph of the author glaring out at the audience.

Scripts or books were in evidence in all the productions,
t they were used primarily to remind the audience the presen-
tion was intended as a sharing of a literary experience. In
ums Under the Windows and An Evening's Frost, only the narrator
d a script. Williams carried in a pile of notebooks at the

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inning of his program, but he did not read from them, or even tend to read from them.

The critical response to A Boy Growing Up was fairly typical the reviewers' feelings regarding the productions of an artist's e and work as "theatre." Gassner thought the production was y well done and very enjoyable, but he warned that "readings ng us to a borderline between dramatic and non-dramatic art t cannot be crossed without risk."[420] McClain maintained it "not theatre" and felt Williams should present his program an auditorium rather than in a theatre, but he confessed, "I not pretend that I had a bad time."[421] Driver was thoroughly aptured with both A Boy Growing Up and I Knock at the Door.

> Part of the delight of the theatre is that it has endless ways of achieving its magic. We do not ask of it, therefore, whether it is long or short, grand or petite, professional or amature, old or new, conventional or unconventional. We ask whether it has unique living moments. If they are there, it is enough, what ever the means.
> Two theatres in New York now happen to be presenting attractions which achieve their theatrical moments through readings of prose works . . . . Both of them, by the most economical of means, dispensing with the trappings of scenery, provide unforgetable moments of the vivid imagination.[422]

Gassner was impressed with Pictures in the Hallway, and called 'genuine theatre." However, he hastened to add that he still reservations about readings. "Dialogues and episodes carved of books should not be considered substitutes for plays written

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[420] John Gassner, Theatre at the Crossroads, p. 288.

[421] John McClain, New York Journal American, October 8, 1957.

[422] Tom F. Driver, Christian Century, October 30, 1957, p. 1288.

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plays."[423] McClain did not think it was "exactly theatre," he reported it did not pretend to be theatre.[424] Atkinson ntained Pictures in the Hallway was "theatre."

> For the production of Pictures in the Hallway is theatre. After a routine beginning it does the things that good theatre does. It creates characters. It defines situations. By stimulating the imagination it brings alive the humor and pathos of a group of people who are trying to fit themselves into the scheme of life.
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> . . . not just a pleasant Sunday reading but a fresh and original work of art. The passion had crowded the plank with multitudes, as in the classical tradition.[425]

The production of I Knock at the Door caused Herridge to te, "Here is rich stirring theatre for all its economy of set, tumes, and movement. O'Casey's greatness is more in evidence n it has been in some of his plays."[426] Coleman felt that "in s instance, that word 'reading' is misleading, for here is ing of high order."[427]

McClain however, returned to his usual position on readings. review of I Knock at the Door was entitled "A Charming Tale-- It's Not 'Theatre.'" He explained that he had no quarrel with form used; his objection was that it did not belong in the atre. "I think clients visiting a legitimate theatre have a

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[423] Gassner, op. cit., pp. 285-286.

[424] John McClain, New York Journal American, September 17, 1956.

[425] Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, September 17, 1956.

[426] Frances Herridge, New York Post, September 30, 1957, R, p. 248.

[427] Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, October 3, 1957, R, p. 247.

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ght to expect a dramatic production, and this is a far cry from
y such."[428]

McClain was more favorably disposed towards the third O'Casey
rogram, Drums Under the Windows, which was more of a theatrical
roduction than the first two, with costumes, some scenery, and
cted out vignettes. He described it as "a bright and rewarding
vening in the theatre."[429] Coleman called it "stimulating and
ripping theatre . . . . one of the most rewarding evenings we've
pent in the showshops this semester."[430]

Critical opinion was sharply divided as to whether or not
recht on Brecht constituted theatre. Herridge liked some parts of
t, but decided that "it is not very solid or satisfying for an
ntire evening of theatre."[431] The critic for the Villager labeled
t as "theatre of the highest order: enlightening, illuminating,
eeply moving and unexpectedly biting and witty, revealing the genius
nd scope of Brecht as playwright, poet, and satirist."[432]

An Evening's Frost, which used costumes and a setting and
ad acted out vignettes, incurred Gottfried's displeasure. He did
ot consider it "theatre," but he complained that the setting and
ostumes prevented it from being considered a "reading."[433] Bolton,

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[428] John McClain, New York Journal American, September 30, 1957, TCR, p. 249.

[429] _____, October 14, 1960.

[430] Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, October 14, 1960.

[431] Frances Herridge, New York Post, January 4, 1962.

[432] Villager, January 11, 1962.

[433] Martin Gottfried, Women's Wear Daily, October 12, 1965.

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usually appreciated oral interpretation productions, thought
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theatre for?' It is not easy to answer that. It is for many
ngs, of which this, undoubtedly, is one of the most beautiful.
s makes theatre something more than a caprice or a superficial
l merely to entertain. This goes into the human profundities."[434]

Once again, there was no uniformity of opinion as to whether or
t oral interpretation productions constituted "theatre." McClain
mained fairly consistent in his opposition to these presentations
Broadway theatres, although he admitted some of them were very
ll done and were enjoyable. Other critics accepted some productions
"theatre," but not others.

All of the productions obtained the endorsement of the majority
the critics. Frequently however, this endorsement was qualified
an expression of doubt on the part of the reviewer regarding the
peal of the production for the "general public." In view of the
ct six of the productions had "limited runs," and at least two
re financial failures, it would seem the critics' concern was
stified. Five of the six productions which had short runs were
oduced on Broadway. The sixth presentation, Miss Webster's The
ontes, was given off-Broadway and apparently had a "limited run"
ause Miss Webster did not wish to extend her engagement rather
n because of a lack of audience support. The three productions
ch enjoyed considerable popularity were also off-Broadway productions.
ms Under the Windows ran for 109 performances, An Evening's Frost
for 132, and Brecht on Brecht ran for 424.

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[434]Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegraph, October 13, 1965.

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CHAPTER VII

MISCELLANEOUS PRODUCTIONS

This chapter is a heterogeneous amalgamation of productions which did not fit into the three preceding chapters. Two of the presentations, Moby Dick and U.S.A. were adaptations of novels; Dear Liar was a dramatization of the correspondence between Shaw and Mrs. Campbell; Under Milk Wood was written for radio; and Telemachus Clay was written specifically for presentation in a manner quite similar to that used by several of the more formal oral interpretation productions. In the discussions of Under Milk Wood and of Moby Dick, brief summaries of productions outside the limitations of the study have been included so that the reader might compare and contrast the different versions.

Only Dear Liar and the initial presentation of Under Milk Wood clearly fit the definition of oral interpretation used in this study. The rest are mutants which belong somewhere in that nebulous area between oral interpretation and "regular" theatre. The writer has attempted, at the beginning of the discussion of each of these "questionable" productions, to justify its presence in the study. The writer's general rationale for including these hybrids is the belief that they are a part, though perhaps only a very peripheral part, of the total picture of professional oral interpretation. This belief is strengthened by the fact the critics frequently

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lassify these productions as some variety of a "reading," and often efer to them in reviews of later presentations which are clearly ithin the definition of oral interpretation.

Moby Dick was the only solo production in this chapter, and only ne presentation, Dear Liar, appeared on Broadway. This was also he only production to have well-known performers. Two of the off-Broadway productions, Telemachus Clay and U.S.A. enjoyed runs of ore than 100 performances.

Moby Dick

Herman Melville's Moby Dick first appeared on stage at the Phoenix Theatre on April 26, 1955, as part of the "sideshow series" the Phoenix sponsored throughout the season. Jerome Kilty directed Howard Rodman's adaptation of the novel. Although it was only presented once, and is therefore technically outside the limitations of this study, several critics considered it important enough to review, and critiques of the later solo production of Moby Dick made frequent reference to the Phoenix presentation. Consequently, a brief discussion of it has been included.

The simple setting represented a ship. It consisted of a tall pole for a mast, a platform for the deck, a few barrels, and some nnautical music stands. Kerr suggested that the music stands and he scripts they held suggested the H.M.S. Pinafore as much as they id the Pequod.[1] The production also utilized a sky-blue backdrop, ighting effects, and original music.[2]

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[1]Walter Kerr, New York Herald Tribune, April 27, 1955.

[2]Grif., Variety, May 4, 1955, p. 54.

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Adaptor Rodman called it a "staged reading," and Gelb and Kerr followed his suggestion in their reviews.[3] Nathan classified it as one of "those dramatic reading exhibits,"[4] and Coleman simply called it "an adaptation."[5]

Moby Dick was presented in what the Variety critic described as a "combination of narration, reading, acting and pantomime."[6] The reviewer for the Morning Telegraph complained that Rodman had been unable to decide whether to structure the material as a reading, like Don Juan in Hell, or as a drama, a la The Caine Mutiny Court Martial. As a result, "the actors ran from their lecterns holding their scripts into vigorous dramatic actions."[7]

Kerr reported the players alternated between "open dramatic passages and rather relaxed sessions with the script." He noted the performers were supported by a number of sea chanteys, a good-sized orchestra, "an evocative assortment of off-stage halloos, and some surprisingly elaborate thunder-and-lightening effects."[8]

The only reviewer who liked Moby Dick was Coleman, who found it an exciting and rewarding evening.[9] The critic for Variety described it as interesting, though not very successful.[10] Gelb admitted it was a "highly professional production," with moments

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[3]Arthur Gelb, New York Times, April 27, 1955, p. 26. Kerr, loc. cit.

[4]George Jean Nathan, New York Journal American, June 18, 1955.

[5]Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, April 26, 1955.

[6]Grif., loc. cit. [7]New York Morning Telegraph, May 5, 1955.

[8]Kerr, loc. cit. [9]Coleman, loc. cit. [10]Grif., loc. cit.

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of beauty, but he thought the stage adaptation was somewhat fruitless, and suggested the motion picture medium was the only one which could successfully grasp the scope of the novel.[11] Kerr was dissatisfied with the combination of narration and action.[12] Nathan left early.[13]

The cast of eighteen was headed by Morris Carnovsky as Captain Ahab. The narrator, Ishmael, played by Paul Sparer, was mentioned favorably by most of the critics, but Carnovsky's performance won only the praise of Coleman.[14] Gelb complained Rodman's adaptation substituted a lackluster Captain Ahab for the demented avenger, and accused Carnovsky of playing the part as though the Captain were "more cantankerous than possessed. He growls rather than thunders. His subdued performance conveys sullenness rather than smoldering fury."[15] Kerr thought Carnovsky looked like "an impressive chin-whiskered Ahab," but disliked his mixture of reading and acting. "Mr. Carnovsky's arm is no sooner raised, in magestic fury, than he must drop it to glance over his shoulder and look at a page. The theatrical gesture rides toward the heavens; the actor's eye is glued to the music stand."[16] Nathan grumbled:

> I think I have as elastic an imagination as the next man, but when I am requested to imagine as the vengeful Captain Ahab an actor with a slight Yiddish accent bursting his blood vessels with excitement in [sic.] triumphantly pointing out into the audience at Brooks Atkinson and identifying him as the vicious great white whale, I believe I am to be forgiven for vamoosing and hieing me in a hurry right over to Luchow's.[17]

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[11] Gelb, loc. cit. [12] Kerr, loc. cit. [13] Nathan, loc. cit.
[14] Coleman, loc. cit. [15] Gelb, loc. cit. [16] Kerr, loc. cit.
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None of the reviewers had anything disparaging to say about Melville's novel in its original form. The Variety critic observed it was very dramatic as a novel, but the stage version lacked excitement. He also objected to adapter Rodman's deletion of the sermon on Jonah, which he regarded as one of the key passages of the book.[18] Kerr objected to the way in which Rodman mixed the narration and the action

> Instead of using the narration to set a scene and then letting the scene play itself out, Mr. Rodman has preferred to blend the two endlessly; they tangle, twist, and bump into each other, each robbing the other of cumulative effect.
> It's always possible to read a work aloud and arrive at one kind of impact; it's also possible to throw out the reading, plunge into sustained dialogue, and arrive at another kind. Here the *semi*-dramatization teases us away from the narration by seeming to promise us something more; and the fact that the narration is going to come sneaking back about two seconds later keeps the promise from ever being realized. In the end, this particular mixture of forms is merely frustrating.[19]

The critic for the Morning Telegraph, as noted earlier, thought the stage version was an unfortunate cross between Don Juan in Hell and The Caine Mutiny Court Martial.[20] Coleman described the manner of presentation as similar to the style developed by Laughton and Gregory for Don Juan in Hell and John Brown's Body.[21] Nathan wrote:

> I don't know how you feel about it, but I am ready to call it a day for those dramatic reading exhibits. Some of them, notably Paul Gregory's reader show of Shaw's "Don Juan in Hell," have been acceptable, but there have been so many bad imitations since then that the whole idea has worn out its theatrical welcome. The latest one, a reading of Melville's Moby Dick down at the Phoenix Theatre, was the last straw.[22]

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[18] Grif., loc. cit. [19] Kerr, loc. cit.

[20] New York Morning Telegraph, loc. cit.

[21] Coleman, loc. cit. [22] Nathan, loc. cit.

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Moby Dick surfaced again six years later at the Madison Avenue Playhouse and, to paraphrase Frances Herridge, claimed another victim.[23] Philip Hanson opened in his own one-man arrangement of the novel on April 10, 1961.

Setting and Accesories

Hanson, wearing a black turtle-necked sweater and black slacks, appeared on an almost empty stage in front of a black backdrop. The only props were a chair and a small bench. Hanson provided his own music, singing a variety of sea chanteys and accompanying himself on a zither.[24] The lighting was described as "dramatic and effective."[25]

Classification

The reviewers were fairly uniform in their classification of the production. The various labels included a "one-man show,"[26] a "one-man arrangement,"[27] a "one-man version,"[28] and a "solo performance."[29]

Manner of Presentation

Hanson portrayed eighteen characters by changing his voice, his facial expression, his walk and his gestures for each character.

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[23]Frances Herridge, New York Post, April 11, 1961.

[24]Robert Coleman, New York Mirror, April 11, 1961.

[25]Kali., Variety, May 3, 1961, p. 82.

[26]Louis Calta, New York Times, April 11, 1961, p. 41.
Herbert Kupferberg, New York Herald Tribune, April 11, 1961.
Whitney Balliett, The New Yorker, April 22, 1961, p. 118.

[27]Coleman, loc. cit. [28]Herridge, loc. cit. [29]Kali., loc. cit.

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He did not use a book or manuscript at any time.[30] Schmidt, who did not like the production, wrote that Hanson jumped "from side to side to take two sides in a dialogue involving ocean ship and whale."[31]

Verdict

O'Connor entitled his review, "Whale of 1-Man Show,"[32] and Coleman headlined his report "Hanson Puts over 'Moby Dick'"[33] The rest of the critics vetoed the production. Herridge credited Hanson with good intentions in his attempt "to recreate a great work of literature," but reported that he failed miserably and succeeded only in reducing "the soaring allegory . . . to a bedtime story for schoolboys."[34] Kupferberg began his review with the Biblical quotation, "Canst thou draw out leviathan with a hook?" He thought that fairly well summed up what Hanson had tried to do and credited him with making a magnificent, though not entirely successful, attempt.[35]

Mishkin concluded his review, "So far as Melville's 'Moby Dick' and Mr. Hanson are concerned, there is only this to be said: this thing is bigger than both of us."[36] Calta praised Hanson's courage and "herculean try," but he did not like the production.[37] The reviewer for The New Yorker left after the first half of the program.[38]

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[30] Jim O'Connor, New York Journal American, April 11, 1961.

[31] Sandra Schmidt, Village Voice, April 20, 1961.

[32] O'Conner, loc. cit. [33] Coleman, loc. cit.

[34] Herridge, loc. cit. [35] Kupferberg, loc. cit.

[36] Leo Mishkin, New York Morning Telegraph, April 12, 1961.

[37] Calta, loc. cit.

[38] Balliett, loc. cit.

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Wall Street Journal critic Cooke feared the evening would be of interest only to those interested in Moby Dick, or whales, or protean acting.[39]

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The reviewers paid tribute to Hanson's aspirations and courage, ut generally they were not impressed with his histrionic talents. lthough O'Connor was one of the two critics who liked the production, ie had to admit two hours of watching just one man became "a little onotonous at times."[40] The Variety critic found some of Hanson's haracters interesting, but complained they were only surface portrayals and the overall effect Hanson created was "diffuse and overambitious."[41] Saffron liked some of Hanson's work, but disliked the way in which three of his characters "often melt together in the same simian crouch and the by-cracky New England dialect."[42] Schmidt wrote of his acting:

> Mr. Hanson counts on the language to give individuality to his characters, using accent, diction, and pitch to create an amazing number and variety of voices. To give the audience's eyes something to do, he has chosen a distinguishing gesture for each voice. Captain Ahab has a stiff leg and glowering face. Starbuck stands very straight with his fists clenched. Flash squats and wipes his hands down the back of his pants.[43]

Mishkin was satisfied that Hanson provided suitable "surface indications" of the various characters, but missed the "sweep and majesty" of the novel.[44] Calta found Hanson lacking in his ability

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[39] Richard P. Cooke, Wall Street Journal, April 13, 1961.

[40] O'Connor, loc. cit. [41] Kali., loc. cit.

[42] Robert Saffron, New York World-Telegram and Sun, April 11, 1961.

[43] Schmidt, loc. cit. [44] Mishkin, loc. cit.

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o "re-create the proper *sense* of magic and illusion."[45] Coleman egretfully admitted Hanson was "no John Gielgud, Emlyn Williams, ichael MacLiammoir or Hal Holbrook when it comes to solo showman-hip."[46] Herridge wrote of Hanson's characterizations:

> Ahab takes on the sepulchral tones of the ghost in 'Hamlet,' varying the monotony only when he shouts 'There she blows' and screams imprecations at the invisible foe. Ishmael becomes an effete deckhand with no hint of the detached artist that Melville saw in him. Queequeg, the ship's mates and carpenter become little more than oddball sketches with which to amuse young listeners.[47]

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The consensus of opinion regarding the suitability of the aterial for stage presentation was summed up by Saffron, who wrote, Confining 'Moby Dick' to the stage seems to be the same defiance f impossible odds as Ahab's quest of the whale." He doubted if 'Sir Laurence Olivier plus all the thespian knights of the British Empire plus all our own Tony Award peerage could pul [sic.] lelville's masterpiece on the stage."[48] Calta suggested the limited scope of the theatre and the magnitude of the novel made it diffi-cult, if not impossible, to fit the saga on the stage. He felt hat, with the possible exception of films, Moby Dick was best njoyed "between covers."[49] The critic for Variety suggested anson might have had better success with the Melville epic had e chosen one segment of the novel rather than attempting to tele-scope the whole saga.[50] The New Yorker reviewer was distressed to

[45]Calta, loc. cit. [46]Coleman, loc. cit. [47]Herridge, loc. cit.
[48]Saffron, loc. cit. [49]Calta, loc. cit. [50]Kali., loc. cit.

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ind Hanson had omitted the sermon in the seamen's chapel. He ompared this to "serving an artichoke without its heart."[51]

omparisons

Hal Holbrook's one-man show was mentioned three times,[52] robably because John Lotos, who produced Hanson's show, also roduced Mark Twain Tonight! Coleman also cited the solo perfor- ances of Gielgud, Williams, and MacLiammoir.[53] Three reviewers eferred to the Phoenix production when, as Saffron recalled, Morris Carnovsky and a large cast were becalmed in a sea of ords."[54]

Schmidt referred to the production of Under Milk Wood, which was running at that time at the Circle in the Square, and noted both Thomas' poem and Melville's novel had been transformed into plays "for the ears."[55] Mishkin compared Hanson's attempt to bring Moby Dick to life with what would happen "if a highly talented, and technically expert concert singer hired Town Hall, for instance, to recreate, let us say, all four of the Wagnerian Ring Cycle operas all by himself."[56] Moby Dick went under after seven performances.

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[51] Balliett, loc. cit.

[52] Kali., loc. cit.
Coleman, loc. cit.
Herridge, loc. cit.

[53] Coleman, loc. cit.

[54] Saffron, loc. cit.
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[55] Schmidt, loc. cit. [56] Mishkin, loc. cit.

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Under Milk Wood

The first of the group productions in the miscellaneous category to be presented was Welsh poet Dylan Thomas' Under Milk Wood. Thomas had worked intermittently on this "play for voices" for more than ten years and completed it about a month before his death. In 1943, the British Broadcasting Company commissioned Thomas to do a short radio talk. He decided to describe a small mythical Welsh seaside town. He called it Quite Early One Morning, and although the program was very brief, it was the forerunner of Under Milk Wood. The dreams of the sleeping townfolk were revealed and their morning activities reported. Some of the same characters who appeared in the radio talk appeared in Under Milk Wood.

The radio program was so successful that Thomas decided to expand it. He tried to develop some sort of a plot to involve the residents of Llareggub, but eventually he decided to use a twenty-four hour time sequence as his framework. Under Milk Wood was only about two-thirds complete when it was read at the Kaufmann Auditorium on May 14, 1953. Thomas himself read the parts of the First Voice and the Reverend Eli Jenkins.[57] The reading was very well received and was repeated two weeks later.[58] The reviewer for the New York Times called the May 14 production the "world premiere" of Under

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[57] Dylan Thomas, Under Milk Wood, with a preface by Daniel Jones (New York: New Direction Books, 1954), pp. vii-x.

[58] Apparently none of the critics attended the first performance, and unfortunately, the writer has only been able to find three reviews for the May 28, 1953, presentation.

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Milk Wood.[59] However, Monroe's thesis, "The Group Reading of Drama" indicates the "voice play" was first presented in 1952 at Harvard's Fogg Museum.[60]

Setting and Accessories

Six performers sat on stools with music stands in front of them. At the back of the stage was a cyclorama on which lighting changes indicated the passage of time. The players wore ordinary dress.[61]

Classification

The reviewer for the New York Times did not classify the production, but called the material a "verse play."[62] The Variety critic described the presentation as the "latest in the dramatic reading vogue."[63] Saturday Review critic Henry Hewes characterized it as a "reading piece."[64] Nancy Wickwire, one of the performers, called Under Milk Wood a "concert reading."[65]

Manner of Presentation

About sixty-five inhabitants of Llareggub were introduced, with each of the performers, with the exception of Thomas, reading

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[59] H. B., New York Times, May 29, 1953, p. 17.

[60] Elizabeth Annette Monroe, "The Group Reading of Drama: Its Essence and Aesthetic Principles" (unpublished dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1963), p. 33.

[61] Ibid. [62] H.B., loc. cit.

[63] Vene., Variety, June 3, 1953, p. 58.

[64] Henry Hewes, Saturday Review, June 6, 1953, p. 25.

[65] Letter from Miss Nancy Wickwire to the author, June 3, 1968. Miss Wickwire also participated in The Golden Age.

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many parts. The players never left their stools.[66] They had manuscripts on the stands in front of them, but actress Wickwire recalled everyone had his lines completely memorized.[67]

Verdict

The reviewer for Variety thought Under Milk Wood was "easily understandable," with sufficient humor and drama to appeal to other audiences, particularly those in college and university towns.[68] The New York Times critic reported, "The generally high-brow audience responded enthusiastically both to the Welsh poet's vigorous versification and vigorous wit."[69] Hewes described the production as "probably the richest and certainly the earthiest theatre experience this season."[70]

Acting

Appearing with Thomas were Dion Allen, Roy Poole, Allen Collins, Sada Thompson, and Nancy Wickwire. The Variety critic described the performers as a "uniformly good group." He singled out Nancy Wickwire for the emotional depth and subtlty she brought to a wide range of characters, and Thomas for his reading of the introductory and narrative sections.[71] Hewes called Thomas "one of the most effective poetry readers in the business," and praised the other members of the company for their clear and intelligent reading of a script which required them to make rapid shifts into

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[66]Monroe, loc. cit. [67]Wickwire, loc. cit. [68]Vene., loc. cit.
[69]H. B., loc. cit. [70]Hewes, loc. cit. [71]Vene., loc. cit.

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a wide range of dialects and age brackets. Hewes did admit to occasional confusion as to the identity of some of the characters, but felt this was inevitable with so many different people being presented in such a short time.[72] The reviewer for the New York Times wrote that the cast "attacked the poetry with intelligence and taste." He described all the performers as "better than competent" and found Actresses Wickwire and Thompson "outstanding."[73]

Material

Under Milk Wood presented twenty-four hours in the lives of the strange and wonderful people of a Welsh village named Llareggub. As noted previously, Thomas tried to develop a plot to attach his people to, but he found it too restricting and so abandoned it. He wrote of the lack of a plot, "I guess I just got boozed up on the language."[74] The New York Times critic pointed out the play was actually "not a play," at least in the sense of the usual dramatic structure. Instead of developing from beginning to end, it used a circular sort of progression, with the story beginning one night and ending the next. He thought Thomas was more effective as a dramatist "in the transitions from one verbal scene to another," and found the verse easy to understand, "in spite of the fact that Mr. Thomas can be a highly difficult 'modern' in his straight poetry."[75] The reviewer for Variety was especially impressed with the portraits Thomas painted of the people of Llareggub.[76] Hewes also wrote of

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[72]Hewes, loc. cit. [73]H.B., loc. cit. [74]Hewes, loc. cit.
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the colorful descriptions of the characters and their activities. Hewes was the only critic to refer to the origin of the play as he pointed out that it was "more radio documentary than it is stage drama."[77]

Comparisons

The New York Times critic described Under Milk Wood as "a vast bawdy panoramic pastoral, a Welsh 'Our Town,' in which an omnipresent commentator sets the scenes or the situations or the relationships and then the actors take over the dialogue that unfolds."[78] Hewes admitted Under Milk Wood might be called "the Welsh version of 'Our Town,'" but he pointed out that Wilder's play was a "lament for the missed richness of life in a strict and outwardly sane New England community," while Thomas' work was a "celebration of the ways the outwardly peculiar persons of Llareggub each find the richness of life in his or her own fashion."[79] The Variety reviewer likened Thomas to Dickens in his ability to draw vivid, concise character sketches. He also called the production the "latest in the dramatic reading vogue."[80]

Thomas died in November of 1953. On February 8, 1954, a memorial performance of Under Milk Wood was presented at the Kaufmann Auditorium. The proceeds went to the Dylan Thomas Memorial Fund. Everyone, including the ushers, donated their services

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[77]Hewes, loc. cit. [78]H. B., loc. cit.

[79]Hewes, loc. cit. [80]Vene., loc. cit.

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for the evening. Broadway actor Walter Abel read the parts Thomas had read. The other cast members were the same ones who had done the two readings with Thomas the preceding year.[81]

Under Milk Wood was published by New Directions in 1954, and Brooks Atkinson wrote an article on the significance of the play. He found this "verse drama" important for three reasons: first, "in its own right as vigorous writing and hearty characterization," second, for the contrast it provided with Our Town, and third, because of the originality of the form. Although Under Milk Wood was similar to the Laughton-Gregory productions of Don Juan in Hell and John Brown's Body, it was different in that it was written specifically to be read. Atkinson discussed this at some length.

> Not the least reason for regretting Mr. Thomas' untimely death is the fact that out of this interesting experiment he might have created a theatre form that would have restored the English speaking drama to the simple candor it had originally.
>
> As the old phrase puts it, the theatre is a plank and a passion. Its sole function is to communicate ideas and emotions through actors to an audience. To read "Under Milk Wood" is to realize how extravagant, cumbersome and complex a simple art has become in the theatre.
>
> Probably "Under Milk Wood" is too light and diffuse to conquer an audience in a large theatre as triumphantly as "Don Juan in Hell" and "John Brown's Body" did. The substance is not sufficiently dramatized. But it is a long step forward toward the creation of a form that could have great power in the theatre and could put an author and an audience together without the interposition of a formal theatre production. If the professional theatre is ever smothered under the dead weight of its own top heavy structure, the form of "Under Milk Wood" could provide a fresh beginning.[82]

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[81] Lewis Funke, New York Times, February 7, 1954, Sec. II, p. 1.

[82] Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, May 16, 1954, Sec. II, p. 1.

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Under Milk Wood on Broadway

The "play for voices" came to Broadway as a fully staged production in 1957, after a triumphant run in London's West End. Most of the same cast appeared in the New York version, but the play was far less successful than it had been in England. Although this presentation is obviously not an oral interpretation production, a brief discussion is included so that the reader may compare two very different forms of presentation of the same material.

The performers wore costumes which were described as "atmospheric" and appropriate for seaside villagers. The setting was flexible and served for numerous changes of locale. "A light discloses an old sea captain on a balcony, little curtains part to provide peeps into privacy, a split level leads under trees, across clover and among lovers."[83] Chapman did not like it. He complained it failed to capture any of the "essential beauty of the author's many images."[84] Atkinson began his review with the question: "Why the scenery?"[85]

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[83]Frank Aston, New York World-Telegram and Sun, October 16, 1957, NYTCR, p. 224.

[84]John Chapman, New York Daily News, October 16, 1957, NYTCR, p. 223.

[85]Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, October 16, 1957, p. 42.

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Six of the critics called Under Milk Wood a play.[86] Kerr noted it had been a "radio play" in its original form and referred to what was then being presented on Broadway as the "current theatrical arrangement."[87]

The show had a very large cast but it was still necessary for the thirty-two performers to double up on many of the parts as they presented the "idlers, soaks, gossips, and philanders."[88] One actor, Donald Houston, served as the narrator who "sets the stage on Thomas's brilliant verbiage and then turns the proceedings over to the actors."[89] The players acted out much of the poem, and two critics took issue with what they considered to be overdramatization. The critic for Variety complained that "amidst so much verbalization the staging is almost extraneous visualization."[90] Atkinson found the stage pictures "distracting" and complained they shattered the solidity of the poem. "The great image of a breathing, living, aimless community has been reduced in size and beauty."[91]

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[86]Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, October 16, 1957, NYTCR, p. 223.
John McClain, New York Journal American, October 16, 1957, NYTCR, p. 223.
Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, October 16, 1957, NYTCR, p. 224.
Chapman, loc. cit.
Aston, loc. cit.
Atkinson, loc. cit.

[87]Walter Kerr, New York Herald Tribune, October 16, 1957, NYTCR, p. 223.

[88]Coleman, loc. cit.

[89]McClain, loc. cit.

[90]Landi., Variety, October 23, 1957, p. 68.

[91]Atkinson, loc. cit.

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The most favorable reaction to the play came from Aston, and it was a rather qualified endorsement. He warned prospective audiences that they must "expect to use an inner eye to get the most from the 'visual poetry'" of Under Milk Wood. He was afraid only a "fringe" of the public would be willing to put forth this extra effort, but he thought those who were willing would like the play a great deal.[92] Watts refused to urge his readers to go or not to go because he felt their response to the play would depend entirely on what they went to the theatre for. He personally found it "too piecemeal in its dramatic interest and too lacking in cumulative theatrical power to be satisfying on the stage." He admitted there were some beautiful moments in the production, and he ended his review with, "Maybe you should see 'Under Milk Wood.'"[93] Chapman described the play as "a lovely and mildly theatrical stage poem," but doubted most audiences would be very interested in it.[94] McClain suggested the play was a treat--but for a very limited clientele.

> It is for the few who have a delight in the alliteration and the whimsy and the strange tricks that can be played with our language. It is for those who can weave their own web of imagery around the people in a small town in Wales, time: the present. For these few it is a poetic and wonderfully gratifying exposition of almost everything.[95]

Coleman found the play "too macabre" and thought it presented the Welsh in an uncomplementary light. He recommended the evening for "pessimists, Stoics, or devotees of Dylan Thomas."[96] Kerr disliked

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[92] Aston, loc. cit. [93] Watts, loc. cit. [94] Chapman, loc. cit.
[95] McClain, loc. cit. [96] Coleman, loc. cit.

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the manner in which the play was presented. He thought it was done as a sort of "clodhopping farce."[97] Atkinson felt director Cleverdon had been extremely skillful in his staging and he admitted the performers were superb, but he did not think the results were successful.

> And yet, alas, the staged version of "Under Milk Wood" is a work of art torn out of context. It is the portrait of a town broken into little pieces. It is busy and diffuse. Instead of capturing the languid meditative mood of a town seen from a long distance, it breaks in small fragments, and the town seems to be frenetic and shrill.[98]

Nearly all the critics had praise for the acting in general and particularly for narrator Donald Houston. With the exception of Coleman, the reviewers liked the material and were especially impressed with Thomas' flare for bringing out the beauty of the English language.

Once again, several comparisons were made between Under Milk Wood and Our Town. Watts felt Our Town had more dramatic effectiveness, but Under Milk Wood was richer in verbal beauty.[99] Coleman thought Wilder was the better stage poet because he provided his play with a story line, but he had to admit Thomas' lines were more beautiful.[100] Atkinson found Our Town much better suited for the stage and reminded his readers Wilder had written it specifically for the stage, while Thomas had written Under Milk Wood for the radio.[101] McClain and Chapman noted both productions relied heavily on a narrator.[102]

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[97] Kerr, loc. cit. [98] Atkinson, loc. cit. [99] Watts, loc. cit.
[100] Coleman, loc. cit. [101] Atkinson, loc. cit.
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As one might surmise from the reviews, Under Milk Wood, as a fully staged Broadway presentation, was not a critical success. It was also not a popular success. It closed after thirty-nine performances.

Under Milk Wood at the Circle in the Square

The Thomas poem next attracted critical attention in March of 1961, when it was produced by the Circle in the Square. This version had only ten people and very simple settings. The scenery consisted of five platforms toward the back of the stage, a few stools, and some latticed screens at the rear. The performers wore gray and black.[103] According to critic Taubman, the music suggested "the melodic largesse of Wales."[104] Balliett thought the lighting director failed to capitalize on the opportunity to develop some spectacular lighting effects which could have been achieved through the use of pin spots, sudden blackouts and subtle shifting of light levels. He complained the proceedings were carried on primarily under "brilliant illumination which looks right through the little dreams and ghosts that rustle ceaselessly through Thomas's poems."[105] The few critics who reviewed the production did not classify it beyond observing it was "not a play."[106]

Most of the ten performers played several roles. "The production provided swift vignettes in speech, action and song,"

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[103]Tom F. Driver, Christian Century, April 26, 1961, p. 535.

[104]Howard Taubman, New York Times, March 30, 1961, p. 25.

[105]Whitney Balliett, The New Yorker, April 8, 1961, p. 134.

[106]Driver, loc. cit.

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ported Taubman.[107] The cast laid down in fields and in boats, etended they were asleep, pretended they were drowned sailors, etended they were clocks, sang drunkenly in a pub, and engaged various other activities. Balliett found the visual aspects the presentation distracting. He did not think the presentation ited the material and pointed to what he called a "vicious circle," n which the "almost continuous motion of stage blurs the nearly alpable content, while, for stage purposes, the content demands uch motion."[108]

Driver suggested those who were not familiar with the poem ould enjoy the play, but he felt those who knew it would find it ore satisfying to read it or to listen to the recording Thomas nd the five other members of the initial production at the Kaufmann auditorium had made. Driver hastened to add that this as not the fault of the actors or of Director Ball, but simply ecause the poetry "belongs essentially to the ear and the mind's ye. When we hear 'I am a draper mad with love' or 'I loved Tom, ick and Harry,' nothing is added by the physical presence of the ctor, however skillful."[109] The Newsday critic called it an admirable but rather stark new revival."[110] Taubman liked it very uch.

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[107] Taubman, loc. cit.

[108] Balliett, op. cit., p. 132.

[109] Driver, loc. cit.

[110] George Oppenheimer, Newsday, April 5, 1961.

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Despite touches of artiness, this production adds to one's pleasure in Thomas' sunlit work. To one who has read "Under Milk Wood" and heard it as a play for voices, the performers directed by Mr. Ball convey fresh nuances of humor and feeling in the Welsh poet's text. Fleeting scenes are made palpable in ways that elude the printed page or words spoken by unseen actors.

Although it cannot turn "Under Milk Wood" into a proper drama, the Circle in the Square has been faithful to Dylan Thomas' 'green-leaved sermon on the innocence of men.'[111]

The critic for Variety thought the cast, which had to present ty-three characters and handle "involved pieces of business, ricate stage movements and tricky vocal accompaniment," was very able, though perhaps not of "standout caliber."[112] Taubman dited the entire cast with doing an excellent job and cited eral actors in roles which he felt had been especially effective.[113]

Balliett did not think the performers had succeeded completely their attempts to get the entire content of the poem across to e audience. He did not think it was their fault, but rather mmed from the fact it was extremely difficult to read such erial aloud to start with, and to recite it and act it was ast about impossible."[114] Oppenheimer admitted he occasionally nd the duplication of roles confusing.[115]

The comments about the material were quite similar to those de by critics of the previous productions. Taubman warned his aders they would be disappointed if they liked their theatre iteral" because Under Milk Wood lacked proper dramatic structure,

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[111] Taubman, loc. cit.

[112] Jaal., Variety, April 12, 1961, p. 54.

[113] Taubman, loc. cit. [114] Balliett, loc. cit.

[115] Oppenheimer, loc. cit.

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but that if they delighted in language and were willing to let their imaginations run free, they would find it "a rare experience."[116]

The critic for Variety noted the likeness to Our Town and referred to the Broadway production four years earlier.[117] Oppenheimer also mentioned the 1957 presentation and observed that, contrary to most critics, he had enjoyed the full production.[118] Taubman had read Under Milk Wood and had heard it as a play for voices. He thought the Circle in the Square production conveyed "fresh nuances of humor and feeling in the Welsh poet's text.[119]

The Circle in the Square took Under Milk Wood on road and brought it back in 1962 after a successful tour, and presented it for fifty-four additional performances. Edith Oliver, apparently the only critic to review the 1962 version, wrote that the performers wore gray outfits, looked like gymnasts, and used movements which she described as "calisthenic." Although she found "some annoying chanting" in the production, she thought on the whole, the "reading was quite good." She then reminded her readers Under Milk Wood was intended to be a radio script. She concluded her review by writing, "I don't think that much is to be gained by seeing it, but I think that something is."[120] She did not elaborate.

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[116]Taubman, loc. cit. [117]Jaal., loc. cit.

[118]Oppenheimer, loc. cit. [119]Taubman, loc. cit.

[120]Edith Oliver, The New Yorker, December 15, 1962, p. 132.

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In December of 1956, the ANTA Matinee Series presented a ngle performance of John Dos Passos' novel U.S.A. The man sponsible for the adaptation was Paul Shyre, who was also respon- ble for the dramatization of the first three volumes of the Casey autobiography. For the Matinee Series program, U.S.A. s done as a "reading" in the manner of I Knock at the Door and ctures in the Hallway. There were five players, five chairs, lectern, and a back drop. A piano and a set of drums provided e musical accompaniment with "representative and syncopated nes of the times."[121] The five performers were Charles Aidman, e Phillips, Norman Rose, Sada Thompson and Rae Allen. (Miss len also appeared in the first two O'Casey presentations and dman was responsible for the adaptation of Spoon River.)

U.S.A. received considerable critical acclaim in its single pearance. The reviewer for the New York Times called it a otable achievement" and expressed regret it was only given for one rformance.[122] The State Department considered sending it to a ris drama festival along with Long Day's Journey into Night, but parently ran short of funds.[123] There was speculation the show ght go on tour with Broadway as its final destination.[124]

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[121] L.C., New York Times, December 19, 1956, p. 41.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Arthur Gelb, New York Times, March 28, 1957, p. 36.

[124] Sam Zolotow, New York Times, January 4, 1957, p. 18.

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No further mention was made of U.S.A. until in May of 1959, when New York Times theatre columnist Louis Calta announced that plans were underway to bring the Dos Passos novel to Broadway later that year. The production was to be considerably more complex than the initial presentation in 1956 had been.[125] In August of 1959, Gelb reported U.S.A. would be presented in an off-Broadway house. Adapter Shyre, who also directed the show, told Gelb the production needed a cast of six versatile actors of "equal prominence" rather than one or two stars. Shyre reasoned that stars were essential for box office success on Broadway, but if he were to secure big name performers for two of the roles, it would give the play the wrong emphasis. He maintained that the success of the presentation would depend on a balanced company of players functioning as a team.[126] U.S.A. opened on October 28, 1959, at the off-Broadway Martinque Theatre.

The writer is aware the 1959 version of U.S.A. does not clearly fit the definition of oral interpretation used in this study. It is difficult to determine whether or not Shyre intended the production as a "recreation of a literary experience" in the minds of his audience. Some of the reviewers mentioned the "recreation of an era," but this is not exactly the same thing. No books or manuscripts were used, costumes of the period were worn, and the players moved freely about the stage. However, several of the critics still classified the proceedings as some form of a "reading." An additional reason

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[125] Louis Calta, New York Times, May 6, 1959, p. 47.

[126] Arthur Gelb, New York Times, August 23, 1959, Sec. II, p. 1.

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or its consideration is the fact that adapter-director Shyre was ne of the early practitioners of the oral interpretation presen- tations with his adaptations of the O'Casey autobiography. Perhaps t should be noted here that Shyre considered U.S.A. more successful han his O'Casey programs.[127] Unfortunately the writer does not know hether Mr. Shyre meant it was more successful with regard to finan- ial matters, or more successful as far as artistic or aesthetic tisfaction was concerned.

tting and Accessories

There were six high stools on a small ramp upstage. A modernistic ckdrop was at the rear of the stage. The only props were chairs and small round table. Three chairs were used in the first act, and a urth was added in the second act. The table and chairs were shifted ound by the actors for the various vignettes.[128] There were two cterns, one on the right of the stage and the other on the left.[129]

The men wore suits and vests, striped shirts, and stiff collars. e women wore dresses of the 1900-1918 era in the first act and lmost flapper type garments" in the second act. The lighting was tremely important, as was the background music which consisted of propriate songs from the various periods."[130]

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[127] Letter from Paul Shyre to the author, June 13, 1968.

[128] Paul Shyre and John Dos Passos, U.S.A. (New York: Samuel ench, Inc., 1960), p. 5.

[129] Letter from William Redfield to the author, July 5, 1968.

[130] Shyre and Dos Passos, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

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Classification

Atkinson called the production a "staged reading."[131] McClain noted the Playbill called U.S.A. a play, but he thought it was more of an "elaborate reading."[132] Aston observed that the authors described their effort as a play, but he felt it was also "a reading, a recital, a concertized version of a vivid narrative."[133] Dash labeled the format used as a "dramatized reading."[134] Watts wrote that the method of staging was "an extention of the sort of dramatized reading versions" Shyre had used for the O'Casey volumes.[135] (It should be noted at the time U.S.A. was presented Shyre had not yet staged the third volume Drums Under the Window, in which he used a somewhat different method of staging than he had used in the first two productions.) The critic for Village Voice decided U.S.A. was "semi-theatrical reading,"[136] while Variety reviewer wrote of the "theatrical kaleidoscope," presented in the "familiar fashion of a dramatic reading."[137]

Actors Windon and Redfern did not think the term "reading" was appropriate. Windom described the production as a "newsreel,"[138]

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[131] Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, October 29, 1959, p. 38.

[132] John McClain, New York Journal American, October 29, 1959.

[133] Frank Aston, New York World-Telegram and Sun, October 29, 1959.

[134] Thomas Dash, Women's Wear Daily, October 29, 1959.

[135] Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, October 29, 1959.

[136] J. T., Village Voice, November 4, 1959.

[137] Nedi., Variety, November 11, 1959, p. 72.

[138] Letter from William Windom to the author, July 12, 1968.

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.le Redfield called it a "revue."[139] Shyre himself used the term
'amatic review."[140] [sic.] The only critic to agree with this label
; Malcolm, who complained that those connected with U.S.A. insisted
calling it a play, while it should really be referred to as a
'vue."[141] Kerr called it a "concert style adaptation,"[142] Beaufort
)orted it was a "documentary-dramatic word picture,"[143] and Cooke
'erred to it as the "stage version of the author's vigorous samplings."[144]

ıner of Presentation

Each of the six performers, except for the actor who played the
ın character, Ward Moorehouse, portrayed many different roles. Those
ıyers not involved in a scene would sit on the stools at the back of
stage. A few costume elements such as feather boas and hats were
)t by the stools to help indicate the different characters. The
'ration portions, although memorized, were given primarily from the
:terns.[145] The major narrations, such as those concerning Isadora
ıcan and Rudolph Valentino, were done at the center of the stage.
presentation of the newsreel sequences was very formalized.

> . . . an appropriate tune of the period would play and as the music dropped the actors would be standing before their stools, and proclaim the larger headlines. For this there would be

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[139]Redfield, loc. cit. [140]Shyre, loc. cit.

[141]Donald Malcolm, The New Yorker, November 7, 1959, p. 88.

[142]Walter Kerr, New York Herald Tribune, October 29, 1959.

[143]John Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, October 31, 1959.

[144]Richard P. Cooke, Wall Street Journal, October 30, 1959.

[145]Redfield, loc. cit.

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little or no special characterization. For the longer headlines or feature bits, the actor would step forward and deliver with a full characterization, according to the tone of the material. Each newsreel would end in a rising finale of music and blackout.[146]

There was a great deal of physical movement. The members of e cast also performed various dances of the times, notably the x trot, the Charleston and the Black Bottom.[147] Beaufort reported e techniques used in presenting U.S.A. ranged from traditional alogue, to spoken headlines and "word-newsreels--reminiscent of iving newspaper' staging to straight narrative recitation."[148]

rdict

The reviews were primarily favorable. Bolton told his readers is was an evening they should not miss, with interesting material, skilled cast, and a method of presentation which made it possible r the audience "to see places and things through the imagination ther than the eye."[149] Aston described U.S.A. as "a gem of an tertainment," which conjured up moods and moments of a fascinating rlier era. He cautioned prospective audiences not to expect a ual drama with the traditional plot development. "This is a arming novelty founded on the substance of a searching intellect."[150]

Dash called the production a "cogent and effective stage work" d praised Shyre for staging the production with "devoted zeal and

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[146]Shyre and Dos Passos, op. cit., p. 5.

[147]Ibid. [148]Beaufort, loc. cit.

[149]Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegraph, October 31, 1959.

[150]Aston, loc. cit.

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nsiderable acumen."[151] Field called the presentation "inventive
d satisfying."[152] Malcolm thought if the viewer would "prudently
sallow the innocent pretension of the program that this revue is
new play,' he is almost certain to have a fine time at the
rtinique."[153]

McClain complimented the director and the producer on their
oice of the 200 seat Martinique theatre where U.S.A. could be done
three-quarter arena style. McClain felt that had it been done
a larger theatre or on a proscenium stage, it would have been
ch less effective. Done as it was, and in the small Martinique,
found it a "generally fascinating evening."[154] Beaufort described
as "an absorbing excursion and a first rate evening in the theatre."[155]
e critic for Cue rhapsodized, "'U.S.A.' is the most exciting,
roarious, stirring, savagely satiric show of the season, on or
f-Broadway."[156] Not all the gentlemen of the press were quite
impressed. Cooke found it "an interesting if somewhat spotty
tertainment."[157] Atkinson liked the way U.S.A. was presented,
t did not think it was "very interesting as a whole." He blamed
is on the material which, he wrote, "consists of bits and pieces
at do not make a strong impression or state a theme."[158] Kerr
knowledged the "concert style adaptation" was brilliantly arranged,

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[151] Dash, loc. cit. [152] Malcolm, loc. cit.

[153] Rowland Field, Newark Evening News, October 29, 1959.

[154] McClain, loc. cit. [155] Beaufort, loc. cit.

[156] Cue, November 7, 1959. [157] Cooke, loc. cit.

[158] Atkinson, loc. cit.

ut complained that something went amiss. "The big black letters
ave taken over. The ink from them runs into everybody's veins,
rawing out what might have been good blood. There they are--six
ascinating players playing sixty potentially fascinating characters--
nd each of them is reduced to a statistic."[159] The Village Voice
eviewer noted the vividly etched characters and the superb performers,
ut reported the Dos Passos trilogy "simply does not come off."[160]
he Variety critic thought the cast gave a memorable performance but
egretfully ruled that U.S.A. was not a memorable play.[161]

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Nearly all the reviewers were generous with their praise of
erformers Peggy McCay, Joan Tetzel, Sada Thompson, William Redfield,
illiam Windom, and Laurence Hugo. Beaufort reported that "six
xcellent actors turn an almost bare stage into a teeming cross
ection of Americana during the first three decades."[162] Atkinson
lso cited the "six excellent actors,"[163] while Aston described them
s "a brilliantly humorous sextet."[164] Bolton called them "skilled,
lert players,"[165] and Dash credited the cast with providing "a
otentially inert exercise" with a sense of "dramatic flow."[166]
cClain thought all six were "equally expert."

As the hero of the success story, Laurence Hugo is an assured and persuasive performer, and he has the experienced aid of Joan Tetzel, who plays his wife.

There is a skilled contribution by William Windom, who is

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[159]Kerr, loc. cit. [160]J.T., loc. cit. [161]Nedi., loc. cit.
[162]Beaufort, loc. cit. [163]Atkinson, loc. cit. [164]Aston, loc. cit.
[165]Bolton, loc. cit. [166]Dash, loc. cit.

both narrator and any number of other characters; a bright and humorous assist from William Redfield; and the most capable services of Sada Thompson and Peggy McCay in diverse assignments.[167]

As noted earlier, Shyre felt it was essential the cast be well balanced and work together as an ensemble.[168] Actor William Windom recalled the "interdependence of fellow performers was at a maxium. [sic] Teamplay was the key." He also recalled there was a considerable sense of esprit de corps among the male members of the cast, as illustrated by the fact they consumed a fifth a week getting dressed and during the intermission.[169]

Material

The play covered the thirty-year period from the turn of the century to 1930. Cooke wrote that it provided "a fair refresher course on the early 20th Century, as projected through John Dos Passos' eye and pen."[170] The central figure of the novel was J. P. Moorehouse. His rise from obscurity to fame as an advertising tycoon provided the thread to which the reports of events and personalities were attached--although sometimes the connection was rather tenuous. Dash praised adapter Shyre for managing to weave the many social and political events into a "cogent and effective stage work."[171] Bolton described the material as "captivating, electric, and all encompassing."[172] Hewes characterized it as an "exploration of the American spirit," tied together by the "tower of living contradictions

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[167] McClain, loc. cit. [168] Gelb, loc. cit. [169] Windom, loc. cit.
[170] Cooke, loc. cit. [171] Dash, loc. cit. [172] Bolton, loc. cit.

and hypocrisies it constructs before your eyes."[173] The critic for Cue labeled it "U.S.A., 1900-1930, in all its richness, its triumphs and its hangovers."[174]

Several of the critics were dissatisfied with the cumulative effect of the story. Atkinson admitted Dos Passos' trilogy vividly presented "the sounds and tempo as well as the chief events of the first thirty years of the century," but complained taken as a whole, it was not very interesting. He thought perhaps this was because the "kaleidoscope" as he called the novel, "turns too fast and reveals too many fleeting images."[175] Beaufort liked some aspects of U.S.A. and thought Shyre had done an excellent job of getting the multitude of diverse "elements into the mainstream of an ordered narrative," but he felt a serious flaw in the adaptation was that "the editorial asides of what might be called its supertext prevented the story and relationship of the central characters from emerging into full focal sharpness."[176]

Cooke admitted the material had "a considerable literary quality," but protested that "it somehow seemed as though Walter Winchell's staccato trumpeting had been incorporated in it."[177] The critic for Variety thought that one of the reasons the play was not entirely satisfactory was that the main character, Moorehouse, was such an empty person.[178] The reviewer for Village Voice complained the trilogy just did not lend itself to the stage. "We are still

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[173]Henry Hewes, Saturday Review, November 14, 1959, p. 41.

[174]Cue, loc. cit. [175]Atkinson, loc. cit.

[176]Beaufort, loc. cit. [177]Cooke, loc. cit. [178]Nedi., loc. cit.

searching for any real 'meat' as we leave the theatre."[179]

Actor Redfield described the adaptation as "a series of anecdotes, variant styles, scenes and sketches which (one hopes) will add up to a unified effect." He felt U.S.A. suffered somewhat from not having a story line, except in the historical sense, thus "it lacked cumulative drama." He wrote, "The sum, oddly enough, was weaker than its parts. Those who enjoyed the details sufficiently enjoyed the production because of what it contained. Those who did not, found it more a vehicle for six skilled players than a completely satisfying text."[180] Redfield's fellow actor Windom noted that U.S.A. required the audience to "pay attention and think. It did not titilate."[181]

Some of the critics who had reservations about the material found the biographies of famous personalities of the period more to their liking. Cooke reported there were several "capsule biographies . . . and they were quite effective."[182] Beaufort told his readers, "It is the brilliant recitals of vivid thumbnail biographies, the vignettes of actual people--the Wright Brothers, Eugene Debs, Rudolph Valentino, Isadora Duncan . . . and equally vivid fictitious characters which fill out the tapestry of this unconventional play."[183]

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[179] J.T., loc. cit. [180] Redfield, loc. cit.

[181] Windom, loc. cit. [182] Cooke, loc. cit.

[183] Beaufort, loc. cit.

Atkinson wrote:

> In the second half . . . Sada Thompson tells the story of Isadora Duncan.
>
> Probably the story does not last more than five minutes. It is only one item in Mr. Dos Passos' kaleidoscope of the first thirty years in the twentieth century in America. It is not the most significant item of many.
>
> But it is the most interesting not only because Miss Thompson delivers it crisply, but also because it is a tale with a beginning, middle and end. It combines buncombe, beauty and success in one short interlude; it has a melodramatic conclusion. The audience listens as if it had never heard the story before.[184]

Comparisons

The Variety critic observed the staging was done in "the familiar fashion of a dramatic reading."[185] Three of the critics referred to Shyre's adaptation of the first two volumes of the O'Casey autobiography.[186] Redfield thought Shyre's experience with I Knock at the Door and Pictures in the Hallway influenced his adaptation and staging of U.S.A., but he did not elaborate.[187] Certainly U.S.A. was further along on the continuum that stretches between the "pure" oral interpretation presentation and the "regular" theatrical production than Shyre's first two adaptations. In terms of popular appeal, U.S.A. was the most successful of Shyre's programs. It ran for 256 performances.

Dear Liar

In 1952, a book entitled Bernard Shaw and Mrs. Pat Campbell: Their Correspondence was published containing the letters Shaw and Mrs. Campbell exchanged during their forty year "friendship."

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[184] Atkinson, loc. cit. [185] Nedi., loc. cit.

[186] Dash, J.T., and Cue, all loc. cit. [187] Redfield, loc. cit.

Actor-director Jerome Kilty, a long time Shaw devotee, found the postal paper war delightful and when, in 1957, he was requested to provide an entertainment for a group of theatre patrons in Chicago, he sequestered himself in a hotel room for ten days and condensed the forty years of correspondence into a two hour program. Kilty and his actress wife, Cavada Humphrey, presented what was later called Dear Liar at the Studebaker Theatre in Chicago on April 26, 1957.

When Kilty began to consider the commercial possibilities of the adaptation, he wrote to Mrs. Campbell's daughter requesting permission to use the letters. At first she was reluctant to give her consent, but finally agreed. After finishing the script Kilty sent it to playwright Lillian Hellman for suggestions as to who he should try to get to play the parts. Miss Hellman thought Katharine Cornell would be perfect for Mrs. Pat, and sent the script on to her. Miss Cornell was enchanted with the material and was instrumental in securing Brian Aherne, who had been her leading man in "The Barrettes of Wimpole Street," to play Shaw. Miss Cornell's husband, Guthrie McClintic agreed to serve as producer. Kilty directed the production, and on March 9, 1959, Dear Liar began a cross-country tour under the auspices of Sol Hurok.[188] The tour closed in the middle of April after a successful "dry run" of forty-three performances.[189] A second tour started in the fall, and after appearing in sixty-six cities, Dear Liar came to Broadway on March 17, 1960, at the Billy Rose Theatre.

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[188]Arthur Gelb, New York Times, January 5, 1959, p. 24.

[189]Time, April 27, 1959, p. 53.

Setting and Accessories

The setting was intended to suggest Mrs. Campbell's drawing room and Mr. Shaw's study.[190] A pink-upholstered Victorian sofa and desk were the furnishings for the living room, while Shaw's study had a sort of combination lectern-desk and a stool.[191] Music of the period was heard in the background at various times during the evening. Except for Tynan, the critics who mentioned the music found it a charming addition to the proceedings. Tynan "shuddered at much of the background music."[192] The only mention of lighting effects came from Hewes, who noted "the sad but inevitable deterioration through the years" was suggested by the decor, the lighting, and the music.[193]

The performers did not try to assume the physical appearance of the people they were presenting, although Miss Cornell dressed her hair in a fashion similar to the way in which Mrs. Pat had worn hers. She was costumed in a black gown of the period. Mr. Aherne wore a velvet smoking jacket.[194] (He also wore trousers.)

Classification

The critics apparently had a difficult time deciding what Dear Liar was. Kilty called the program "a comedy of letters,"[195] but the nearest the reviewers came to following his suggestion was

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[190] Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, March 18, 1960, p. 19.

[191] Henry Hewes, Saturday Review, April 2, 1960, p. 33.

[192] Kenneth Tynan, The New Yorker, March 26, 1960, p. 81.

[193] Hewes, loc. cit.

[194] Letter from Miss Katharine Cornell to the author, June 11, 1968.

[195] Frank Aston, New York World-Telegram and Sun, March 18, 1960, NYTCR, p. 375.

Atkinson's description of the proceedings as "an intelligent adaptation of the letters,"[196] and Watts' mention of "Jerome Kilty's dramatic arrangement of the 40 years of embattled correspondence." Watts further informed his readers Dear Liar was not a play in the conventional sense, and no one pretended that it was.[197] Similarly, Chapman noted Kilty did not pretend to have made the letters into a play, but rather he had "turned this exchange of correspondence into lively conversation."[198] The critic for Time wrote of Kilty's adaptation, "What results is no play, nor is it meant to be."[199]

Coleman referred to "the Kilty orchestration,"[200] while Tynan called it a "dramatic condensation."[201] Kerr termed the proceedings an "arrangement for two performers."[202] McClain called Dear Liar "Mr. Kilty's free adaptation for the stage," and observed the evening might well have become a "precious and static reading" had it not been for the talents of the performers and Kilty's editorial and directorial skills.[203] The Variety critic maintained to call the

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[196] Atkinson, loc. cit.

[197] Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, March 18, 1960, NYTCR, p. 320.

[198] John Chapman, New York Daily News, March 18, 1960, NYTCR, p. 319.

[199] Time, March 28, 1960, p. 53.

[200] Robert Coleman, New York Mirror, March 18, 1960.

[201] Tynan, op. cit., p. 80.

[202] Walter Kerr, New York Herald Tribune, March 18, 1960, NYTCR, p. 319.

[203] John McClain, New York Journal American, March 18, 1960, NYTCR, p. 318.

performance "a reading would be invidious,"[204] however in Variety's weekly listing of current productions which appeared in the same issue as the review, Dear Liar was classified as a "dramatic reading." Miss Cornell thought that "dramatized reading" was the best way to describe the production.[205]

Manner of Presentation

Miss Cornell and Mr. Aherne both had manuscripts in front of them during the performance, but they had their lines memorized and only occasionally appeared to be reading. Most of the time Aherne stood at his lectern and Miss Cornell sat at her desk. At times they both moved about the stage.[206] McClain was pleased to find that, "by the interpolation of graceful remarks directed to the audience by both principals, by occasional scenes played to one another--some of them excerpts from Shaw's plays--the dread formula of a conventional reading is obviated."[207] Neither performer made any attempt to impersonate their respective correspondents.[208]

Verdict

The critical response to Dear Liar was divided and quite often the individual reviewers had mixed reactions to the presentation. Coleman admitted Shaw and Campbell had been two of the most vivid theatre personalities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth

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[204] Land., Variety, March 23, 1960, p. 59.

[205] Cornell, loc. cit. [206] Ibid. [207] McClain, loc. cit.

[208] Chapman, loc. cit.

centuries, but he thought Kilty's adaptation of their letters "failed to kindle into an exciting evening in the theatre."[209] Chapman characterized the proceedings as an "offbeat, interesting and admittedly undramatic theatrical venture."[210] Kerr granted "all that grace can do has been done for 'Dear Liar,'" but did not think this was quite enough. He felt the evening threatened to become a "social rather than a theatrical occasion . . . with a few shredded vegetables as canapes." Kerr pointed out Shaw usually got the better of Campbell in their literary dual, but his letter writing, though enjoyable, was not on the same level as the writing he did for his plays. He concluded, "The atmosphere is pleasant, but the sense of combat is distant, tucked away under the arm of the postman."[211]

Tynan had some rather snide comments to make about some aspects of the production, but he admitted these were "trivial quibbles" and assured his readers he had "no doubt that 'Dear Liar' will both delight and instruct you."[212] Atkinson praised the acting of Cornell and Aherne, credited Kilty with an "intelligent adaptation" of the letters, but found the production "no substitute for the crackle of a comedy by the man who wrote the most spirited letters in this wayward exchange." However, he hastened to point out due to the scarcity of worthwhile plays, Dear Liar was quite welcome.[213] Clurman also noted the dearth of dramatic fare. "Nowadays there

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[209]Coleman, loc. cit. [210]Chapman, loc. cit. [211]Kerr, loc. cit.
[212]Tynan, op. cit., p. 81. [213]Atkinson, loc. cit.

is so little theatre on Broadway that everything presented in a playhouse by stage actors is offered as something that calls of dramatic criticism." He described the evening as "pleasantly civilized."[214] The critic for Time conceded Dear Liar was "pleasant and provocative," but despite this, in his opinion it "falls flat."[215] Hewes suggested his readers regard the presentation as a "pleasant browse through an old curiosity shop," but warned them not to "expect any startling acquisitions."[216]

Three of the "first line" critics liked Dear Liar. McClain headlined his review "2 Stars Shine in Fine Night." He was pleased with the settings, the selection and arrangement of material, the manner of presentation--which managed to avoid "the dread formula of a conventional reading," and with the actors. "This is a resplendent evening for these two; it is also a happy one for the customers."[217] Aston was extremely enthusiastic about the production and told his readers the evening "guarantees an experiment that borders on rapture."[218] Watts was somewhat more reserved in his approval, but recommended the production as a "stimulating and steadily interesting theatrical evening . . . distinctly worth attention."[219] The Variety critic described Dear Liar as a "stunning entertainment."[220]

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[214] Harold Clurman, Nation, April 16, 1960, p. 343.

[215] Time, loc. cit. [216] Hewes, loc. cit.

[217] McClain, loc. cit. [218] Aston, loc. cit.

[219] Watts, loc. cit. [220] Land., loc. cit.

Acting

Miss Cornell and Mr. Aherne also received mixed notices from the critics. Nearly all the reviewers paid tribute to the talents of the two stage veterans, but not all of them thought the performers had been successful in capturing the essence of their characters. The critic for Time complained Miss Cornell was "too gentle" to convey the tempestuous Mrs. Pat, and that Aherne was "too jaunty" as Shaw.[221] Chapman also found Miss Cornell "too gentle a lady to be the sharp-tongued, volatile Mrs. Pat I've read about."[222] Coleman mentioned Miss Cornell "was evidently handicapped by incipient laryngitis during the more emotional passages."[223] Kerr liked some aspects of Miss Cornell's performance, but had reservations about others.

> The airiness with which she toys with the notion of appearing in "Pygmalion" is enchanting. The suggestion that she is a "veteran" of the theatre brings a soft subway rumble into her mildly outraged throat. When her not entirely candid playwright makes a pretty pretense of knowing nothing about finances, she need only dilate the pupils of her glistening eyes very slightly--and arch her uncrowned but unmistakably regal head just a degree or two in his direction--to delight us with her poised disbelief.
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> . . . . . .
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> But was it really so much grace that caused Mrs. Pat Campbell to be described, at last, as a "sinking frigate firing on her rescuers?" Or was it a battleship belligerence that never quite stirs on the local stage?[224]

Watts praised Miss Cornell for her charming rendition of Mrs. Pat as a successful actress and for her portrayal of the impoverished but gallant and proud lady when she was no longer

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[221] Time, loc. cit. [222] Chapman, loc. cit.

[223] Coleman, loc. cit. [224] Kerr, loc. cit.

a sought-after star of the London stage.[225] Aston enthused about Miss Cornell, "When she rehearses for 'Pygmalion," yowling at his 'iggins, you listen open mouthed and wonder why the devil Miss Cornell never took over 'My Fair Lady.' No protests please; this dame could do anything, and better."[226]

Watts pointed out the role of Mrs. Campbell was not quite as "lively" as the part of Shaw because Shaw was naturally a better writer and consequently Aherne had the most entertaining lines.[227] Atkinson lauded both Cornell and Aherne as "two of our most cherished actors" and cited their talents and taste, but he complained that "'Dear Liar' preserves on stage a stubborn imbalance of talents. Shaw's letters to Mrs. Pat are consistently gayer, wiser and more incandescent."[228]

Coleman also agreed Kilty had provided Shaw with "more opportunity to shine," and he felt that as a result, Aherne had been more successful in his role than Miss Cornell was in hers.[229] Atkinson wrote, "As Shaw, the irrepressible egotist, Mr. Aherne plays with great vivacity. He is restless, energetic and mischievous; he explodes with words."[230] Tynan compared the actor to a "roguish Scoutmaster . . . whimsically puckering up the corners of his lips after every outburst of ungallant egoism." Tynan's only real complaint about Aherne's performance was his accent, which Tynan described as "unmistakably Welsh."[231] Kerr

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[225]Watts, loc. cit. [226]Aston, loc. cit. [227]Watts, loc. cit.
[228]Atkinson, loc. cit. [229]Coleman, loc. cit.
[230]Atkinson, loc. cit. [231]Tynan, loc. cit.

was not convinced that Aherne's Shaw "ever took a bite out of anybody," but he thoroughly enjoyed the actor's performance anyway.

> Working at an easy jogtrot, so that he seems to be living on his heels like an airedale who has learned to walk and is so happy about it that he can't be coaxed down again, Mr. Aherne tosses off a jest like "I could not love thee, dear, half so much, loved I not money more" with wrinkle of his mustache that has just about the right amount of self-satisfaction in it (90%, not an ounce more or less).[232]

There was some disagreement as to whether the performers impersonated the letter writers, although producer McClintic positively stated they did not. "On the face of it, it would be absurd as the action covers forty years in less than two hours of playing time and they are never off-stage."[233] However, Watts maintained soon after the curtain rose, the actors seemed to "merge into the half affectionate, half infuriated pair."[234] McClain substantiated this as he wrote:

> There is no effort by Miss Cornell or Mr. Aherne to impersonate either character. But both of them triumph in their ability to communicate the personalities of the spirited Mrs. Pat and the renegade Mr. Shaw.
> Mr. Aherne never wears a beard or a Norfolk jacket, but he suggests both: and Miss Cornell is a timeless and tempestuous Irish-Italian.[235]

Oppenheimer also noted Aherne did not use a beard or try to imitate Shaw physically, "yet by his stance, his brogue, his stubborn confidence in himself and in the soundness of his least

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[232] Kerr, loc. cit.

[233] Guthrie McClintic, clipping in the Theatre Collection, perhaps from the Playbill.

[234] Watts, loc. cit. [235] McClain, loc. cit.

conviction, he suggests Shaw."[236] Aston admitted to having been duly informed the two actors were not impersonating Campbell and Shaw, but he was not convinced. "In the beginning they bloom with vigor. At the end she has faded and he totters . . . . If this isn't impersonation it is marvelous suggestion."[237]

The performers had two scenes when, as the critic for Time phrased it, they were able to "get their teeth into something theatrical rather than into each other."[238] The Variety reviewer found the scene in which Shaw rehearsed Campbell for Pygmalion "sheer delight."[239] Atkinson also thought the rehearsal scenes for Pygmalion and for The Apple Cart were superb, but further illustrated "no adaptation can substitute for a play."[240] Tynan, in his usual role as dissenter, confessed he "cringed at Miss Cornell's decision to act out two scenes from 'Pygmalion.'"[241]

Material

Nearly all the critics found the letters enjoyable though not theatrically exciting. The letters began in 1899 when Mrs. Pat was at the height of her career and Shaw was just beginning to achieve recognition as a playwright, and end with the actress' impoverished death in 1940. There has always been considerable speculation that Shaw and Mrs. Campbell carried on a flaming affair, but the letters would seem to indicate the affair was

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[236] George Oppenheimer, Newsday, March 23, 1960.

[237] Aston, loc. cit. [238] Time, loc. cit. [239] Land., loc. cit.

[240] Atkinson, loc. cit. [241] Tynan, loc. cit.

verbal rather than physical. Kerr pointed out that between the two literary lovers there stood a mailbox, Mrs. Shaw, and Shaw's own "natural timidity." Mrs. Pat herself wrote, "We were two lustless lions at play."[242] McClain decided they had never actually been lovers--"rather they were two people who greatly enjoyed exploiting each other, and having done so, retained a faltering fondness."[243] Chapman observed "G.B.S. never wrote to Mrs. Pat and Mrs. Pat never wrote to him. They only wrote back to each other." Chapman further concluded the speculation that the letters were love-letters was quite correct. "Shaw was in love with Shaw and Mrs. Pat was mad about Mrs. Pat."[244]

Watts noted the picture of Shaw that emerged from the letters was not a very flattering one.[245] Clurman found the correspondence interesting and informative about the theatre in England during that time, but he did not think the exchange was very romantic.[246]

Kilty's selection of the letters and his explanatory interpolations received recognition from several critics. The only reviewer who was dissatisfied was Tynan. He quarrelled with the introductory information with which Kilty had prefaced the rehearsal scene of Pygmalion. He objected to the outlining of the plot--he thought it was completely unnecessary--and he detected an error in Kilty's placement of the scene.[247] McClain thought Kilty had done an excellent editorial job,[248] as did the critic

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[242]Kerr, loc. cit. [243]McClain, loc. cit.

[244]Chapman, loc. cit. [245]Watts, loc. cit.

[246]Clurman, loc. cit. [247]Tynan, loc. cit. [248]McClain, loc. cit.

for Time.[249] Atkinson wrote, "Given the task of making a stage adaptation of the letters these celebrated persons wrote to each other, it is difficult to see how Mr. Kilty could have done better. He has made dialogue sequences out of sentences and paragraphs excerpted from the letters."[250]

Comparisons

There were no references to previous productions except for mention of Miss Cornell and Mr. Aherne's successful appearance some years before in The Barretts of Wimpole Street.[251] There was no mention of Mr. Kilty's adaptation of Moby Dick in 1955. McClain noted Dear Liar avoided the "dread formula of dramatic readings,"[252] but did not cite any examples.

Dear Liar did not do well on Broadway, although it ran for fifty-four performances. It lost about $17,500 during its six week engagement, and this was inspite of the fact Director Kilty waved fifty per cent of his salary and Miss Cornell waved all of her salary for the last three weeks.[253]

Although Dear Liar was not a Broadway success, the adaptation became very popular in Europe.[254] Kilty and his wife toured the

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[249] Time, loc. cit. [250] Atkinson, loc. cit.

[251] Aston, loc. cit.
Atkinson, loc. cit.

[252] McClain, loc. cit.

[253] Audit of financial books of Dear Liar by accountants Pinto, Winokur, and Pagano, found in a scrapbook of clippings on Dear Liar in the Theatre Collection.

[254] New York Times, March 19, 1962.

show abroad and throughout the United States. On March 16, 1962, they appeared in the off-Broadway Theatre Marquee and gave forty more performances of Shaw-Campbell letters.

Telemachus Clay

In 1957, Lewis John Carlino wrote a short play, The Brick and the Rose. He intended it to be read rather than performed. Ten actors dressed in black portrayed forty-six characters. They remained on their stools throughout the reading and used no movement. Each performer had a script on a reading stand in front of him. The main character of the story was a teen-age boy in the slums of New York. Author Carlino wrote of his play and the manner in which he wanted it produced: "Such a story which encompasses so many dimensions of time and characters could be written no other way; could not be delimited by the confines of staging and scenery."[255]

The Brick and the Rose was a forerunner to Telemachus Clay, a full length play which Carlino planned to present by a method he called the "theatre of collage." He rejected the traditional manner of staging in which the actors play to each other while the audience observes. He wanted the actors to "play the scene to each other through the mind of the audience." As Little phrased it, Carlino "is asking audiences to become a kind of electrical conductor through which the emotions of one actor will pass to

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[255]Letter from Lewis John Carlino, as quoted in Monroe, op. cit., pp. 39-40.

another.[256] Telemachus Clay opened off-Broadway at the Writers' Stage on November 15, 1963.

Setting and Accessories

Ten actors sat on stools in a line across a bare stage. An eleventh performer, the narrator, sat in the center and slightly downstage from the other actors. All the players wore black and all directly faced the audience.[257] The lighting gave the illusion of movement as it focused first on one performer and then on another, and moved back and forth across the stage.[258]

Classification

Some of the critics decided to use Carlino's term, "a collage of voices."[259] The critic for Variety informed his readers, "That's as good as any for the unusual dramatic reading."[260] Thompson referred to it as a "show" because he did not know what "collage of voices" meant.[261] Oppenheimer called it "a collage of voices" at one point in his review, but later pointed out that it resembled

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[256]Stuart Little, New York Herald Tribune, November 11, 1963.

[257]Gene Palatsky, Newark Evening News, November 16, 1963.

[258]Frances Herridge, New York Post, November 17, 1963.

[259]Lewis Funke, New York Times, November 16, 1963, p. 17. Herridge, loc. cit.

[260]Kenn., Variety, November 27, 1963, p. 63.

[261]Jack Thompson, New York Journal American, November 16, 1963.

a "dramatic reading."[262] Palatsky thought it was "a dramatic concert reading and something of a minstrel show."[263]

Manner of Presentation

The actors did not use scripts, but except for that difference, the manner of presentation was basically the same as Carlino had used for his earlier play The Brick and the Rose. The players remained on their stools and spoke directly to the audience most of the time. One of the actors played the role of Telemachus Clay while another served primarily as the narrator.[264] The other nine performers handled about ninety parts.[265] The narrator identified characters and kept the audience informed as to the time and place of the scene.[266]

Verdict

Telemachus Clay was definitely a "split decision," with vehement supporters and just as vehement opponents. Bolton "unreservedly" recommended it to his readers as "an evening of unusual quality."[267] Bender wrote that the cast was "uniformly marvelous and creative" and the production offered "a good, fresh,

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[262]George Oppenheimer, Newsday, November 18, 1963.

[263]Palatsky, loc. cit.

[264]Edith Oliver, The New Yorker, November 23, 1963, p. 147.

[265]Herridge, loc. cit. [266]Oppenheimer, loc. cit.

[267]Whitney Bolton, New York Morning Telegraph, November 18, 1963.

thought provoking couple of hours."[268] Herridge found a "haunting power" in the work.[269] Gottfried acknowledged there were some flaws, but he thought it was "brilliant theatre."[270] Brustein was practically ecstatic. He called it "the only evening of American Theatre so far this year which begins to approach distinction."[271]

Expressing the opposing viewpoint, Thompson began his review, "One of the most pretentious and depressingly bad shows to hit off-Broadway in a long time is 'Telemachus Clay.'"[272] Nadel was in complete agreement. He called it a tedious, cacaphonic, [sic.] recital of unrelieved filth" and he thought it would probably qualify for the dubious distinction of the low point of the off-Broadway season.[273] The critic for Variety thought the format was interesting, but disliked the language, some of which he felt was florid while other parts of it he felt were in poor taste. He decided Telemachus Clay was "much ado about very little."[274] Oppenheimer regarded the play as "an interesting although not successful experiment."[275]

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[268] William Bender, New York Herald Tribune, November 18, 1963.

[269] Herridge, loc. cit.

[270] Martin Gottfried, Women's Wear Daily, November 18, 1963.

[271] Robert Brustein, New Republic, December 21, 1963, p. 28.

[272] Thompson, loc. cit.

[273] Norman Nadel, New York World-Telegram and Sun, November 16, 1963.

[274] Kenn., loc. cit.

[275] Oppenheimer, loc. cit.

Acting

Nearly all the critics praised the performers. Even Nadel, who vociferously disliked the production, admitted the cast was competent, which he felt made "the whole thing even more embarrassing."[276] Oliver decided the performers were "just right."[277] Bender called the group "uniformly marvelous and creative," and declined to single anyone out.[278] Several of the critics had special praise for Carolan Daniels, who presented an extremely effective childbirth scene without moving from her stool.[279] Narrator Clayton Corbin, who also portrayed a beatnik prophet, attracted favorable notice from four critics,[280] but two reviewers complained they were unable to hear many of his lines.[281] John Tracy, making his New York acting debut as Telemachus Clay, did not impress most of the critics. Oppenheimer thought he had talent but lacked the experience to do much with his "nebulous" role.[282]

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[276]Nadel, loc. cit. [277]Oliver, loc. cit. [278]Bender, loc. cit.

[279]Gottfried, loc. cit.
Thompson, loc. cit.
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Oppenheimer, loc. cit.
Herridge, loc. cit.
Bolton, loc. cit.

[280]Gottfried, loc. cit.
Kenn., loc. cit.
Funke, loc. cit.
Palatsky, loc. cit.

[281]Thompson, loc. cit.
Oppenheimer, loc. cit.

[282]Oppenheimer, loc. cit.

Palatsky found his interpretation of Telemachus "honest," but too weak to be effective.[283] Thompson wrote of Tracy, "A new James Dean, as he has been touted, he is not. He seems like a nice lad and it's too bad he had to get involved with this mess for his debut."[284]

Herridge was impressed with the effect achieved when all the players spoke at once, but with one voice predominating. "They create vividly the neurotic frenzy of a cocktail party, the hollowness of the crowd."[285] Bolton reported the performers managed to provide "an experience in motion," despite the fact they did not leave their stools.[286] Herridge also noted the illusion of movement, but she thought it was the lighting effects which created the effect rather than anything the players did.[287]

Material

The main area of criticism was the story itself. Telemachus Clay was born out of wedlock and had to endure taunts about his parentage as he was growing up. At twenty he leaves his home town for Hollywood. He wants to sell a script he has written to the movies, and to find God, his father, and himself. In Hollywood he is thoroughly abused and completely disillusioned. He leaves to continue his wanderings while, back home, his girl gives birth

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[283]Palatsky, loc. cit. [284]Thompson, loc. cit.

[285]Herridge, loc. cit. [286]Bolton, loc. cit.

[287]Herridge, loc. cit.

to his illegitimate son. The critic for Variety characterized the script as "banal and pretentious" and thought Telemachus' home town "might have been created by Thornton Wilder in a bad mood."[288] The reviewer for Players Magazine compared Telemachus Clay to Tobacco Road, and declared the story encompassed "every current perversion of popular interest."[289] Oliver wrote, "The best that can be said for the script . . . is that it is harmless in a tiresome and vulgar kind of way . . . . The lines are mostly windy-poetic or squalid-explicit."[290] Nadel likened Carlino to a "rebellious small boy shouting dirty words." He thought the story was "banal" and found nothing admirable in Carlino's writing. "His whole style is ostentatious, his characterization is puerile. Every character seems borrowed--and some from pretty shoddy literary sources."[291]

Oppenheimer disliked the main character Telemachus, but thought the author showed considerable skill in quick vignettes, such as a short scene on a train involving a child who would not be quiet until a beleagured fruit salesman silenced him by stuffing a banana in his mouth.[292] Gottfried praised Carlino's sense of theatre, his facility with dialogue, humor and fantasy, but called his message "foolish."[293] Palatsky also lauded the playwright's skill with dialogue and his sense of theatrical timing, but found

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[288] Kenn., loc. cit.

[289] Ben Morse, Players Magazine, February, 1964, p. 138.

[290] Oliver, loc. cit. [291] Nadel, loc. cit.

[292] Oppenheimer, loc. cit. [293] Gottfried, loc. cit.

the story unconvincing and unmoving.[294] Thompson described the play as "largely a diatribe against the film world which might have had some validity 30 years ago, but which doesn't make sense these days."[295]

Three of the critics had kinder words for the script. Hewes informed his readers, that while the play was similar to many about idealistic young writers who become disillusioned, "here and there it erupts into something wild and wonderful."[296] Herridge found a "haunting power" in the story and described it as a "stunning evocation of the lost artist in an alien world."[297] Brustein wrote:

> I didn't like "Telemachus Clay" for about 15 minutes, during which time the author stole outrageously from "Under Milk Wood." When he began to plunder the Nighttown sequence from "Ulysses" as well, the form of the evening began to annoy me intensely: why deliberately model your play on works that were not designed for the stage. After a while however, I stopped brooding and began to enjoy myself, for the author Lewis John Carlino, has a considerable talent which even his thefts do not conceal . . . he is an extremely uneven writer, but he is, on occasion, a biting and moving one.[298]

Even though most of the critics disliked the material, several of them did think the material and the manner of presentation were well suited. The play had thoughts, dreams, memories, flashbacks and other things which would have been difficult to stage in a normal production.[299] Bender thought the scene in which the baby was born could only have been done in this way.[300] The critic for

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[294]Palatsky, loc. cit. [295]Thompson, loc. cit. [296]Hewes, loc. cit.

[297]Herridge, loc. cit. [298]Brustein, loc. cit.

[299]Gottfried, loc. cit. [300]Bender, loc. cit.

Village Voice wrote, "We are shown moments--a boy and girl making love, a young woman in childbirth--which would be intolerably sweet or painful without such detachment. We are also given the possibility of tiny vignettes which would be overweighed with significance if further acted out."[301]

Comparisons

Several of the comparisons were of a literary nature. Five critics noted the similarity of Telemachus Clay to Under Milk Wood,[302] and two mentioned its likeness to James Joyce's Ulysses.[303] Hewes thought the material was reminiscent of Spoon River.[304]

Nadel observed the performers sat on stools in a row similar to the way the players had in U.S.A. and Spoon River, but warned his readers the similarity ended with the stools.[305] Funke pointed out that, despite Carlino's belief he had developed a new technique with his "collage of voices," the method of staging was "not exactly revolutionary . . . the sight of players sitting on high stools has become familiar to us through the flood of readings we have had."[306]

Although the manner of presentation was not completely new, this apparently was the first play written specifically to be

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[301] M.S., Village Voice, November 21, 1963.

[302] Morse, loc. cit.
M.S., loc. cit.
Brustein, loc. cit.
Bender, loc. cit.
Hewes, loc. cit.

[303] Herridge, loc. cit.
Brustein, loc. cit.

[304] Hewes, loc. cit. [305] Nadel, loc. cit. [306] Funke, loc. cit.

presented by actors who sat on stools and directly addressed the audience. Many of the critics did not like the play, but most felt the "collage" idea had merit. Despite the violent rejection of Telemachus Clay by some of the reviewers, it enjoyed a run of 125 performances.

Summary

It is difficult to make any generalizations about the productions in this chapter because they are so diverse. In terms of length of run, the most successful one was U.S.A. This presentation of John Dos Passos novel was adapted and directed by Paul Shyre, who had been responsible for the two O'Casey dramatizations, I Knock at the Door and Pictures in the Hallway. Shyre's method of presentation was substantially different from the rather formalized reading technique he had used in the two O'Casey programs. The players still had stools, but they used them only when they were not involved in a scene. There was a great deal of movement, costumes of the period were worn, and no scripts were used. Several of the critics however, still classified U.S.A. as a reading. Most of them approved of the production.

The only solo show in this chapter was also an adaptation of a novel. Philip Hanson presented his version of Moby Dick for seven performances. The consensus of critical opinion seemed to be that, while Hanson was to be admired for his courage, he was not talented enough to accomplish what he set out to do, and there was considerable doubt in the minds of several critics as to whether

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Melville's classic could be successful on the stage under any circumstances.

Dear Liar was also a failure, at least in financial terms. Jerome Kilty was responsible for the adaptation of the correspondence between George Bernard Shaw and Mrs. Pat Campbell. This was the only production considered in this chapter with "big name" performers, but Katharine Cornell and Brian Aherne failed to attract audiences. It was the most elaborated presentation in terms of setting, with a sofa and desk indicating Mrs. Pat's living room and a lectern-desk combination representing Shaw's study. The players used manuscripts but only as props.

Similarly, the performers in Under Milk Wood had manuscripts on reading stands in front of them, but they knew their lines. They wore ordinary clothes and sat on their stools throughout the performance. Author Dylan Thomas appeared as one of the readers and the few critics in attendence were most complimentary to the poem and to the readers. However, as it was only given for two performances, it is impossible to judge its popular success. The full scale production of Under Milk Wood which appeared on Broadway in 1957 was a failure, both in terms of popular appeal and critical reaction. A later production, done off-Broadway with a smaller cast and less theatrical paraphernalia enjoyed some critical approval, although there were still objections to the over-visualization of things which would, some reviewers felt, have been better left to Thomas' poetry and one's own imagination. The play had grown out of a program Thomas had presented on radio and he called it "a play for voices."

Perhaps the most significant production in this chapter was Lewis John Carlino's Telemachus Clay. This play was written to be presented in what Carlino called the "theatre of collage." He believed he had developed a new type of theatre which directly involved the audience. The difference lay in the manner of presentation, which called for the actors to remain on their stools and to speak directly to the audience rather than to each other. As some of the critics pointed out, this was not too different in format from various "reading" productions. However, it was different in that this was the first time an author had written a play to be presented in this manner.

Several of the critics were more concerned with whether or not the material used in these miscellaneous productions could be considered as "drama" or as "a play" than they were with the question of whether the presentation should be regarded as "theatre." Paul Shyre called his adaptation of U.S.A. a play, but some of the reviewers disagreed. Aston cautioned potential audiences not to expect the "usual drama or suspense," to try to locate a plot. He thought the production would be better described as a "reading" or a "concertized version of a vivid narrative."[307] Malcolm wrote that "it is weak and doubtful as a play--which is what it insists on calling itself--but excellent as a revue."[308] McClain ruled, "It really isn't a play at all, in the conventional sense; it is

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[307]Frank Aston, New York World-Telegram and Sun, October 29, 1959.

[308]Donald Malcolm, The New Yorker, November 7, 1959, p. 88.

more an elaborate reading, and as such it is very good."[309]

McClain also liked Dear Liar, which was similar to U.S.A. in that it made use of at least partial scenery and costume. He reported that Dear Liar successfully avoided "the dread formula of a reading."[310] Watts heartily recommended the production, but he noted it was "not a play in any conventional sense, nor does it pretend to be."[311] Atkinson enjoyed the literary duel, but warned that it was "no substitute for the crackle of a comedy by the man who wrote the most spirited letters in this wayward exchange."[312]

Lewis John Carlino's "collage," Telemachus Clay, met with mixed reactions. The critic for the Villager agreed that experimentation was necessary, but questioned, "Is it theatre? It is more for the workshop, not for a paying audience."[313] Brustein, writing for New Republic confessed, "To attend a staged reading is to feel like that theatre goer in a recent New Yorker cartoon who, upon watching the curtain rise on four empty stools says 'I don't like it already.'" However, he found Telemachus Clay "the only evening of American theatre so far this year which begins to approach distinction."[314] Herridge labeled the production "one of the most interesting new theatre forms to appear in a long time."[315]

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[309] John McClain, New York Journal American, October 29, 1959.

[310] _____, March 18, 1960.

[311] Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, March 18, 1960.

[312] Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, March 18, 1960, p. 19.

[313] M.S., loc. cit., November 21, 1963.

[314] Robert Brustein, loc. cit. [315] Frances Herridge, loc. cit.

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As was the case in the previous chapters, some of the critics were reluctant to accept oral interpretation productions as "theatre," and considered the material used in them as less satisfactory than a "play" or "drama." Others thought the presentations constituted thoroughly enjoyable and acceptable theatre.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The question raised in this study was: Is oral interpretation a separate and unique type of entertainment, or is it a specialized form of theatre? The findings regarding setting and accessories, manner of presentation, acting, material used, and critical commentary regarding the question of whether or not oral interpretation presentations constituted "theatre," suggests the following conclusions:

1. Obvious differences exist between the majority of oral interpretation presentations and conventional theatre productions in the manner of presentation--specifically, in the use of scripts, narrators, and movement. Scripts were in evidence in nearly three-fourths of the oral interpretation presentations. However, as we have seen, the performers in most of the productions had their lines memorized and used the scripts as props. In some productions, Don Juan in Hell and Pictures in the Hallway for example, the actors pretended to be reading from the scripts and turned the pages constantly. In others, such as In White America and When I Was a Child, the actors began the vignettes by pretending to read from the scripts, but soon stopped reading and began acting. Three productions used scripts for the purpose normally associated with them. The performers in Oedipus Rex and The Mayor of Zalamea read their lines, as did narrator Martyn Green in Drums Under the Windows. Narrators were

used in ten productions.

The performers in more than half of the oral interpretation productions were restricted in their movement. Players in five presentations used almost no movement, and performers in twelve productions used only limited movement. Several of the presentations which did not restrict the movement of the players featured acted-out vignettes.

2. Another significant difference between oral interpretation presentations and conventional productions is that the material used in three-fourths of the oral interpretation presentations was not originally intended for the stage. Nearly half of the presentations used more than one genre of literature. Seven used several different kinds of material, including letters, diaries, court records, histories, conversations, witticisms, and songs, as well as excerpts from poetry, plays, novels, and short stories. The major form of literature used in seven of the presentations was a play or selections from plays. Six productions featured primarily poetry. Three volumes of Sean O'Casey's autobiography constituted the material for three productions. Novels were adapted in three presentations, and collections of short stories were used for three productions. Emlyn Williams' first Dickens' program, Mixed Bill, utilized cuttings from four of the English author's novels and two of his short stories. Dear Liar was an adaptation taken from forty years of correspondence between George Bernard Shaw and Mrs. Pat Campbell.

It is impossible to draw any conclusions, on the basis of the material presented in this study, as to what type of material is best suited for oral interpretation. The reviewers were favorably inclined

toward the material used in more than half of the productions. The criticisms leveled at the material which failed to receive critical endorsement cited the lack of a definite central theme and the use of material which lacked dramatic excitement or lyrical beauty.

3. The majority of oral interpretation productions made use of the theatrical accessories of scenery and lighting. Frequently however, only selected or limited elements were used.[1]

Eight of the presentations used no scenery. Limited scenery was utilized in twelve productions. Three of these featured a symbol of the author in the setting. In The World of Carl Sandburg, an empty throne-like chair with Sandburg's books scattered around it was spotlighted. A Boy Growing Up featured a screen with Dylan Thomas' signature scrawled across it. A large photograph of Brecht dominated the stage in Brecht on Brecht. Nine productions used more elaborate scenery, representing such settings as a living room in a nineteenth-century parsonage.

The reviews of twelve productions did not mention lighting, while brief mention was made of the lighting in nine. The critical commentary indicates that special lighting effects and/or atmospheric lighting were an important feature of ten productions.

As might be expected, the least frequently used theatrical accouterment was costume. In twenty presentations, the performers wore evening dress or street clothes. The performers in three

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[1]The terms "selected" and "limited" are used to indicate that scenery and lighting were used, but not to the extent one would expect them to be used in a conventional theatre production.

productions used some elements of costume, and the players in the remaining eight wore costumes similar to what would be expected in a conventional theatrical presentation. In five of the productions, the actors used simple costume changes to indicate different characters.

4. The performers in nearly all the oral interpretation productions had appeared in previous conventional theatre productions, consequently, much of the stage technique used by the interpreters was very similar to that used in regular theatre presentations. More than half of the oral interpretation productions featured well-known actors.

5. The majority of critics were willing to accept at least some oral interpretation productions as "theatre." Their reviews indicated that many of them shared Variety critic Hobe Morrison's view: "All I know, or rather believe, is that if a performance is good, it doesn't make any difference to me what form it takes."[2]

On the basis of the above conclusions, the writer is of the opinion that this form of oral interpretation is not a separate and distinct type of entertainment, but a specialized form of theatre utilizing selected stage techniques and accessories. It is obvious that many of these productions differ from conventional theatre productions in their emphasis on the aural rather than the visual aspects of the production, and in the type of material used.

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[2]Letter to the author from Hobe Morrison, January 2, 1968.

However, performers in both types of presentations serve as the medium through which an author's ideas are presented. Both the actor and the interpreter try to communicate these ideas orally to an audience. The interpreter is frequently aided by lighting and elements of scenery, and occasionally, by elements of costume.

It appears that oral interpretation borrows certain techniques and accessories from the theatre to stimulate the imagination of those in the audience, but tries to avoid using these techniques and accessories to the extent that the emphasis is shifted from what the audience sees in their minds, to what they see on the stage. Purists in the realms of oral interpretation and of theatre may object, but the writer feels the similarities between oral interpretation and theatre outweigh the differences. As critic Tom Driver pointed out in his review of Pictures in the Hallway and A Boy Growing Up:

> Part of the delight of the theatre is that it has endless ways of achieving its magic. We do not ask of it, therefore, whether it is long or short, grand or petite, professional or amature, old or new, conventional or unconventional. We ask whether it has unique, living moments. If they are there, it is enough, whatever the means.[3]

It is the writer's opinion that, while some types of materail might be presented very effectively by a performer who has a script on a podium, and who uses little or no movement, no costume, scenery or lighting effects, as evidenced by Sir John Gielgud's Ages of Man, other types of material would be greatly enhanced by the use of some theatrical techniques and accessories. It should be noted, in

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[3]Tom F. Driver, Christian Century, October 30, 1957, p. 1288.

reference to Ages of Man, that Sir John is an actor of considerable talent and experience, and the critical commentary concerning the production clearly indicates that he made extensive use of the techniques which have helped to make him a famous actor. Those who try to prescribe what oral interpretation must or must not use, severely limit the possibilities of this medium.

Suggestions for Further Study

Professional oral interpretation offers a fertile field for scholars in theatre and in oral interpretation. Very little research has been done in this area, and there are many interesting aspects a researcher might consider. This study has been concerned with only the productions done in commercial New York theatres. Several of these productions were sent on extended tours either before or after their New York appearances. The "road" version of these productions and the popular and critical response they received might suggest the status of oral interpretation throughout the United States. An in depth examination of one presentation for its entire theatrical existence would also be of value. Presentations which seem to be especially well suited to such a study include: Don Juan in Hell, John Brown's Body, The Hollow Crown, The World of Carl Sandburg, Dear Liar, Spoon River, In White America, Mark Twain Tonight!, and Emlyn Williams' programs as Dickens.

People who have worked extensively in professional oral interpretation, such as Emlyn Williams, Hal Holbrook, Paul Gregory and Paul Shyre offer interesting possibilities for research, provided

of course, that they would be willing to cooperate. A study of the advantages and disadvantages of this form of presentation as ascertained by those involved in the productions, and by those critics who review them, would be useful to those interested in either professional or college oral interpretation presentations.

Some of the methods of presentation used in oral interpretation productions are similar in certain respects to devices Brecht used in several of his plays to "alienate" the audiences. A comparison in terms of purpose and technique would be of special interest to those concerned with the "fourth wall." A comparative study might also be made between professional oral interpretation productions done in New York and those done in London. A dissertation treating professional oral interpretation in London from 1951 to 1962 was done by James Linn.[4]

Those who are interested in both theatre and oral interpretation should find this an excellent field in which to work. Those interested primarily in theatre, or primarily in oral interpretation could concentrate on the various elements of their particular area which are a part of professional oral interpretation.

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[4]James Reive Lindsay Linn, "A Historical Study of Oral Interpretation in London, 1951-1962 As a Form of Professional Theatre," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1964.)

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