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A STUDY OF SIX REPRESENTATIVE AMERICAN POST
WORLD WAR II PLAYWRIGHTS

by

Wayne D. Bottje

A THESIS

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of
Michigan State University of Agriculture
and Applied Science in partial ful-
fillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Speech

August, 1955

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

The writer wishes to acknowledge with appreciation the assistance of Dr. Wilson B. Paul, without whose help this thesis could not have been completed.

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D E D I C A T I O N

To the Broadway Theater's most enthusiastic visitor from the campus of Michigan State University, Mr. Donald O. Buell, the writer respectfully dedicates this volume.

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An Abstract

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1955

Approved

Donald C. Suck

Major Professor

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

- TITLE : A Study Of Six Representative American Post World War II Playwrights.
- AUTHOR : Wayne D. Bottje
- SOURCE : Master Of Arts Thesis, Michigan State University of Agriculture And Applied Science.
- PROBLEM : Chapter 1: To comprehend the historical and theatrical picture during the decade the six representative playwrights were making their major contributions to the theater and determine the general state of the theater in this period.
- Chapters 2-7 inclusive: To study the backgrounds of each of the six representative playwrights in this study (Tennessee Williams, John Patrick, Mary Chase, Arthur Miller, William Inge, and Robert Anderson), to determine what effect their backgrounds had upon their writing, and to study their major plays and the critical reaction to them.
- Chapter 8: To survey the accomplishments of the six playwrights, to determine their similarities and differences, and attempt to weigh their contributions to the theater.
- PROCEDURE : Chapter 1: Survey the history of the ten year period, 1945-55, on the national and international scene, and the theatrical developments of the same era to illustrate the social mileau in which these six playwrights are writing.
- Chapters 2-7 inclusive: Use the comments and criticisms of the professional drama critics and the theatergoing experiences of the thesis writer to determine the nature of each playwright's contributions during the period studied.

Chapter 8: Use the material of the first seven chapters to compare the playwrights and discover how they have or have not reflected the society in which they live in their writings.

RESULTS : The history of the period reveals it to be a particularly turbulent era with strong national and international tensions. Of the playwrights studied, Arthur Miller, in particular, deals with the social problems of the decade. Tennessee Williams and William Inge are primarily concerned with characters in their immediate social environment. Mary Chase and John Patrick are principally writers of comedy and escapist material, with the notable exception of the latter's Teahouse Of The August Moon, which is a humorous commentary upon the current social problem of armies of occupation. Robert Anderson is still somewhat of an unknown quantity, with a social theme predominating in his first play and characters in the second. None of the material of the six playwrights seem to have been substantially affected by the Second World War.

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CHAPTER I

A SURVEY OF THE POSTWAR AMERICAN THEATER, 1945-1955

"The American Theater," writes Arthur Miller, "occupies five side streets, Forty-Fourth to Forty-Ninth, between Eighth Avenue and Broadway, with a few additional theaters to the north and south and across Broadway. In these thirty-two buildings every new play in the United States starts its life and ends it."¹ And, as if to anticipate a storm of protests from theater devotees outside New York reminding him that considerable theatrical production is going on throughout the rest of the country, Miller writes, "I agree, and repeat only that with practically no exceptions, the new American plays originate on Broadway. I would add that I wish they didn't, but they do. The American Theater is five blocks long by about one and a half blocks wide."²

Mr. Miller, born in Manhattan and a graduate of the University of Michigan, will be accused of being a "typically provincial New Yorker." Assuming his thesis to be correct why, then, all the excitement over

1. Arthur Miller, "The American Theater," Holiday Magazine, XVII (January, 1955), p. 91

2. Ibid.

a strictly local phenomenon? Why do thousands of young people all over the United States each year prepare themselves for a profession that can be squeezed into a few square blocks in New York City? Why, if these are the limits of the American Theater, are so many people, young and not so young, hundreds and thousands of miles away from Broadway and who have never seen a Broadway production stirred so deeply by "The American Theater"?

Mr. Miller's thesis need neither be wholly accepted nor completely rejected. There is, certainly, an element of truth in it. To be sure, every new play in American does not end its life in this restricted area. To cite but a few of many examples, Oklahoma has made thousands of new friends annually, though long since departed from Broadway. Porgy And Bess, an expatriate from "The American Theater" twice returned, is currently bringing joy to multitudes of theater lovers throughout Europe. Miller's own Death Of A Salesman has been translated into many languages and produced in a dozen or so countries -- as well as the length and breadth of America. The list can be multiplied many times. Every new play ends its life in this limited area of New York City? Nonsense! Miller need not rely on professors of drama, stock company directors, and little theater people, as he

says, to challenge that statement.

Perhaps the observation, "with practically no exceptions (the qualification is convenient!) the new American plays originate on Broadway" is made on somewhat firmer ground. Strictly speaking, of course, even most of the new plays "originate" -- that is, are "tried out" -- in theaters outside New York City, although these are usually looked upon merely as "rehearsals" for the New York opening. Further, these productions usually germinate in producers' offices set up in New York to "feed" the New York (i.e. "American") Theater.

Nevertheless, exceptions may be noted here, too -- as Miller evidently anticipates by his qualification. Robert Anderson's second drama, All Summer Long, won original critical acclaim in an initial production in the Washington, D. C., Arena Theater, resulting in its production on Broadway. Walter Kerr's musical, Sing Out, Sweet Land, "originated" at Catholic University in Washington, D. C., and was later transferred to Broadway. Two other musicals, Song Of Norway and the recent musical version of Peter Pan, "originated" on the West Coast. A number of other exceptions are readily available.

Having noted the exceptions, however, there is still room for agreement with much of what Miller has

written. What Miller has evidently intended to express is the idea that, insofar as the birth and nurturing of new American drama and dramatic literature is concerned, this tiny area of New York City is, essentially "The American Theater." Here is where actors, composers, playwrights, and directors are "made." Here, too, is established the dramatic literature that will be used and re-used by community theater, college theater, and amateur theatrical groups throughout the land.

Although non-Broadway theatrical enterprises have been called "the tributary theater" -- being, as they are, the spawning areas for the professional theater's actors, directors, designers, and writers -- the Broadway theater itself is no less a tributary theater. The contributions of the New York stage to the success and growth of the non-Broadway theater are no less significant than the more obvious contributions made to the professional theater by the so-called tributary theater. An honest judgment of the two mainstreams of the American theater would suggest that each is considerably dependent upon the other, that each would suffer a mortal blow if the other were to disappear completely from the American scene.

This study is concerned with the consideration of six representative playwrights who are currently

making contributions primarily to the contemporary professional New York stage and secondarily to the so-called tributary theater. Since these playwrights reflect, in some considerable measure, the turmoil of their times, a brief study of the events of the past decade during which they were making their initial major contributions to the world of the theater would be appropriate to this study.

The year 1945 was, beyond all question of doubt, one of the pivotal dates in American history. This was the year the most cataclysmic war in the world's history ground to a halt. This was the Year One of the newest and most fearful weapon ever incorporated into the arsenals of warring nations -- a single lethal weapon that not only ended a conflict but has continually and increasingly clouded the relations among nations and has, in various ways, altered individual ways of performing daily tasks. The Atomic Age has not alone brought a new terror into the lives of all peoples -- it has brought, too, the dazzling promise of tremendous progress in the scientific and medical worlds, a promise that has been only partially realized in the past decade.

Nineteen forty five is also to be remembered as the year which removed three towering figures on the international scene in quick succession -- Roosevelt, Mussolini, and Hitler. In San Francisco the United

Nations was taking shape, filled with the hope that the apparent unanimity of desires for peace among the three Great Powers, the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union, would find permanent expression in this successor to The League Of Nations.

In America, the anticipation of a severe post-war depression resulting from sharp cutbacks on military orders happily failed to materialize as pent-up demands for consumer goods quickly filled the economic vacuum. America's overseas military power was being quickly dismantled, troops were pouring back from overseas, and most of the populace was preparing to meet the future with high optimism.

The closing year of the war also found the 1944-45 season on the Broadway stage at its most flourishing state in more than a decade, both quantitatively and qualitatively speaking. This season saw 83 new shows presented on Broadway, plus 14 new shows that closed out of town (some for lack of theater space in New York), as compared with 55 new shows in the previous year. Together with revivals and return engagements, the total Broadway production mark was over 100 shows.

By the Variety standard of classifying "hits" as being those shows which make money for the show's backers and "flops" being those which lose money, the season was likewise better than average, since 24 of

the 83 new shows were listed as "hits" and 12 of these as "smash hits" (i.e. big money makers). Included among the "smash hits" were three plays that form a later part of this study: Mary Chase's Harvey, Tennessee Williams' The Glass Menagerie, and John Patrick's The Hasty Heart. This was also the year of a number of memorable musical shows, including among them Richard Rodgers' and Oscar Hammerstein II's Carousel, Bloomer Girl by Harold Arlen and E. Y. Harburg, On The Town with book and lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, music by Leonard Bernstein and from an idea by Jerome Robbins, Dark Of The Moon by Howard Richardson and William Berney, Song Of Norway with book by Milton Lazarus and music arranged from Edward Greig by Robert Wright and George Forrest, and Up In Central Park with book and lyrics by Herbert and Dorothy Fields and music by Sigmund Romberg. Included, too, were such excellent dramatic productions as John Hersey's A Bell For Adano (adapted for the stage by Paul Osborn), Anna Lucasta by Philip Yordan, The Late George Apley by John P. Marquand and George S. Kaufman, and I Remember Mama, adapted by John Van Druten from a novel by Katherine Forbes. The 1944-45 season on Broadway was distinguished both from the standpoints of quantity and of quality.

In 1946 the high hopes for international cooperation began to crumble rapidly and the Western Powers were

becoming irrevocably arraigned against the Russian colossus, first in the Balkan and Baltic States, next in a wrangle in the United Nations over the presence of Russian troops in Iran, and again in a peace conference that brought an almost interminable conflict in attempting to draw the borders between Yugoslavia and Italy in the Trieste area.

The international tensions were increasingly making themselves felt in the lives of individual Americans. Tension mounted in the United Nations, too, over increasingly futile efforts to control the use and manufacture of the atomic bomb. Bernard Baruch, presenting the United States plan for atomic control, forcefully described it as a choice "between the quick and the dead." ³

Throughout the country inflation began to creep up on the citizenry as consumers' demands continued unfilled. A series of major strikes, involving a loss of 110,700,000 man hours of labor, ⁴ cut production and sharply increased prices. The year saw crippling strikes in the steel industry, the soft coal mines, the railroads, the maritime industry, the automobile industry, electrical equipment industry, and the packing houses. The nation's

3. Bernard M. Baruch, Vital Speeches, XII, p. 546, July 1, 1946

4. New York Times, Sec. 4, p. 10, December 29, 1946

unrest was made manifest in November when, in a national election, the Republicans won control of Congress for the first time since 1932.

In the theater the first full post-war year on Broadway (1945-46) saw a definite dip in the number of new shows, from 83 in the previous year to 62, of which only 13 were counted "in the money." Forty-nine shows failed financially on Broadway and 33 more failed on the road. The season also included 12 revivals, including a bill by England's visiting Old Vic Repertory Company. Ten of the revivals were financially successful.

Included among the hits of the season were the exuberant musicals, Amie Get Your Gun by Herbert and Dorothy Fields and music by Irving Berlin, and Call Me Mister, with book by Arnold Auerbach and Arnold B. Horwitt and music by Harold Rome, and equally distinguished dramas, Arnaud d'Usseau and James Gow's Deep Are The Roots, Garson Kanin's Born Yesterday, Elmer Rice's Dream Girl, State Of The Union by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, and The Magnificent Yankee by Emmet Lavery. But on the "flops" list were some disturbing signs. Such fine dramas as Anouilh's Antigone, starring Katherine Cornell, Arthur Laurents' fine war play, Home Of The Brave which was squeezed out because of a theater shortage, the delicate and

picturesque Lute Song, adapted by Will Irwin and Sidney Howard from a Chinese play (defeated on Broadway by its own lavish expenditures), the dramatization of Lillian Smith's Strange Fruit, Robert Sherwood's semi-war play, The Rugged Path (which closed early because of the disaffection of the star, Spencer Tracy), ⁵ the dramatization of Franz Werfel's The Song Of Bernadette, and Tennessee Williams' and Donald Windham's play, You Touched Me! -- all failed to pay for themselves despite being better than average theater.

On the international scene, the year 1947 became a turning point, the year in which the break between the Soviet Union and the West was officially acknowledged. Beginning in March with the Truman Doctrine, enunciated by the President for the purpose of " ... preventing the overthrow of 'democratic governments' anywhere by outside intervention," ⁶ the conflict became more irrevocable when Secretary of State George C. Marshall launched the Marshall Plan in a speech at Harvard University on June 5. The intent of the plan, according to Secretary Marshall, was " ... the revival of a working economy in the world so as to permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions

5. Variety, p. 69, June 5, 1946

6. New York Times, Sec. 4, p. 8, December 28, 1947

can be built." ⁷ The Soviet reply clearly expressed the intentions of America's one-time ally. "The U.S.S.R. will put all efforts into seeing that the Marshall Plan is not realized," said Politburo Member Andrei Zhadanov, ⁸ and the Cominform, an abbreviated version of the recently (1943) disbanded Communist world organ Comintern, was set up to accomplish that end. The first action of the Cominform was to foment general strikes in France and Italy which were immediately defeated by prompt and vigorous action by the anti-Communist Governments of those countries.

On the domestic scene there was a sharp drop in labor troubles, but the passage of the Taft-Hartley Labor Law by the Republican Congress presented an issue for the Presidential campaign in the following year. Prices continued to rise and President Truman summoned Congress into a special session to reimpose wage and price controls, but the Congress, being controlled by a majority of the opposite political faith, was little disposed to do his bidding and passed an ineffective price control law.

Britain, struggling under a rapidly diminishing dollar supply and a war-weary industrial machine,

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

enjoyed a few brief moments of sunshine in a nationwide celebration of the marriage of the heiress-presumptive, Princess Elizabeth, to the Duke of Edinburgh.

Along Manhattan's Street of Bright Lights, however, the 1946-47 theater season gloomily noted a further drop in the number of new plays produced -- down to 56, of which only 15 were recorded as hits. A doubling of revivals from the previous year, to 24, plus 24 plays that failed to reach New York, made the total productions 104 for the season. The incidence of failures among the revivals was unusually high (17 out of 24), 15 of these resulting from the failure of the newly organized American Repertory Theater and from the five Shakespeare plays presented by Donald Wolfit's English Touring Troupe.

The season included one success and one failure pertinent to this study, Arthur Miller's All My Sons and John Patrick's The Story Of Mary Surratt. Other successes of the season included Lillian Hellman's Another Part Of The Forest, Anita Loos' Happy Birthday, Maxwell Anderson's Joan Of Lorraine and Eugene O'Neill's last great play, The Iceman Cometh, and two musical fantasies, Brigadoon, with a book by Alan Jay Lerner and music by Frederick Loewe, and Finian's Rainbow, with book by E. Y. Harburg and Fred Saidy and music

by Burton Lane. The season's failures included, in addition to the Patrick drama, the Elmer Rice-Kurt Weill musical version of Mr. Rice's play, Street Scene, Menotti's twin bill of The Telephone and The Medium, and the Sartre import, No Exit.

In the 1948 world picture the lines were clearly drawn and the power of the Soviet Union and the West became locked together in a "cold war." The West European states began the long haul to regain their pre-war industrial status as the Marshall Plan started to move into high gear. As their factories began to resume operation the Western states started also to think of security and set up a mutual defense pact in Brussels in March of 1948. The United States definitely abandoned its historic non-entanglement policy when the Senate passed the Vandenberg Resolution affirming its determination to take part in the North Atlantic defense with the Brussels Pact nations.

The Soviet Union angrily struck back at this stiffening attitude of the West by imposing a blockade on Berlin, an island in the middle of the Russian occupation zone. But this attempt at pressure on the West failed when Britain and the United States created an airlift which supplied 2,100,000 West Berliners with fuel and food.

The Russians suffered another defeat when Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia objected to Soviet dictation and led Communist Yugoslavia out of the Eastern bloc of nations.

In the Far East, however, the picture was rapidly getting grimmer for the West as the Chinese Communist armies swept down from the North and began pushing Chiang Kai Shek's Nationalist armies against the beachheads of the China coastlands.

At home, the big news of the year was the unexpected election victory of President Harry S. Truman over Thomas E. Dewey despite the fact that the President had been deserted by the extreme left (Wallace) and right (Dixiecrat) wings of his party. The increasing and prolonged international tensions were reflected in the indictment of Alger Hiss, a former employee of the State Department and advisor to President Roosevelt at the Yalta Conference, for perjury, thus providing the Republican Party with a strong campaign issue and giving impetus to a movement later to become known as "McCarthyism."

The New York theater, too, seemed suffering from some sort of a malaise for the 1947-48 theater year saw a still further contraction in the number of new shows presented on Broadway. Seventeen of the 52 new plays (four less than the preceding year) in the theaters paid off in this season, with only eight

tryouts folding on the road. Tryouts, no less than those plays which bow on Broadway, represent money invested and lost and productions mounted. This season also included 21 revivals, of which 11 were successful financially (including seven by the British D'Oyly Carte Gilbert and Sullivan Company).

Among this season's hits significant to this study was Tennessee Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire. Also listed among the hits were Thomas Heggen and Joshua Logan's Mister Roberts, William Wister Haynes Command Decision, Ruth and Augustus Goetz's The Heiress, Jan de Hartog's Skipper Next To God, the musicals Allegro by Rodgers and Hammerstein and High Button Shoes with book by Stephen Longstreet and music by Jule Styne and Sammy Cahn, and three successful revues, Angel In The Wings, with music and words by Bob Hilliard and Carl Sigman and sketches by Ted Luce, Hank Ladd, and Grace and Paul Hartman, Inside U.S.A., with music by Howard Dietz and Arthur Schwartz and sketches by Arnold Auerbach, Moss Hart, and Arnold Horwitt, and Make Mine Manhattan, with book by Arnold Horwitt and music by Richard Lewine. The financial failures included J. B. Priestley's An Inspector Calls, Michael Myerberg's adaptation of Dear Judas from a story by Robinson Jeffers, and Eastward In Eden by Dorothy Gardner.

The most significant event of the theatrical season came in the closing of the fabulous Rodgers' and Hammerstein musical, Oklahoma, after 268 weeks (five years and two months) of performances, numbering 2, 202. This was just 36 performances less than the world's record London musical, Chu Chin Chow, but if the 46 servicemen's matinees at reduced prices were added to the figure Oklahoma could be regarded as establishing a new record for musicals. The musical was also responsible for making The Theatre Guild, its producing organization, once again a major influence in the American theater picture.

A feeling of terror struck the heart of America in 1949 when President Truman announced, "We have evidence that ... an atomic explosion occurred in the U.S.S.R." ⁹ The terror was not alleviated when attempts in the United Nations to control the atomic bomb came to a complete dead-end and the suspicions of the good faith of the contending Powers deepened.

In Europe the Berlin blockade was ended after ten months and 22 days of mutual recriminations, but the lines of antagonism were drawn tighter as the Western nations joined in a mutual defense treaty by signing the North Atlantic Pact. Moscow retaliated

9. New York Times, Sec. 4, p. 8, December 25, 1949

by organizing a "Council of Economic Mutual Aid", designed to integrate East Europe's economy with Russia's economy. The Soviets began to strike terror into the hearts of their internal opposition as well. In Hungary, Cardinal Mindszenty, a high prelate of the Roman Catholic Church, was imprisoned for alleged treason and the former chief deputy of the Hungarian Communist Party was hung. In Bulgaria the former Vice Premier was executed for alleged treason and Soviet Marshal Rokossovsky was put in charge of the armies of Poland. These moves were apparently made to guard against further "national Communism" of the Tito variety, the latter continuing effectively to defy the Soviet Union with increasing assistance from the United States.

In the Far East the West suffered a mortal blow as all of China fell to Mao Tze-tung's Communist armies, and fear was felt by the Western Powers that all of the poverty-stricken nations on China's vast borders might fall under Communist influence and domination. ¹⁰

In the United States the trial of Alger Hiss ended in a hung jury, and a new one was begun. But the tensions of the "cold war" were increasingly felt

10. Ibid.

as new and more severe government loyalty checks were instituted, Congress investigated the expulsion of left wing factions by labor unions, and eleven leaders of the American Communist Party were tried and convicted of violating the Smith Act, which made it a crime to "advocate or teach" the overthrow of "any Government in the United States by force or violence." 11

These tensions may or may not have affected the Broadway scene but the year 1948-49 suffered a sharp reduction in total productions, perhaps principally due to the reduction in foreign touring companies. There was a total of 63 productions on Broadway, of which 43 were straight plays (8 hits), 16 musicals (6 hits), and four revivals (one hit). One of the more remarkable aspects of the season was that only one production closed out of town.

The season was made most memorable by Elia Kazan's production of Arthur Miller's Death Of A Salesman and by the introduction of another Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, South Pacific. But the qualitative caliber of the season was maintained by other fine productions as well, for among the season's productions were Sidney Kingsley's Detective Story, Edward, My Son by

11. Ibid.

Robert Morley and Noel Langley, Jean Giraudoux's The Madwoman Of Chaillot, and Robert E. McEnroe's The Silver Whistle, and the bright musicals, Kiss Me, Kate, with music and lyrics by Cole Porter and book by Bella and Samuel Spewack, and Where's Charley? with a book by George Abbott and music by Frank Loesser.

The list of financial failures was equally distinguished by Tennessee Williams' Summer And Smoke, a revival of Sidney Howard's They Knew What They Wanted, and Jean-Paul Sartre's Red Gloves. The season also saw the closing of 17 of 21 holdovers from previous seasons. Born Yesterday, Mr. Roberts, Highbutton Shoes, and A Streetcar Named Desire continued to run throughout the whole season.

Nineteen fifty marked the second major turning point in the post-war era as the "cold war" turned into a "hot war" with the invasion of South Korea by the Russian sponsored North Korean Communists in June. Forced to act quickly in South Korea's defense or sacrifice the good faith of its allies around the world, President Truman took the decision, as Commander-in-Chief, to send American air and sea forces into combat in South Korea immediately. Three days later American ground troops were ordered into the fight. Shortly thereafter, the United Nations Security Council

(the Russian delegate having previously walked out) asked U. N. countries to furnish armed forces to repel the North Koreans and put General Douglas MacArthur in command of its troops. ¹²

During the course of the fighting United Nations' troops pushed deep into North Korea until hordes of Chinese Communists crossed the border and swamped the numerically inferior United Nations' troops, pushing them back again below the 38th parallel, the postwar dividing line between North and South Korea.

The sudden conflict brought a resurgence of remilitarization in the United States, a sharp increase in the size of the Army, an upping of the military budget, new materials shortages, and consequent inflation. In December the President declared a national emergency, applied price and wage controls, and appointed Charles E. Wilson, head of the General Electric Corporation, to direct the new Office of Defense Mobilization. ¹³

Politics, however, was not forgotten and there was increased sniping by the Republican minority at Secretary of State Dean Acheson for "selling Chiang

12. New York Times, Sec. 4, p. 8, December 31, 1950

13. Ibid.

Kai-Shek's China down the river." Senator Joseph McCarthy charged that "the State Department is infested with Communists" who "handed over" China to Mao Tze-tung.¹⁴

In Europe, French Foreign Minister Schuman proposed the Schuman Plan for pooling basic heavy industries, and talk was timidly begun on the possibility of rearming Germans and making them a part of the North Atlantic Defense Alliance.

In the Broadway picture the 1949-50 theater season hit a new low, both quantitatively and qualitatively. In a total of 56 productions there were 43 new plays and musicals, eight revivals, and five miscellaneous shows. The incongruity of the season was that despite the low caliber of production there were fewer costly failures than in previous seasons. Seven of the 56 productions were definitely hits and nine were placed in a "currently uncertain status" by Variety at the season's end (May 31, 1950).

The definite hits included T. S. Eliot's Cocktail Party, Gian Carlo Menotti's The Consul, Samuel Taylor's The Happy Time, and Carson McCuller's Member Of The Wedding, the long-running musical Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, another revival of James M. Barrie's Peter

14. Ibid.

Pan, Joshua Logan's venture into play writing with a free adaptation of Chekov's Cherry Orchard retitled The Wisteria Trees, and the Alan Paton-Maxwell Anderson-Kurt Weill musical, Lost In The Stars.

The season's most promising contribution to dramatic literature and history was the arrival of a new playwright on the Broadway scene. The play; Come Back, Little Sheba: the playwright; William Inge. The production was to make a new dramatic star out of Shirley Booth and brought the promise of a new and different writing talent to the Broadway scene.

The financial failures of the season included revivals of George Bernard Shaw's Caesar And Cleopatra and of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, as well as plays by lesser mortals, including Ludwig Bemelman's Now I Lay Me Down To Sleep, Lillian Hellman's adaptation of Emmanuel Robies French play, Montserrat, Jean Giraudoux's comedy, The Enchanted, and the Robert Sherwood-Irving Berlin musical, Miss Liberty. Six holdovers continued their runs through the entire season, and 14 holdovers closed (including Born Yesterday, which had been running since the 1945-46 season).

The war in Korea ground to a stalemate in 1951 but by the year's end no truce was in sight, despite the Soviet U. N. delegate's proposal that " ... discussions should be started between the belligerents for a cease

fire" ¹⁵

A brief, violent furor was aroused in the United States when President Truman fired General Douglas MacArthur from the Supreme Command of the United Nations forces in Korea because of insubordination to the President. The event threatened for awhile to become a sharp political issue but had already begun to lose its potency as the year ended.

Politics, however, was rife throughout the year as the Republicans sharpened the axes for the 1952 Presidential election. Senator Robert A. Taft was the first hopeful to throw his hat into the ring. General Eisenhower, commanding the North Atlantic Treaty Organization forces in Europe, managed to hold aloof from all political overtures from representatives of both parties. Senator Joseph McCarthy continued his allegations of "pro-Communism" in the State Department and made a bitter attack on Defense Secretary George C. Marshall, accusing him of making common cause with Stalin. ¹⁶ Corruption in the Government and Washington's "five percenters" (contact men who made money in securing government contracts) also formed a part of the Republican attack on the Administration.

¹⁵. New York Times, Sec. 4, p. 10, December 30, 1951

¹⁶. Ibid.

Europe continued to debate the Schuman Plan and various plans for rearming Germany, but at year's end nothing concrete had yet been done about it. General Eisenhower was slowly forging Western Europe's defense forces into a manageable unit, but the still shaky European economies were being reluctantly pressed to the limit to accomplish it. In Great Britain, Winston Churchill once again assumed the Prime Ministership as Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee's Party was defeated in a national election.

The American Theater, in the 1950-51 season, experienced a remarkable upsurge in stage activity. Eighty three shows crossed the boards, a figure pushed up by the ill-advised 10-show ANTA Play Series (which did, however, produce one of the year's hit shows, Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur's Twentieth Century). Of the 83 productions, 55 were new plays and musical shows, 26 were revivals, and two were return runs (Oklahoma and Where's Charley?). Forty-two straight plays included eight financial hits and the 13 musicals included three hits, in the manner of Variety.

The musical hits of this season were especially memorable, this being the season of Guys And Dolls, adapted from Damon Runyon stories by Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows and with music and lyrics by Frank Loesser,

Call Me Madam, with book by Lindsay and Crouse and music and lyrics by Irving Berlin, and another Rodgers and Hammerstein production, The King And I. The straight play hits, generally of more dubious quality, included F. Hugh Herbert's The Moon Is Blue, Wolcott Gibb's Season In The Sun, Clifford Odets' The Country Girl, Affairs Of State by Louis Verneuil, Bell, Book, And Candle by John Van Druten, and Christopher Fry's The Lady's Not For Burning.

This was also the season when plays of higher quality than the hits listed above were rejected by the theatergoers. These were to include the Sidney Kingsley adaptation of Arthur Koestler's novel, Darkness At Noon, Tennessee Williams' The Rose Tattoo, Billy Budd, adapted from a story by Herman Melville by Louis O. Coxe and Robert Chapman, Lillian Hellman's The Autumn Garden, and Betty Smith's A Tree Grows In Brooklyn.

Four holdovers continued to run throughout the season, 17 holdovers from the previous season closed.

The war in Korea continued stalemated and United States casualties (killed, wounded, and missing) totaled nearly 130,000 men as 1952 ended.¹⁷ Peace talks at Panmunjom were in disagreement over the single

¹⁷ New York Times, Sec. 4, p. 8, December 28, 1953

problem of how to repatriate the war prisoners.

In Europe the progress for the West was much brighter as the nations set up definite goals for Western defense, gave West Germany virtual sovereignty, and approved the Schuman Plan. But progress on these matters slowed down as the year drew to an end due, in part, to a revival of old national rivalries, in part to a relaxing of Russian pressure, and partly because of the relaxation of pressure from the United States because of the change in American leadership and the preoccupation of the nation with its own election.

The election resulted in the triumph of the personal popularity of the Republican candidate, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, although the Democratic candidate, Adlai Stevenson, also polled a record number of votes for a losing candidate. The election was interpreted as a victory for the liberal and internationalist wing of the Republican Party and a defeat for the right wing, nationalist section of the Party led by Senator Taft who, however, still held control in the Senate by virtue of being the Senate Majority Leader. Senator McCarthy scored a triumph when Owen Lattimore, his prime target, was indicted on the charge of lying when he swore he was not pro-Communist. ¹⁸

18. Ibid.

In New York theatrical circles the 1951-52 season slumped from the previous year by recording ten less productions, the ANTA Play Series of the 1950-51 season, which was not repeated, apparently being the margin of difference. Forty five new plays and nine new musicals made up the significant portion of the season's bounty.

Eleven financial hits were counted out of the 73 productions, of which nine were straight plays and two were musicals. On the whole it was a rather dramatically weak season. Two of the hit shows were staged readings, Paul Gregory's production of George Bernard Shaw's Don Juan In Hell and Emelyn Williams' Dicken's Readings. The hit plays included Joseph Kramm's The Shrike, Jan de Hartog's The Fourposter, John Van Druten's I Am A Camera, The Constant Wife by Somerset Maugham, Point Of No Return by John P. Marquand and Paul Osborn, and a new success by the long-absent creator of Harvey entitled Mrs. McThing. Included, also, was a very successful revival of the Thurber-Nugent 1939 comedy, The Male Animal.

Musical-wise, it was an exceptionally disappointing season for of the two financially successful musicals one was a revival of the old Rodgers and Hart musical, Pal Joey, and one was a revue, New Faces, with an abundance of new writing, musical, and acting talents.

Two other musicals, Top Banana, with a book by Hy Kraft and words and music by Johnny Mercer, and Paint Your Wagon, with book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner and music by Frederick Loewe, escaped financial success by a narrow margin. Escaping success by a wider margin were revivals of Eugene O'Neill's two dramas, Anna Christie and Desire Under The Elms, Barefoot In Athens by Maxwell Anderson, The Grass Harp by Truman Capote, a revival of George Bernard Shaw's Saint Joan, and Christopher Fry's Venus Observed, among many, many others.

Nineteen fifty three proved to be a year of startling developments on many fronts. In Moscow Joseph Stalin died and was succeeded by a triumvirate composed of Malenkov, Beria, and Molotov -- which was soon reduced to two when Beria, accused of being a "traitor", was arrested and subsequently shot.

In the Far East the Korean conflict ground to an uneasy truce after more than three years of fighting, to be followed by a serio-comic "explaining-to and assorting-of" prisoners of war held by the contending sides. In Southeast Asia the French war in Indo-China against the Communist forces of Ho Chi Min moved into its eighth year, with the French giving signs of growing weary of the struggle as the Communists increased their gains against the French forces.

In Europe the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) alliance was becoming stronger and more sure of itself but the French, suffering a succession of short-lived Governments, continued to prove adamant about rearming the Germans and failed to do anything about ratifying the European Defense Community (EDC) Treaty. The constant shifting of Governments made a "political football" out of these issues and little was accomplished in France's external relations. In February, however, the long deferred Schuman Plan began operation.

On the domestic scene the nation was deluged by a series of Congressional investigations of subversion in the Government, the unions, the schools, and the churches. One committee tried to call ex-President Truman before it, but failed in this attempt because of the Presidential immunity provisions of the national laws. Many of the investigations were spurred on by Senator Joseph McCarthy, head of one of the Senate investigating committees, who began also to array himself in opposition to President Eisenhower by observing that "The Administration's batting average on Communism is none too good."¹⁹ The President disagreed and by the year's end it began to look like

19. New York Times, Sec. 4, p. 8, December 27, 1953

the battle lines were being drawn between the President and the extreme right wing of his own Party.

On Broadway, where controversy always rages but politics is generally rather remote, the 1952-53 season was an anomaly in that it staged the fewest productions (54) of the postwar theater years but the quality of the theater was noticeably on the upgrade. This was the year that produced such fine pieces of theater as Arthur Miller's The Crucible (which was a financial failure), William Inge's Picnic, Tennessee Williams' bizarre Camino Real (also a financial failure), Arthur Laurent's Time Of The Cuckoo, Frederick Knott's Dial M For Murder, and the musicals Wonderful Town, with a book by Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov, music by Leonard Bernstein, and lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, and Me And Juliet, an original musical from the production line of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, II.

It was also a season of a greatly increased proportion of financial successes, 16 out of the 54 productions going for the money. Of the 54 productions, 31 were new plays and ten were new musicals. The increasing difficulty in financing shows, due to rapidly rising costs of production and operation, appeared to be a major factor in the decrease in

productions. An unusually large number of announced productions could not be financed and never did reach the boards. Ten shows closed out of town.

The international tensions appeared to ease considerably in 1954 as the new Soviet regime turned more to internal reform. Their principal manifest opposition to the West took the form of threats against the admission of the West German Republic into the Western defensive alliance. This step had not yet been accomplished by the year's end. France had upset all previously laid plans by failing to ratify EDC, whereupon French Premier Mendes-France, in a quick series of ingenious moves, got Britain to abandon her historic insular aloofness and West Germany to abandon hope for the disputed area of the Saar, and by the end of the year a set of Paris Pacts, in effect replacing the EDC plan (to the advantage of France), were awaiting ratification by the nations concerned. ²⁰

In the Far East France managed to extricate herself from the agonizing eight-year long war in Indo-China, but only at the high price of abandoning the rich northern portion of Indo-China to the Communists, and thereby weakening her hold on the

²⁰. New York Times, Sec. 4, p. 8, December 26, 1954

southern part of that unhappy state.

On the domestic scene, Senator Robert A. Taft died during the year and was succeeded as Senate Majority Leader by Senator William Knowland of California. The tensions that were lessening abroad were much increased at home. Senator Joseph McCarthy made bitter attacks on the Eisenhower Administration in general and upon the Department of the Army in particular and a series of unpleasant Congressional investigations followed his charges. Ultimately, Senator McCarthy was reprimanded by the Senate and his influence and popularity, very high as the year began, waned after the Senatorial censure.²¹ At year's end Senator McCarthy and Senator Knowland appeared to be the leaders of a small group of extreme right wingers in the Republican Party arrayed against the much larger Eisenhower forces. An Eisenhower-Democratic coalition was the 1955 prospect on legislation relating to defense and foreign affairs.

On Broadway, the season 1953-54 showed a slight increase in productions over the preceding year with 59 shows being presented. Again, it was a triumph of quality over quantity, the season being distinguished by such excellent shows as the John Patrick adaptation

21. Ibid.

of the Vern Sneider novel, The Teahouse Of The August Moon, Robert Anderson's Tea And Sympathy, The Caine Mutiny Court Martial, Herman Wouk's own dramatization from his novel The Caine Mutiny, Jean Giraudoux's fantasy Ondine, Ruth and Augustus Goetz's adaptation of Andre Gide's story The Immoralist, and the prize winning musical, The Pajama Game, with a book by George Abbott and Richard Bissell and music and lyrics by Richard Adler and Jerry Ross.

Of the 59 shows, 41 were new plays and nine were new musicals. Thirteen of these 59 shows turned up as financial successes, 11 of them plays and two of them being musicals. Other shows included in the hit, or money making, class were T. S. Eliot's The Confidential Clerk, Norman Krasna's Kind Sir, Samuel Taylor's Sabrina Fair, The Solid Gold Cadillac by Howard Teichman and George S. Kaufman, Anniversary Waltz by Jerome Chodorov and Joseph Fields, Liam O'Brien's The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker, and the musical Kismet, adapted from Edward Knoblock's play by Charles Lederer and Luther Davis and with music by Alexander Borodin adapted and arranged by Robert Wright and George Forrest.

The current year began with the "cold war" tensions increasing once again as the Chinese Communists

made threatening gestures in the direction of Formosa, the seat of the Chinese Nationalist Government which the United States was sworn to defend. Uncertainty enveloped the whole picture over just how far the allies of the United States would go to support the United States' position -- particularly since some of them had already officially recognized Communist China. By mid-year the tension had leveled off and Communist China -- temporarily, at least -- had modified its former truculent posture.

In France, the vigorous Mendes-France Government fell and the weakness of the French political structure again became manifest. In Great Britain, however, the stability of the Government was made evident as Winston Churchill turned the reins of Government over to the next man in line in the Conservative Party, Anthony Eden. The new Prime Minister promptly called a national election and won a handy victory for the Conservatives over the Labour Party.

In Moscow, the Soviet hierarchy was reshuffled as Premier Malenkov resigned and Marshal Bulganin became the Chief of State, with Communist Party Boss Nikita Khrushchev moving into a strategic position.

Nineteen fifty five has been the year both West Germany and Austria have achieved sovereignty after long years of occupation by the Big Powers.

In the United States medical science scored a major triumph as Dr. Jonas Salk's polio vaccine was found to be an effective combatant against infantile paralysis.

The New York Theater picture was brighter in the year 1954-55 as four more productions than the preceding year reached its stages. Of the 63 shows in this season, 42 were plays and 19 were musicals, the largest number of musicals to reach the Broadway stages since the war. Of the 42 plays, 34 were new works and eight revivals. An unusually large number of these plays were adaptations (13) and nine of the total of 42 plays were imports.

Fourteen of the nineteen musicals were new works, the other five being revivals (mostly City Center "light opera" productions). Adaptations figured large among the musicals, too, with seven of them being derived from other sources.

The season was unusually successful financially as well. By the season's end 15 of the 63 productions had paid for themselves (though some had lifted themselves out of the red by the sale of motion picture and television rights) and seven were still in an undetermined status. There were 28 definite financial failures and 13 other productions (City Center and Phoenix Theaters) with limited runs, where successes are not readily calculated in terms of dollars

and cents.

The 15 financial successes of the season were: Guy Bolton's adaptation of Marcelle Maurette's drama Anastasia, the Maxwell Anderson adaptation of William March's novel The Bad Seed, Sandy Wilson's British musical The Boy Friend, William Inge's Bus Stop, Tennessee Williams' prize-winning Cat On A Hot Tin Roof, S. N. Behrman and Joshua Logan's musical adaptation of Marcel Pagnol's trilogy, Fanny, Sidney Kingsley's Lunatics And Lovers, the Old Vic presentation of Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream, the musical version of James M. Barrie's Peter Pan, Noel Coward's Quadrille, N. Richard Naish's The Rainmaker, the Ruth and Paul Draper Show, Max Shulman and Robert Paul Smith's The Tender Trap, the Paul Gregory production of 3 For Tonight, and Agatha Christie's Witness For The Prosecution.

In the "undertermined" status at the season's end were: Ankles Aweigh, a musical with a book by Guy Bolton and Eddie Davis, music by Sammy Fain, and lyrics by Dan Shapiro, the musical Damn Yankees with a book by George Abbott and Douglass Wallop and music and lyrics by Richard Adler and Jerry Ross, The Desperate Hours, dramatized by Joseph Hayes from his own novel, Inherit The Wind by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, Plain And Fancy, with a book by Joseph Stein and Will Glickman, music by Albert Hague, and

lyrics by Arnold Horwitt, Seventh Heaven, adapted from the Austin Strong play by Stella Unger and Victor Wolfson with music by Victor Young, and Silk Stockings, a musical adaptation of Ninotchka with a book by George S. Kaufman, Leueen MacGrath, and Abe Burrows and music and lyrics by Cole Porter.

Among the 28 financial failures were numbered Robert Anderson's All Summer Long, Christopher Fry's The Dark Is Light Enough, Clifford Odet's The Flowering Peach, Roald Dahl's The Honeys, House Of Flowers with a book by Truman Capote and music by Harold Arlen, Graham Greene's The Living Room, Gian Carlo Menotti's prize winning musical The Saint Of Bleeker Street, and Horton Foote's The Traveling Lady.

The City Center had its best season in the ten year period of its existence with Helen Hayes appearing in revivals of What Every Woman Knows and The Wisteria Trees and productions of The Time Of Your Life and The Fourposter.

A novelty of the 1954-55 season was the televising of the full stage production of the musical version of Peter Pan, starring Mary Martin, after the show closed on Broadway. This event was instrumental in making the expensive production pay for itself and points a possible bright future for other shows of high quality being assisted in this same way.

This cursory review of the first post-war decade reveals that, although there has been a considerable dropping off in total productions from the pre-war era, a fairly steady schedule of productions has been maintained during the ten year period.

The postwar decline in theatrical productions has been variously ascribed to the advent of television, higher production and operational costs, shortage of theaters, high price of tickets, and a shortage of good play scripts. Exactly how much each of these factors have affected the legitimate stage would be difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain, but that they have affected it, in one degree or another, is undoubted. Television, a major competitor for spectator interest, has been a distinct threat to all facets of the entertainment industry since its arrival as a mass-entertainment media in about 1950. Insofar as its effect on the legitimate theater is concerned, there are two schools of thought concerning it. George Jean Nathan expresses one point of view by observing:

Just how television is going to discourage adult theatre-going, as some fish argue, is hard to figure out, since it devotes itself largely to plays which have already been shown in the theatre, which are stale to the theatregoer, and which are so often in addition so wretchedly done that they drive him right back to the theatre to see something decently staged and acted. Those televiewers who are satisfied with what they see are not theatre

customer material, and never were. Television will thus naturally be damaging to the motion picture boxoffice but, if the theatre has any sense, it will guarantee its future great prosperity by encouraging it with every means, fair or foul, at its command. 22

On the other hand, many theater-wise people, while not belaboring television as much as the movie industry does, have a healthy respect for television's competitive qualities, if not always its artistic standards. John MacArthur, as Editor and Publisher of Theatre Arts Magazine, has his finger on the pulse of the American Theater. He writes, in an editorial decrying the decline in theater attendance:

Of course, in most civilized countries in the world the government subsidizes theatre as something worthwhile, and of course, we subsidize many of those countries and therefore indirectly subsidize theatre elsewhere. We do not want such a subsidy here. But it would seem in the face of increasing competition from television, if not radio, the living theatre as well as the movies might expect cooperation from all elements of show business in just recognition and the living theatres essential and continuing contribution to their welfare and betterment ... 23

The presence of television on the entertainment scene might be a two-edged sword insofar as the American theater is concerned. Television's most obvious challenge, of course, is in providing visual entertainment in the comforts of one's own home as contrasted with the discomforts of the New York

22. George Jean Nathan, The Theatre In The Fifties (New York: Knopf, 1953), pp. 16-17

23. John MacArthur, "An Editorial," Theatre Arts Magazine, XXXVII, p. 15, October, 1953

theaters (a considerable and increasing problem), the problems of traffic and parking, of the high cost and unavailability of theater tickets, and the other harassments that beset the New York legitimate theatergoer.

More serious and more insidious, however, is the tendency of television to bastardize the public tastes. Certainly, as George Jean Nathan maintains, the adult theatergoer will continue to find his refuge in the theater where qualities that can never be captured in a television production can still be found. It is also true, unfortunately, that many more people who were occasional theatergoers and who were often the margin between the success and failure of a stage production have now completely succumbed to the cheap, imitative blandishments of commercial television. Casual observations by interested persons have been made to the effect that large numbers of adults in many of the suburban areas of New York City (always a large source of New York's theatergoing audience containing, as they do, higher income and more culturally advanced populaces) subject themselves to television fare night after night, often without even exercising the New Yorker's unique privilege of making a choice of one of seven channels every half hour. The effect,

on an indeterminate mass scale, is like an opiate. Like all tastes, whatever they may be, if they are not assiduously cultivated they wither and die on the vine. Perhaps television's greatest contribution to the decline of the American stage will be in this steady process of the bastardization of the public taste.

Not all of television's presence is evil, however, insofar as its relationship to the legitimate stage is concerned. Television has been invaluable in taking up the slack in unemployed actors that has increased as the legitimate stage has contracted. In 1950, for example, Actors Equity had a membership of slightly less than 7,000, the largest in its history up to that time. Only one out of every six of its members had been employed for as long as six months. According to its statistics, the "average stage actor" had worked ten weeks during the year and had earned \$825.²⁴ Although an acting career is still one of the hardest of all professions to break into, television has succeeded in making the employment problem somewhat less severe. As far as the New York end of the picture is concerned, this varies from year to year, depending upon the current vogue for "live" or filmed shows, the latter coming primarily from Hollywood.

24. Lloyd Morris, Curtain Time; The Story Of The American Theater (New York: Random House, 1953), p. 366

Television is not only a means of taking up the slack in theatrical employment. It has also been the training ground for several actors and playwrights who have gone on to distinguish themselves in the theater. Two of the most prominent in the acting profession are Eva Marie Saint, who debuted on Broadway in TV writer Horton Foote's drama, A Trip To Bountiful, after being singularly successful in a number of television roles and who went on to win an Academy Award in motion pictures, and Ben Gazzara who, after numerous television roles, was seen in a leading role in End As A Man and subsequently in Tennessee Williams' prize winning play, Cat On A Hot Tin Roof. Among television writers having made contributions to the stage are the previously mentioned Horton Foote, George Axelrod of The Seven Year Itch, and N. Richard Naish with See The Jaguar and The Rainmaker.

A possible further compatible relationship between television and the stage has been tentatively suggested by the enormously successful telecast during the current season of the musical production of Peter Pan starring Mary Martin. The principal virtue of this particular production, insofar as the welfare of the stage is concerned, is that it pulled an extremely expensive production out of the red. The significance

of this fact being that if the financial risks of stage production can be tempered by the hope of ultimate television financing the encouragement of more and better stage productions may result. Television will probably be little disposed to bankroll mediocrity on the stage when they can produce it so much more cheaply themselves. More likely is that the better stage productions will catch their eye -- and money -- and all can conceivably turn out for the best for the theater on Broadway.

In one sure way, however, television is proving to be Broadway's greatest enemy. In the gradual appropriation of the New York theater buildings the television networks are slowly making the New York theater a vanishing institution. Arthur Miller notes in his story on The American Theater that "We have some 32 houses going today in New York as against 40 or more ten years ago, and between 70 and 80 in the twenties." ²⁵ Television, to be sure, can be held only partially responsible for this state of affairs. Essentially, it is a conflict between the commercial and artistic aspects of the picture. An institution which ends each season with only one-sixth to one-eighth of its product successful

25. Arthur Miller, "The American Theater," Holiday Magazine, XVII (January, 1955), p. 92

financially represents a poor risk to the theater owner, who is still further blocked from making profits by zoning ordinances which have heretofore prevented legitimate theaters from being housed in an otherwise profitable building. Television, on the other hand, is an expanding and profitable business and networks, unlike individual theatrical producers, are in a position to offer long term leases on houses, guaranteeing profits to the owners. In this way, too, television is helping to constrict the American Theater.

But we should avoid looking upon television as the only threat to the legitimate stage. The same commercial instinct that removes stages from the legitimate fold and turns them over to television operates also to the demolition of theater buildings year after year to be replaced by "more profitable" office buildings. In the past year alone two New York theaters, The Empire and The Vanderbilt, have been replaced by commercial structures. And the same commercial instinct accounts for the flight of many of the theater's brightest stars to the West Coast where pay is higher and the security of a movie contract more appealing. Stage Door²⁶ told

26. Edna Ferber and George S. Kaufman, Stage Door (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1936)

the story in 1937, a story that is re-enacted year after year in the lives of aspiring actors and actresses. Only the traditions of the theater, the lure and charm and elusiveness of the theater have made it in every sense of the word worthy of the title, "The Fabulous Invalid."

On the positive side of the picture one of the most interesting phenomena of this most recent decade of the American Theater is the enormous influence of the Group Theater of the 1930's on the contemporary theater. Born in rebellion against the prevailing theater of the thirties, this group of dedicated actors and directors, led by Harold Clurman, Lee Strasberg, and Cheryl Crawford, labored diligently for nearly a decade in an effort that has made the lights burn much more brightly along the marquees of Broadway ever since. John Gassner must surely have had the Group Theater in mind when he wrote, "The theatre in our time ... becomes luminous as a rule only when somebody sends a Roman candle into the night. Illumination in our time, here and even abroad, results mainly from random, often eccentric, efforts and is usually tentative." 27

27. John Gassner, The Theatre In Our Time (New York: Crown, 1954), p. 445

In the days when the Group Theater was electrifying the theater world with productions of Sidney Kingsley's Men In White, Clifford Odets' Awake And Sing, Golden Boy, and Rocket To The Moon, the theater world was agog over the vigor and originality of its tempestuous artists. Great as these accomplishments were, history is more liable to credit the Group Theater with its subsequent influence on the theater. In the postwar decade, long after the Group Theater had faded from the scene, its alumni were active in all parts of the American theater. Harold Clurman was being acclaimed one of the top directors in the theater. Clifford Odets was writing more mature and less radical plays with The Country Girl and The Flowering Peach. John Garfield, Morris Carnovsky, and Luther Adler were being seen to brilliant advantage as actors on Broadway. Franchot Tone had made a name for himself in Hollywood and made occasional returns to Broadway (most recently in Oh, Men! Oh, Women!). Elia Kazan had become the Number One director on Broadway and in motion pictures. Sanford Meisner had done brilliant work in television dramatic production. Lee Cobb and others had turned in consistently fine acting performances on Broadway and in motion pictures. Stella Adler was passing her art on to others in a much sought-after acting school.

Cheryl Crawford was a top flight producer on Broadway -- everywhere the ambitious little company of the troubled thirties had been spreading its heritage and the theater today has been much the richer of late because of that inspired little company of actors and directors formed by Harold Clurman, Lee Strasberg, and Cheryl Crawford back in the Spring of 1931.

There has been much wailing and wringing of hands over the decline in theatrical production on Broadway and its consequent effect on theatrical enterprise in the United States. Brooks Atkinson wrote in 1953:

No lover of the theater can read the annual statistics without a feeling of awful apprehension. Fewer productions every year, frightening costs of production and operation -- these are the facts that consistently eat a little further into the vitality of the theater ... It is quite possible that the serious play of artistic independence may die, at least on Broadway, and bequeath the commercial theater to popular comedies ... popular melodramas ... and the big musical dramas ... There is no place in our commercial theater for interesting plays that do not arouse many thousands of people to immediate action. ²⁸

The theater lover may share Atkinson's concern over the threat to the theater of rising costs of production and operation. He may, in view of the record, question Atkinson's assertion concerning

28. Lloyd Morris, quoted in Curtain Time; The Story Of The American Theater (New York: Random House, 1953), p. 366

"fewer productions every year." But there is no evidence to support the assertion "It is quite possible that the serious play of artistic independence may die" Since Atkinson wrote these words Broadway has been host to such fine serious plays of artistic independence as Miller's The Crucible, Inge's Picnic, Giraudoux's Ondine, Anderson's Tea And Sympathy, Williams' Cat On A Hot Tin Roof, Menotti's musical, The Saint Of Bleeker Street -- to name but a few of the many recent productions of considerable artistic integrity.

Drama critics and theater lovers have their moments of despair. When they look about them and see the tremendous financial success of such feather-weight productions as The Moon Is Blue, The Seven Year Itch, The Fifth Season, and Time Out For Ginger, their first impulse is to take to decrying the modern trend downward of the theater. The truth appears to be somewhat the contrary. The quality of writing in a substantial portion of today's theater is infinitely superior to that day when Why Marry? and The Green Hat and The Student Prince graced our stages and 200 new productions a year saw light on Broadway. The twenties, to be sure, was distinguished by contributions from Eugene O'Neill,

Philip Barry, Maxwell Anderson, George Kelly and others. The thirties saw a number of fine works from the pens of Anderson, Barry, Sidney Kingsley, Sidney Howard, Clifford Odets, Robert Sherwood, and William Saroyan, among others. But the theory is questionable at best to suggest that any one era had a monopoly on the best theater writers. The perspective may cause one to feel -- as so many contemporary drama critics feel -- that today's plays and playwrights do not measure up to the past. The purpose of the present study is, in a considerable measure, to put the present picture of the theater, insofar as the playwrights are concerned, in more nearly its proper perspective. If, perhaps, no Eugene O'Neill has appeared on the horizon of the current theater picture in America, there are nonetheless numerous good reasons for holding that Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, John Patrick, Mary Chase, William Inge, and Robert Anderson, among other writers of today, are making sizeable and enduring contributions to the American Theater.

The man who can come more closely today to filling the place left by the late Eugene O'Neill is, by the common opinion of the contemporary drama authorities, a 41 year old poet-playwright from Mississippi who calls himself "Tennessee" Williams.

Over the past ten years Mr. Williams has written three prize winning dramas for the New York stage and has so revolutionized the theater art of the current stage that he has come to be recognized as the "avant-garde" of the contemporary American theater. This study will begin by looking at Tennessee Williams and his contributions to the literature of the American theater.

CHAPTER II

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: AVANT-GARDE OF THE CONTEMPORARY THEATER

Speak of the literature of the current American theater and you speak first of Tennessee Williams. As far removed from the mundane theater of today as the poetry of Keats is from the verses of Edgar Guest, Williams, in all of his unorthodox and moody treatment of the stage, has nevertheless had his plays presented in performance over 2000 times in Broadway theaters alone in the last decade, not to mention hundreds of performances throughout the country and overseas, and in motion pictures. Despite the fact that some of his plays (particularly the two most recent ones) stirs audiences to wonder "what is it all about?" the name of Tennessee Williams is still magic on the marquees along Broadway.

Tennessee Williams is, in a manner of speaking, the "enfant terrible" of the American Theater. Although an extremely mild-mannered -- even shy -- individual in his personal being his plays reflect nothing at all of his mild-mannerliness and little of his shyness, except for the characters of Laura in The Glass Menagerie, of Matilda in You Touched Me! and Alma in Summer And Smoke. Most of his characters are violent, merciless,

mercenary, volatile, frustrated, and morbid by frequent turn. Almost without exception the ray of sweetness and light has never found its way into a Williams' play. As a dramatist he seems determined to present all that is base and mean in human existence, though seldom are his characters conceived as deliberately evil. Rather, they have either become so as a product of their environment (e.g. Blanche du Bois, Maggie the Cat) or of personal weakness (e.g. Amanda Wingfield), rather than evil by deliberate intent. Stanley Kowalski might be considered an exception to this observation, although many profess to see less evil in Stanley than a passionate desire to uncover the truth and bare lies and falsehoods. This writer confesses to not seeing Stanley in quite that light. He appears to be a deliberately malicious trouble-maker with no ideals to speak of, as the rape of Blanche would strongly indicate.

Williams is not a playwright with a smiling face. Said he, when presented in 1945 with the Drama Critic's Circle Award for The Glass Menagerie, "I don't think the critics will like my future plays as much as this one. In this play I said all the nice things I have to say about people. The future things will be harsher." ¹

1. Time, VL (April 23, 1945), p. 88

In this remark Williams sized up his own future plans very well indeed, but the critics have not measured up to his judgment of them. For today, almost without exception, the critics adjudge Tennessee Williams the Number One writer in the American theater, however much they occasionally deplore his eccentricities. Walter Kerr, for example, began his criticism of Camino Real by the remark, "It is this reviewer's opinion that Tennessee Williams is the best playwright of his generation. It is also the reviewer's opinion that Camino Real, which opened at the National Thursday, is the worst play yet written by the best playwright of his generation" ²

The future titan of the American theater was born in Columbus, Mississippi, on March 26, 1914, the son of an enterprising shoe salesman. He spent his early life in a Rectory, since his parents lived with Williams' grandfather, an Episcopal minister with great influence and many friends in the Delta country of Mississippi. Tennessee Williams maintains that his grandfather was one of the three greatest influences in his early formative years in the shaping of his later tastes and ideas. He fondly recalls his grandfather in these terms; "He had a great love for poetry and literature, and a wonderful library. He

2. Walter F. Kerr, New York Herald-Tribune, March 20, 1953

was an extremely liberal man ... never a fundamentalist. He didn't disapprove of indulgences of the flesh. He played bridge and enjoyed his cocktail." ³

His grandfather was representative of the fading Southern aristocracy which has gradually been displaced in the South by a new population with entirely different values. It was while at his grandfather's house that Williams came in contact with the Southern women who have become the Amanda Wingfields and Alma Winemillers of his plays. Concerning the distaff emphasis in his plays, Williams maintains that Southern women are the only remaining members of our populace who can speak lyrical dialogue without sounding high flown. ⁴

The second great influence in his youth was his mother, who coddled him a great deal since he was in poor health during much of his early years. And later, when he wanted to go to college, his mother took whatever she could save from the meager family income and helped him make his way through school. Williams, who is known to be an extremely thoughtful person, was able to repay her after the success of The Glass

3. Mary Braggiotti, "Away From It All," New York Post, December 12, 1947

4. Paul Moor, "A Mississippian Named Tennessee," Harpers Magazine, CIIIC (July, 1948), p. 71

Menagerie by signing over to her fifty percent of the play's profits. The amount of money was considerable.

The third great influence in Tennessee Williams' life was his sister Rose, who personified to him everything that was beautiful and desireable. While still in their childhood years the Williams family moved from Mississippi to St. Louis. The move was a shock for the children. Gone was the gentility of Delta life in the Rectory. In its place was a shabby home, with windows only in the front and back, on a shabby street. The father's income from the shoe factory was not large. The two children were snubbed by the youngsters of private schools, and their broad Southern accents and courtly manners were made fun of by the children of the public schools. Tennessee (who was then known by his Christian name of Thomas Lanier Williams) and his sister began to grow within themselves and lived much of their young lives for each other. After becoming a successful playwright, Tennessee Williams was able to recall his childhood there with much bitterness:

[In St. Louis] we suddenly discovered that there were two kinds of people, the rich and the poor, and we belonged more to the latter ... I remember gangs of kids following me home yelling 'Sissy' -- and home was not a very pleasant refuge. It was a perpetually dim little apartment in a wilderness of identical brick and concrete structures ... If I had been born to this situation I might not have resented it deeply. But it was forced

upon my consciousness at the most sensitive age of childhood. It produced a shock and rebellion that have grown into an inherent part of my work. 5

During his last year in Mississippi the future playwright was crippled for nearly a year by an extremely severe case of diphtheria. Hardly had he recovered from that when he contracted a cataract on his right eye, which was not removed until after three costly operations. During these long periods of convalescence Williams says he used to lie back and let his romantic imagination run wild, another source of fruitful training for his later career. During his high school years in St. Louis he began to find himself as a poet and writer. He turned out reams of poetry "in the manner of Edna St. Vincent Millay." He also sold a few stories to Weird Stories Magazine and this encouraged him so much that when he graduated from high school he decided to take English composition at the University of Missouri.

He spent three years at Missouri. The first year his grades were very good (except ROTC, which he failed). Then he pledged a fraternity, and from then on his grades tumbled. After three years his father, discouraged by his lack of progress, called him home and put him to work on a routine job in the shoe

5. Lincoln Barnett, "Tennessee Williams," Life, XXXIV (February 16, 1948), p. 118

factory where he earned \$65 a month. Tennessee, romanticist that he was, chafed under the monotony of the job and every night, fortified with black coffee and cigarettes, wrote for hours and hours. This rigorous routine ultimately led to a physical breakdown and Williams was sent to his grandparent's home to recover.

When he returned to St. Louis he was still determined to become a writer. His father was not pleased by the decision but his mother paid his tuition and he entered Washington University in St. Louis. He turned out a steady stream of poems and short stories -- and got most of them back from the publishers. His first produced play was a farce called Cairo, Shanghai, Bombay! which was presented in Memphis. A year later a St. Louis amateur group, The Mummers, produced his first serious plays, Candles To The Sun, about coal miners, and a story laid in a flophouse entitled Fugitive Kind. Further, a one-act of his won first prize at Webster's Grove little theater contest.

But when another one-act failed to win even an honorable mention at Washington University's yearly English XVI play contest, he withdrew from the University and enrolled in Prof. Edward Mable's Drama Department at the University of Iowa. By waiting on tables and getting a few dollars now and then from

his mother, Williams was finally able to secure his A. B. Degree from Iowa in 1938.

He then took off for California with a school teacher friend from New Orleans. In California, when he was not picking squabs on a squab farm, he was pouring out plays and poetry, sending them to New York as fast as he could write them. In 1939 Story Magazine published The Field Of Blue Children, the first story to be published under the name of Tennessee Williams.

There are many versions of the story about why the playwright changed his name from Thomas Lanier Williams to Tennessee Williams. According to one he discarded the name of Thomas Lanier because he felt he had "compromised" it by publishing too many poems under it in bad imitation of Edna St. Vincent Millay, so he took the name of Tennessee to remind himself that a young writer has to defend his stockades against bands of savages, just as his pioneer ancestors did in Tennessee. 6

However, another story reports that he changed his name because it "sounds pompously too much like William Lyon Phelps." 7 And a third version explains that his fraternity brothers gave him the name "Tennessee"

6. Mary Braggiotti, "Away From It All," New York Post, December 12, 1947

7. Time, VL (April 23, 1945), p. 88

because of his rich Southern accent and, for all intents and purposes, it has become his real one. He is even known to sign correspondence to his close friends with the numeral "10". The odd name has led Dorothy Parker to exclaim, "Tennessee Williams! I might as well call myself Palestine Parker!" ⁸

Whatever the reason for the change in his name he was almost immediately successful. In the same year that he was published in Story Magazine he won a \$300 award in a Group Theater Contest for four one-act plays entitled American Blues. Even more important, however, were several letters from literary agents as a result of the award. He considered all the letters he received carefully and decided the one he liked best was from Audrey Wood. This was probably one of the wisest decisions he ever made.

He traveled to New York from California on the money received from the award to sign the contract with Miss Wood and to enroll on a scholarship in an advance playwriting course then being taught in the New School Of Social Science by John Gassner and Theresa Helburn, both influential in The Theatre Guild. While there Williams wrote the first draft of Battle Of Angels. John Gassner thought it was

8. Paul Moor, "A Mississippian Named Tennessee," Harpers Magazine, CIIIC (July, 1948), p. 65

the best new script he had seen in five years. Lawrence Langner of The Theatre Guild took an option on it. Miss Wood secured a \$1000 grant from the Rockefeller Foundation for him. A production of Battle Of Angels was scheduled to open the Fall Season in Boston. A new American playwright was being launched. Tennessee Williams took off for an interlude in Mexico.

He returned in the Autumn to witness an unhappy premiere of his first play. Battle Of Angels, the story of a churchwoman, married to an invalided man, seducing a philandering poet, was not well attuned to the prurient eyes and ears of the Boston theatergoers. Five years afterward, the playwright ruefully recalls the tragic opening:

I never heard of an audience getting so infuriated. They hissed so loud you couldn't hear the lines, and that made Miriam [Hopkins] so mad that she began to scream her lines above the hissing. Then they stamped their feet, and after a while most of them got up and left, banging their seats behind them. That play was, of course, a much better play than this one [The Glass Menagerie]. The thing is, you can't mix up sex and religion, as I did in Battle Of Angels, but you can always write safely about mothers. ⁹

The Boston critics were not much kinder than the audience. The Globe's critic called it "one of the most incredible dramas ever presented in Boston" ¹⁰

9. "The Talk Of The Town," The New Yorker, XXI (April 14, 1945), pp. 18-19

10. Paul Moor, quoted in "A Mississippian Named Tennessee," Harpers Magazine, CIIIC (July, 1948), p. 64

and another described it as " ... a halfwit living a defensive life against predatory women." ¹¹ Elliot Norton of the Post, however, said that Mr. Williams' talent was "most interesting." ¹² The Theatre Guild closed the play after the two week tryout period in Boston with a half-apologetic, half-prophetic statement in the Boston papers; "The play was more of a disappointment to us than to you. Battle Of Angels turned out badly, but who knows whether the next one by the same author may not prove a success?" ¹³

The playwright was obviously stung by the bitter criticism. The next five years in his life were to be a series of ups and downs. He missed a military career because of a bad heart. In 1941 the Rockefeller grant was renewed in part, but he was forced to supplement his income in various ways; reciting bawdy poetry that he himself had written, in Greenwich Village night clubs, ushering at the Strand movie theater in Times Square for \$17 a week, running night elevators in a mid-town hotel, and other menial jobs. Later, when success had engulfed him, Williams wrote in The New York Times that his life prior to success was:

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

... one that required endurance, a life of clawing and scratching along a sheer surface and holding on tight with raw fingers ... I was not aware of how much vital energy had gone into this struggle until the struggle was removed. I was out on a level plateau with my arms still thrashing and my lungs still grabbing at air that no longer resisted. This was security at last ... [but] security is a kind of death, and it can come to you in a storm of royalty checks beside a kidney-shaped pool in Beverly Hills or anywhere at all that is removed from the conditions that made you an artist ... 14

During this same period of struggle and starvation Williams shared a YMCA room with another struggling artist, Donald Windham. This relationship led to a dramatic collaboration on a short story by D. H. Lawrence entitled You Touched Me!, a story of a drunken retired sea captain who tries to marry his shy daughter off to his adopted son in the face of bitter opposition from his puritanical and mendacious sister. The play was completed during this period and was presented in 1943 at both the Cleveland and Pasadena Playhouses.

While Williams was ushering at the Strand theater his indefatigable agent, Audrey Wood, in cooperation with the Rockefeller Foundation, secured a six-month writing contract for him with M-G-M studios in Hollywood at \$233 a week. He was told to look over The Sun Is My Undoing by Margaret Steen as his first project, which he dutifully did, only to discover that plans

14. Lincoln Barnett, "Tennessee Williams," Life, XXXIV (February 16, 1954), p. 124

had changed when he arrived in Hollywood. He was then assigned to Marriage Is A Private Affair, to be written for Lana Turner. The studio was quite impressed by the dialogue he had prepared for Marriage Is A Private Affair, but felt it wasn't quite "right" for Miss Turner and they rejected the script.

After the two abortive starts Williams then showed the studio executives an original scenario he had prepared about a Southern woman of declining gentility. The studio wasn't interested and suggested he work on a story for Margaret O'Brien. Williams told them what he thought of child stars, whereupon the studio retired him from his writing chores. He withdrew to the beach, continued to collect \$233 a week for the remainder of his contract, and set to work developing his original scenario.

When the task was completed he returned to New York and reluctantly turned the script over to Audrey Wood with the remark, "Just another one of those old uncommercial plays of mine." ¹⁵ But the agent was so moved by the script that she refused to let anyone read it until she could think of someone who would do the script justice. After three weeks of consideration she suddenly thought of Eddie Dowling's deeply realized

15. Paul Moor, quoted in "A Mississippian Named Tennessee," Harpers Magazine, CIIIC (July, 1948), p. 67

production of Paul Vincent Carroll's Shadow And Substance. She sent the script to him and he bought it immediately. No one else ever had a chance to read The Glass Menagerie.

The play, Williams admits, is partly biographical. Amanda Wingfield is, with noticeable modifications, his own mother. The son is Williams himself, with recollections of the monotony of his work in the shoe factory and his fierce desire at that time to fly away from it all. And Laura is his sister Rose, who really did have a menagerie of glass animals in her room in order to keep her mind off the squalor of her surroundings, including the alley outside her window where prowling dogs tore alley cats to pieces night after night. Williams recalled, after the play was written, that the little glass animals:

... came to represent in my memory all the softest emotions that belong to recollections of things past. They stood for all the small and tender things that relieve the austere pattern of life and make it endurable to the sensitive. The areaway where the cats were torn to pieces [behind the house] was one thing -- my sister's white curtains and tiny menagerie of glass were another. Somewhere between them was the world we lived in. ¹⁶

Another recollection, dating even further back to his life in his grandfather's house was attributed

16. . Lincoln Barnett, "Tennessee Williams," Life, XXXIV (February 16, 1948), p. 118

to the inspiration for Battle Of Angels, but applies with equal aptness to The Glass Menagerie. He wrote:

I remember a lady named Laura Young She was something cool and green in a sulphurous landscape. But there was a shadow upon her. There was something the matter with her. For that reason we called upon her more frequently than anyone else. She loved me. I adored her. She lived in a white house near an orchard and in an arch between two rooms there were hung some pendants of glass, that were a thousand colors. 'That is a prism,' she said. She lifted me and told me to shake them. When I did they made a delicate music.

This prism became a play. 17

The Glass Menagerie has been called, for the obvious reasons of context, "a memory play." To Williams it is all of that, and if the characters are pathetic (as Amanda is), or touching (as is Laura), or restless (as is the son), or compassionate (as the Gentleman Caller), that is surely because these were the fonder memories that inhabited the poet-playwright's mind. Thenceforth, those memories were to be put behind him and the more evil aspects of life, as he encountered it, were to flow from his talented mind.

The Chicago premiere of The Glass Menagerie was attended by all kinds of mishaps, including the calculated reluctance of Eddie Dowling's partner, Louis Singer, to even have the curtain go up on the

17. Paul Moor, "A Mississippian Named Tennessee," Harpers Magazine, CIIIIC (July, 1948), p. 64

play. But by opening night all had been settled, only to find that the house hadn't even been sold out for opening night! The Chicago critics were ecstatic over the performance. Ashton Stevens wrote; "From neighboring seats I heard William Saroyan mentioned, and Paul Vincent Carroll, and Sean O'Casey, and even a playwright named Barrie. But the only author's name I could think of was Tennessee Williams, whose magic is all his own." ¹⁸

The Chicago public, at first, was not ecstatic. For several days the box office lagged. Then the critics began to scold the theatergoers in their columns. The box office picked up. When the show was ready to move to New York after three and a half months in Chicago, The Glass Menagerie was SRO.

When the play was ready to open in New York the critics and the public alike were in an anticipatory mood, not alone because of the enthusiastic stories that had been emanating from Chicago about the play but also because it was to mark the return to the New York stage of a long-absent sweetheart of the theater, Laurette Taylor. There was no disappointment on either score on the evening of April 1, 1945, when the curtains went down at the Playhouse Theater on

18. Ibid., p. 68

the first of 563 New York performances of The Glass Menagerie.

Tennessee Williams' The Glass Menagerie is an enchanting play. Hardly anything happens in it and it is as quiet as quiet can be -- yet, when one leaves the Playhouse and meets reality on the 48th Street sidewalk, one realizes that some kind of hypnotism has been at work ... 19

wrote John Chapman of the Daily News.

The craftsmanship -- the playwrighting, which is memorable; the playacting, which is flawless; and the production, which is inimitable -- makes of The Glass Menagerie a masterpiece of make-believe ... 20

applauded Robert Garland in the Journal-American.

Not since Saroyan's My Hearts In The Highlands dropped into town one day in the Spring of 1939, has there been a production as encouraging to those who believe in the theatre as a form of significant expression and not exclusively as an entertainment racket ... 21

said Rosamond Gilder in Theatre Arts.

In The Glass Menagerie (a lovely title), you will see a very touching play, made to seem even better than it is because of a really magnificent performance by Laurette Taylor ... Tennessee Williams has captured a brief but poignant period in four lives, no negligible accomplishment on any stage ... 22

observed Wolcott Gibbs in The New Yorker.

Many critics found many different things in Tennessee Williams' first Broadway production. One saw humor in it:

19. John Chapman, New York Daily News, April 2, 1945

20. Robert Garland, New York Journal-American, April 2, 1945

21. Rosamond Gilder, Theatre Arts, XXIX (June, 1945), p. 325

22. Wolcott Gibbs, The New Yorker, XXI (April 7, 1945), p. 40

Mr. Williams has put some laughs in The Glass Menagerie but they are laughs growing out of a situation. They are not Broadway wisecracks. When you laugh the characters would be, in real life, surprised that what they said struck you as funny; they are creatures caught in the most ordinary but the most terrible of tragedies -- that of trying to live when they have no sensible reason for their living ... 23

Another found that " ... what he has accomplished is the creation of four walloping parts which, by virtue of his cast, results in the exhibition of the art of playing and no play." 24 Still another found a bit of the past all through the production:

The new play by Tennessee Williams ... has the haunting quality of an unhappy dream. Four frustrated persons grope for a handrail in the fog of their own disabilities, but since this is Williams and not Saroyan any hope that they find their way out is left to be built up in our own imagination. The form is the one adapted from the Chinese by Thornton Wilder in Our Town without visual framing and by Van Druten in I Remember Mama with its charming pictures ... 25

A fourth was puzzled briefly by the play's lack of action:

The lack of action in The Glass Menagerie is a bit baffling at first, but it becomes of no consequence as soon as one gets to know the family. Their life is brought on the stage in a dreamy, informal manner suitable to reminiscences, and though the script describes a pathetic situation, it is always underlined with humor ... 26

23. Burton Rascoe, New York World-Telegram, April 2, 1945

24. Kappo Phelan, The Commonweal, XXXXII (April 20, 1945), p. 17

25. Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt, Catholic World, CLXI (May, 1945), p. 166

26. Otis L. Gurnsey, Jr., New York Herald-Tribune, April 2, 1945

The ideal that Williams was trying to achieve, according to the playwright himself, was a static drama, "a play whose interest does not depend on incident or situation but holds its audience through the revelation of quiet and ordinary truths." 27 In effect, this would seem to mean the play was conceived to dramatize the subjective experiences of the characters -- to get under the surface of the characters rather than outward manifestations of character and conflict. Eugene O'Neill achieved this same sort of idea in The Great God Brown by using masks to project the inner character. Here Tennessee Williams, while his objective is the same, uses a somewhat different approach. He has chosen virtually to stop the action of the entire drama -- the static drama -- while he probes the inner recesses of his characters. One observer of the contemporary theatrical scene has written:

The most remarkable feature of the work of the younger playwrights was their use of the stage in a new way to dramatize the subjective experience of their characters. This effort to bring to light the hidden worlds in which individuals live -- often sharply unlike the supposedly "real" world which they inhabit -- was first exemplified in 1945 by Tennessee Williams' The Glass Menagerie ... Williams uses the device of making the son, long after his escape, a narrator who addresses the audience; the play takes place in his memory. This enabled Williams to ignore the conventions of realistic drama

27. Harry Gilroy, "A Playwright Named Tennessee," New York Times Magazine, December 7, 1947, p. 19

and thereby concentrate and sharpen his tragedy of frustration on the planes of inward and outward life. ²⁸

A few years later this same trend can be observed in another young playwright, Arthur Miller, as he combines the reality of Willy Loman's everyday existence with the fantasies and self-delusions he conjures up in his own mind. In actual practise, however, Death Of A Salesman is more directly related to Williams' second successful play, A Streetcar Named Desire, wherein the action progresses simultaneously with the subjective probing. In this respect alone both A Streetcar Named Desire and Death Of A Salesman marked a distinctive advance over the dramatic technique Williams used in The Glass Menagerie. Elia Kazan spoke in this same vein when, while directing Camino Real, he remarked:

No one appreciates how much A Streetcar Named Desire did to open the avenue to a less literal approach toward the theatre. Because of Streetcar we had Death Of A Salesman. Now we all hope people are ready for this [Camino Real]. ²⁹

Another characteristic of Williams' writing style that was to manifest itself ever more strongly in subsequent Williams' dramas was revealed initially in The Glass Menagerie -- his penchant for dramatic

28. Lloyd Morris, Curtain Time; The Story Of The American Theater (New York: Random House, 1953), p. 361

29. Henry Hewes, "Tennessee Williams -- Last Of Our Solid Gold Bohemians," Saturday Review Of Literature, XXXVI (March 28, 1953), p. 26

symbolism. In Camino Real it reached its peak -- an entirely symbolistic drama filled with symbolistic characters. In The Glass Menagerie the very title was a symbol, as Williams subsequently related (cf. note 15), a symbol of the fragility and isolation of Laura's being. Within the menagerie itself the unicorn, in its lonely singularity, personifies the loneliness of the characters in the play. Even in the staging, the gauze curtain that covers some of the scenes is symbolic of the distance the narrator has put between himself and his mother and sister -- a distance measured in time and in space.

Among the critics present at the New York opening of The Glass Menagerie were some "yes-buts" -- those who were intrigued by what the newcomer had to say and how he said it, but had some reservations about the play itself. John Mason Brown, for example, found it to be a play with " ... high ... shimmering virtues" and is " ... blessed with imagination" and possessed of "many lovely moments." ³⁰ But, says Mr. Brown:

Full though his heart is, Mr. Williams' drama sometimes proves empty. I found that it lost my interest even while it held my admiration ...

Perhaps this was because, unlike Chekhov, Mr.

30. John Mason Brown, "Seeing Things," Saturday Review Of Literature, XXVIII (April 14, 1945), p. 35

Williams permits us to become uncomfortably conscious of how slight is the incident upon which he has based his play. Perhaps it is because his dialogue is not always active enough to compensate for the lack of action in his story. Perhaps it is because he allows us to know too much too early about all of his characters except the charmingly written and played Gentleman Caller. Perhaps it is because Miss Taylor is off-stage for so long a scene in the second act. Or perhaps, as I have hinted, it is because the praise the play had won in advance had led me to expect that miracle which is every critic's hope ... 31

Joseph Wood Krutch, writing in a similar "yes-but" mood, observes:

... nothing which I am about to say should be taken as denying the fact that The Glass Menagerie is a remarkable play and its author a man of extraordinary talent. But there is no use failing to mention that his weaknesses are as patent as his gifts, or that very good writing and very bad writing have seldom been as conspicuous in the script of one play. It has a hard, substantial core of shrewd observation and deft, economical characterization. But this hard core is enveloped in a fuzzy haze of pretentious, sentimental, pseudo-poetic verbiage which I can compare only to the gauze screens of various degrees of filmy opacity which are annoyingly raised and lowered during the course of the physical action in order to suggest memory, the pathos of distance, and I know not what else. How a man capable of writing as firm as is some of that in this play can on other occasions abandon himself to such descriptive passages as that in which a young man is described -- in Oscar Wilde's worst style -- as 'like white china' is a mystery. Moreover, the incongruity is almost as conspicuous between personages as it is between passages ... 32

Whatever the criticisms, a new playwright had been launched. There remained now to be seen whether

31. Ibid.

32. Joseph Wood Krutch, The Nation, CLX (April 14, 1945), p. 424

the new star on the horizon was going to continue with, and improve upon, his initial playwriting success or whether he, like certain playwrights before him (notably William Saroyan and Clifford Odets) would flash across the sky and quickly fade away. The public was to have its answer in a continuous succession of controversial plays from the pen of Tennessee Williams. The playwright from Mississippi is not one to take his successes seriously. Playwriting is his business, his life, his being. No time is to be taken off to spend the income. The play is the thing.

Even prior to *The Glass Menagerie* Williams had written some half dozen other full length plays and nearly 20 one-acters, including 27 Wagons Full Of Cotton, This Property Is Condemned, Portrait Of A Madonna, The Purification, The Lady Of Larkspur Lotion, The Last Of My Solid Gold Watches, and the award winning collection of four one-acts collectively titled American Blues, which included one play bearing the title Ten Blocks On The Camino Real, later to be expanded into a full length play.

Included, also, in this extensive number of theater pieces was the aforementioned You Touched Me! which was to become the author's next offering on Broadway. It was rushed into production, no doubt,

to take advantage of the continuing success of The Glass Menagerie, and opened on the evening of September 25, 1945.

The critics were rather cool. True, The Glass Menagerie was a difficult first play to top. But You Touched Me! hardly seemed the proper play to attempt it. One of the critics fumed:

... it is something of a mystery (or isn't it?) why the playwright allowed its production ... I can only say that the writing seemed to me foolish indeed and the production vastly overweighted by specious direction and a most busy architectural set by Motley ... 33

And another cryptically remarked, "Few romantic comedies have either soared with so much message or stooped to so many monkeyshines." 34

You Touched Me! was the first (and, up to the present, only) collaborative effort by Tennessee Williams. It was also the first time he had treated a story that was not original with him. It was not a happy choice. In the reading, You Touched Me! seems a singularly disjointed play. The characters -- unlike so many of Williams' characters -- seem only half-apprehended and never going anywhere and the symbolism gets quite out of hand. One observer

33. Kappo Phelan, The Commonweal, XIII (October 12, 1945), p. 623

34. Time, XXXXVI (October 8, 1945), p. 77

wryly remarks about the excess of symbolism:

Playwrights Williams and Windham are soapboxing for Life, Growth, Fulfillment and the future. They set these abstractions up in an English country house, and arrange a match against Stagnation, Snobbishness, and the Status Quo, Frudishness, and Decay The trouble with such highly contrasted symbols is that they themselves are virtually burlesques: almost everything the old man does smacks of melodrama, almost everything the old soak does smacks of farce. ³⁵

To attempt to evaluate Williams' plays by their reading is not quite fair to the playwright since there is a theatricalism about his dramas that can be appreciated only by hearing and seeing them performed in a stage setting. One of the critics demonstrated this fact for, when he first saw The Glass Menagerie, he wrote:

There's little doubt that Tennessee Williams is a playwright to be reckoned with in the current theater. Not only where night-before-last's The Glass Menagerie is concerned, but also when his locally unproduced You Touched Me! is taken into consideration. He writes deftly and well. And, which is more important, he has something definite to say and knows how to say it definitely ³⁶

But, after seeing You Touched Me! on the stage, the same critic ruefully observed:

Nobody, not even Guthrie McClintic, has any right to produce a poor play as well as You Touched Me! is produced. For a long time, you can't make up your mind whether it is any good

35. Ibid., pp. 77-78

36. Robert Garland, New York Journal-American, April 2, 1945

or not Until well along into the opening stanza, Ole Massa Guthrie had me almost fooled.

Almost, but not quite. For it slowly but surely dawned upon me that there was less in You Touched Me! than met the eye and ear. At the same time, and contradictorily, there was too much going on. Too much talking. Too much acting. Too much story-telling. Too much gesticulating. Too much pausing for effect. Too much posing. Too much climbing about the scenery. Too much everything but play 37

You Touched Me!, although preceding The Glass Menagerie in composition, has the same shy, withdrawn woman in the character of Matilda Rockley who was to appear as Laura Wingfield in The Glass Menagerie, Alma Winemiller in Summer And Smoke, and, to some extent, Blanche du Bois in A Streetcar Named Desire. The principal point of difference is that Matilda Rockley is an English, rather than a Southern, girl.

Some of the critics had difficulty on agreeing upon just what kind of a play it was. Joseph Wood Krutch says:

... the thing which distinguishes the play from the usual treatments of similar stories is the fact that it is told, not from the standpoint of romantic comedy (as claimed by the authors), but as an intense, half-symbolical drama in which boy-getting-girl seems intended to represent the triumph of good over evil. 38

But to Stark Young, the story was different. Says Mr. Young: "All in all, this is a romantic

37. Robert Garland, New York Journal-American, September 26, 1945

38. Joseph Wood Krutch, The Nation, CLXI (October 6, 1945), p. 349

comedy, with perhaps farcical leanings -- though this cannot be quite clear; it may be the acting more than the writing -- and through the scenes runs a hint of subtler implication, which may be the playwrights' or may be Lawrence." 39

A third reviewer was completely bewildered:

... Mr. Williams and his collaborator ... have contrived ... an odd work of sex and symbolism which but for its many serious set-speeches, might pardonably be mistaken for a species of farce or burlesque. The point of their message, I'm afraid, is decidedly damaged by the broad strokes, the black-and-whiteness, the conscious or unconscious buffonery of their playwriting: it is impossible to take what actually goes on seriously, and not quite possible -- in view of what it is supposed to mean -- to laugh it off. The authors themselves have apparently taken a midway position by dubbing You Touched Me! a romantic comedy. 40

A fourth expressed bewilderment in a similar vein:

This sounds as if it might have the makings of a farce somewhere, and now and then that's just what it is. But only now and then. Most of the time the authors have their thesis to think of, but some of the time they don't seem to be thinking clearly about much of anything, and the result is that You Touched Me! boils down to a hopelessly confused patchwork of a play whose 'romantic comedy' seems very strained indeed, and whose efforts to preach Life and Growth to the English amid destruction and devastation often seems not only oddly pretentious but downright presumptuous ... 41

But there were kind words, too, for the drama

39. Stark Young, The New Republic, CXIII (October 8, 1945), p. 469

40. Louis Kronenberger, PM, September 26, 1945

41. Willella Waldorf, New York Post, September 26, 1945

wrought by these two collaborators. Howard Barnes, viewing it in a comparative light, remarked:

The theater is becoming literate and imaginative again. You Touched Me! ... is no great shakes as a piece of dramatic construction, but this Tennessee Williams-Donald Windham play has heart and considerable eloquence. Compared to other early season offerings, it is extremely satisfying ... ⁴²

And John Chapman, after conceding that " ... at times [it] becomes almost too tenuous and occasionally verges upon the precious ..." observes, more affirmatively:

They do not use humor as a bludgeon; they use it lightly and deftly. They try once or twice to voice some message or other about the world of the future, but since nobody alive seems to have any concrete plan for tomorrow they cannot be too harshly blamed for sounding mixed up ... ⁴³

You Touched Me! was neither an unqualified success nor an abysmal failure. It ran for 109 performances, not sufficient to make it a financial success but a respectable run by Broadway standards. Undoubtedly, some of its drawing power was due to the continuing success of The Glass Menagerie and the aura around the name of Tennessee Williams. But others were intrigued by the fragileness of the tale of the English country girl and her sensitive lover, some were drawn by the rambunctious performance of Edmund Gwenn as the drunken Captain Rockley, and some, no doubt, were

42. Howard Barnes, New York Herald-Tribune, September 26, 1945

43. John Chapman, New York Daily News, September 26, 1945

attracted by the idea of a D. H. Lawrence story being adapted to the theater. The play was to be the only collaborative effort by Tennessee Williams. Since that time he has so successfully traveled his own original path that another collaboration appears quite unlikely.

Tennessee Williams has a mind that will not lie fallow long. During the next two years (1946-47) he was working almost simultaneously on two plays, one of which was to solidly establish him as a playwright of the highest talent. Although his extensive production of one-act and longer plays would suggest that Williams is an extremely facile playwright, the truth is just the opposite. He devotes a year to a year and a half on his major plays and makes three or four drafts of each play. His prodigious output is more attributable to his diligence than to his facility, for Williams dwells constantly in a world of romantic dreams and ideas. The observation of people and the recording of his observations on paper and on the stage is Williams' whole existence. The world has profited from his diligence.

The world of the theater was seldom more richly rewarded than on the evening of December 3, 1947, when an obscure streetcar from the Vieux Carré in New Orleans became immortalized on the stage of the Ethel

Barrymore Theater in New York. A Streetcar Named Desire became the drama that not only proved that Tennessee Williams was a playwright but a playwright of the first order. A Streetcar Named Desire was no longer a down-payment on a career. With this play the account was paid in full.

A Streetcar Named Desire is, in some measure, a revised version of The Glass Menagerie. In Blanche du Bois is a Southern woman of declining gentility, as is Amanda in The Glass Menagerie. In Stan Kowalski is the resisting force embodied in the son in Menagerie. Blanche's suitor in Streetcar is the counterpart of The Gentleman Caller in the earlier play. And Stella and Laura are the passive elements in the two plays. But beyond that comparison, all resemblance ends. For, whereas The Glass Menagerie is a passive, static drama that simply probed the lives of the four characters in the search for "the quiet and ordinary truths," A Streetcar Named Desire has moments of violence and terror and the characters are not simply probed but laid bare. Gone are the still glass animals and in their place the raucous action of the poker game. Gone the breathless pauses of a shy love and in its stead the brutality of a rape scene. A Streetcar Named Desire is the dynamic version of The Glass Menagerie and, because of that fact, it is

more theater and a superior play.

The playwright is still enamoured of symbols -- which, indeed, becomes a poet. In this drama, as in his first success, the title symbolizes the play.

One observer explains:

The play's title evokes Blanche's neurotic creed that sentient desire, not just mere living, is the opposite of death. Her opening line foreshadows the whole play: 'They told me to take a streetcar named Desire, transfer to one called Cemetery, and get off at Elysian Fields ... ' This is typical Williams' symbolism. 44

In his subsequent drama, Camino Real, Williams was to run wild with his symbolical references. One critic, seeking to discover the playwright's fascination for symbols, received the reply:

To me, using a symbol is just a way of saying a thing more vividly and dramatically than I could otherwise. For instance, the hotel proprietors dropping Casanova's shabby portmanteau of fragile memories out the window [in Camino Real] is a clearer expression of an idea than you might be able to do with a thousand words. However, I don't believe in using symbols unless they clarify ... 45

Since Williams' favorite playwrights are Anton Chekhov and Garcia Lorca the dramatist's extensive use of symbols is further readily explainable. The symbol is clearly the device of the poet and would seem a proper, if sometimes abused, device for the talents of poet-playwright Tennessee Williams.

44. Paul Moor, "A Mississippian Named Tennessee," Harpers Magazine, CIIIC (July, 1948), p. 69

45. Henry Hewes, "Tennessee Williams -- Last Of Our Solid Gold Bohemians," Saturday Review Of Literature, XXXVI (March 28, 1953), p. 26

Williams has termed A Streetcar Named Desire "a tragedy of incomprehension,"⁴⁶ an exceptionally apt description of the play, for essentially the tragedy of the story does lie in the inability of Stanley to understand the degenerative forces in Blanche's life, the inability of Blanche to substitute the contentment of her sister's life for her lost "gentility," the inability of Blanche's suitor to reconcile himself with the tragic consequences of Blanche's past. Unlike the stern tragedies of Arthur Miller, where the tragic act is carried to its ultimate end (death), Williams' tragedies leave their characters writhing in the agony of their own misfortunes, misunderstandings, and mistrusts. For Williams, the drama is never ended with a gunshot, a crackup, a hanging, -- the tragedy continues after the audience leaves the theater, as if the audience were walking out into the actual existence of a tragic reality -- a symbol of sorts in its own right.

The question may arise as to whether playwright Williams has intended to be sympathetic to his forlorn heroine or whether he has remained aloof and coldly impersonal as he watches Blanche sink to her complete degradation. The Times critic sees it in Williams' favor:

46. Paul Moor, "A Mississippian Named Tennessee," Harpers Magazine, CIIIC (July, 1948), p. 69

To her brother-in-law [Blanche] is an unforgiveable liar. But it is soon apparent to the theatergoer that in Mr. Williams' eyes she is one of the dispossessed whose experience has unfitted her for reality; and although his attitude toward her is merciful, he does not spare her or the playgoer. For the events of Streetcar lead to a painful conclusion which he does not try to avoid. Although Blanche cannot face the truth, Mr. Williams does in the most imaginative and perceptive play he has written ... 47

But the Herald-Tribune critic, enjoying the play as a whole, takes exception to the writer's "lack of sympathy." He says:

On two counts, it is somewhat disappointing. The talented author might well have foreshortened some of his scenes in a chiarascuro of death and desire, humiliation and insanity. And he might have crowded the final stanzas of the work with a bit more sympathy. They are curiously touching, but they lack some of the nobility that defines high tragedy. 48

The Post's critic feels somewhat the same way about it:

... his doomed heroines are so helplessly enmeshed in their fate they cannot put up a properly dramatic battle against it.

There is something a little embarrassing about watching the torment of as helpless a victim of a playwright's brooding imagination as the heroine of A Streetcar Named Desire, particularly when her downfall is studied with almost loving detail. The result is that the play has a painful, rather pitiful quality about it. Yet its characters are so knowingly and understandably presented, the vividness of its life is so compelling, and the theatrical skill of its portrait of spiritual and

47. Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, December 4, 1947

48. Howard Barnes, New York Herald-Tribune, December 4, 1947

moral decay so impressive that it never ceases to be effective and powerful ... 49

Perhaps it can best be expressed by the playwright himself. He says:

Every artist has a basic premise pervading his whole life, and that premise can provide the impulse for everything he creates. For me the dominating premise has been the need for understanding and tenderness and fortitude among individuals trapped by circumstances. 50

Williams apparently justifies critic Atkinson's judgment of him in this instance.

Another intelligent critic of the American theater sees the following element in the plays of Tennessee Williams:

The outstanding quality of Tennessee Williams' writing is his sensitivity to human suffering, his sympathy with those he sees as doomed to inevitable destruction as one social order gives way to another. Just as Chekhov's three sisters could never reach any real Moscow, so Williams' Amandas and Blanches cannot shake off the obsession of an extinct gentility. Mr. Williams sees his protagonists surrounded by a more ruthless world than Chekhov, but then how many revolutions and world wars have rolled around the globe since the first axe blows were struck at the off-stage cherry trees. 51

And John Gassner remarks, in a similar vein:

Without possessing Miller's socially directed attitude Williams, too, has been concerned with the dream mechanisms of unfortunate characters who try to create and preserve ideal images of themselves.

49. Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, December 4, 1947

50. Lincoln Barnett, "Tennessee Williams," Life, XXIV (February 16, 1948), p. 116

51. Rosamond Gilder, "Art And Industry; The U. S. Theatre Today," World Theatre, I (1950, No. 1), p. 29

Like Miller, he regards their delusions with compassionate interest as pathetic defenses against the frustration or shipwreck of their lives. 52

Although it is necessary to reach back to Lorca and Chekhov to trace the real roots of Williams' past, some critics profess to see some elements of the style and manner of Clifford Odets and William Saroyan in the work of Tennessee Williams. In a comparative study with Saroyan, John Mason Brown says:

Mr. Williams is a more meticulous craftsman [than Saroyan]. His is a manifestly slower, less impromptu manner of writing. His attitude toward his people is as merciless as Mr. Saroyan's is naive. He is without illusions. His men and women are not large and spirited and noble, or basically good. They are small and mean; above all, frustrated. He sees them as he believes they are, not as they would like to be or as he would like to have them. They have no secrets from him or from us when he is through with them. They may have little sweetness, but they are all lighted ... 53

The same critic writes; " ... in some respects [Streetcar is] the most probing play to have been written since Clifford Odets wrote Awake And Sing ..." 54

Rare, indeed, is the play that wins the unanimous praise of the critics without any exceptions. A Streetcar Named Desire did not escape the censure of some of the aisle-sitters. The drama critic of the

52. John Gassner, The Theatre In Our Times (New York: Crown, 1954), pp. 348-49.

53. John Mason Brown, "Seeing Things," Saturday Review Of Literature, XXX (December 27, 1947), p. 22

54. Ibid.

Catholic World fairly sputtered:

An obscene nightmare framed in the dingy browns of a dilapidated house of the Quarter in New Orleans ... 'I want to die in the clean seas,' cries Blanche. 'I want to get in the clean air,' was my one desire.

Tennessee Williams has genius but it needs purification. The acting has genius, too ...

The Streetcar Named Desire takes one on a trip that makes Medea seem like a pleasure ride. 55

Robert Coleman of the New York Daily Mirror had his doubts, too:

Tennessee Williams has not written a top-flight play in A Streetcar Named Desire. It is episodic and strangely static despite the violence ... But he has written a dreamy, poetic, moodful vehicle for a fine cast ...

The characters that Williams has coralled in A Streetcar Named Desire are a moronic, tedious and pathetic lot. Vicious or stupid, they are the sort that you would flee from hastily in real life. Politely, if possible ... 56

Nearly two years later the Williams' drama was assembled on a London stage under the sharp direction of Sir Lawrence Olivier in a production starring the director's wife, Vivian Leigh, in the tragic role of Blanche du Bois. London patrons stormed the box office for the opening performance, standing all night in a block-long queue. The London critics heaped

55. Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt, Catholic World, CLXVI (January, 1948), pp. 358-59

56. Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, December 4, 1947

praises upon Olivier and Miss Leigh, but were not so sure about the play. While some of them found some things to praise about the Williams' script others felt compelled to observe, "I feel as if I had crawled through a garbage heap ..." and "Blatent, crude sex ..." 57

Across the Channel, in Paris, Un Tramway Nomme Desir was given the costliest production ever accorded an American play in France. Jean Cocteau, the director, added a number of original and irrelevant touches, including a burlesque strip tease through the transparent scenery during the rape scene. The Paris public was enthusiastic about the production and stormed the box office. Said the Paris theater manager, "The greatest sensation the American theater has ever given France." 58 Growled the critic of the Paris newspaper, Le Figaro:

Stripteases, bizarre morbidities, riots, drunken orgies, poker parties, shriekings, eroticism ... obscenities and rapes, with just a bit of sexual deviation tossed in for good measure ... Two years of fighting in line before countless theaters in two hemispheres for this tramway seems a strange kind of lunacy. 59

Less than a year after the successful premiere of A Streetcar Named Desire another original play under

57. Quoted in Time, LIV (October 31, 1949), p. 54

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

the signature of Tennessee Williams was presented on Broadway. With an advance sale of over \$100,000, the Margo Jones' production of Williams' Sumner And Smoke moved into the Music Box Theater on West 45th Street on the evening of October 6, 1948. The shadow of A Streetcar Named Desire fell across the new drama. The onus of a smash success early in his theatrical career was to plague the playwright in this and succeeding dramas. The play did not live up to the public's expectations for the author. It ran for 100 performances.

Sumner And Smoke is as fragile and diaphanous as its title, marked on one brief occasion only by a sharp and shocking flareup of action when the elder doctor is shot. Otherwise, it is concerned with a shy and inhibited Southern minister's daughter painfully in love from childhood with the wastral son of the next door doctor. The shock of his father's death reforms the young doctor while she, at the same time striving to achieve his standards, becomes as the young doctor once was. The playwright tells the story swiftly and deftly with his characteristic imagistic style in the eleventh scene of the 12-scene play:

Alma: .. Is it -- impossible now?

John: I don't think I know what you mean.

Alma: You know what I mean, all right! So be honest with me. One time I said 'no' to something. You may remember the time, and all that demented howling from the cock-fight? But now I have changed my mind, or the girl who said 'no,' she doesn't exist any more, she died last summer -- suffocated in smoke from something on fire inside her. No, she doesn't live now, but she left me her ring -- You see? This one you admired, the topaz ring set in pearls ... And she said to me when she slipped this ring on my finger -- "Remember I died empty-handed, and so make sure that your hands have something in them!" (She drops her gloves. She clasps his head again in her hands.) I said, 'But what about pride?' -- She said, 'Forget about pride whenever it stands between you and what you must have!' (He takes hold of her wrists.) And then I said, 'But what if he doesn't want me?' I don't know what she said then. I'm not sure whether she said anything or not -- her lips stopped moving -- yes, I think she stopped breathing! (He gently removes her craving hands from his face.) No? (He shakes his head in dumb suffering.) Then the answer is 'no'!

John: (Forcing himself to speak) I have a respect for the truth, and I have a respect for you -- so I'd better speak honestly if you want me to speak. (Alma nods slightly.) You've won the argument that we had between us.

Alma: What -- argument?

John: The one about the chart.

Alma: Oh -- the chart!
(She turns from him and wanders across to the chart. She gazes up at it with closed eyes, and her hands clasped in front of her.)

John: It shows that we're not a package of rose leaves, that every interior inch of us is taken up with something ugly and functional and no room seems to be left for anything else in there.

Alma: No ...

John: But I've come around to your way of thinking, that something else is in there, an immaterial something -- as thin as smoke -- which all of those ugly machines combine to produce and that's their whole reason for being. It can't be seen so it can't be shown on the chart. But it's there, just the same, and knowing it's there -- why, then the whole thing -- this -- this unfathomable experience of ours -- takes on a new value, like some -- some wildly romantic work in a laboratory! Don't you see?

Alma: Yes, I see! ... You needn't try to comfort me. I haven't come here on any but equal terms. You said, let's talk truthfully. Well, let's do! Unsparingly, truthfully, even shamelessly, then! It's no longer a secret that I love you. It never was. I loved you as long ago as the time I asked you to read the stone angel's name with your fingers. Yes, I remember the long afternoons of our childhood, when I had to stay indoors to practice my music -- and heard your playmates calling you, 'Johnny, Johnny!' How it went through me, just to hear your name called! ... I've lived next door to you all the days of my life, a weak and divided person who stood in adoring awe of your singleness, of your strength. And that is my story! Now I wish you would tell me -- why didn't it happen between us? Why did I fail? Why did you come almost close enough -- and no closer?

John: Whenever we've gotten together, the three or four times that we have ...

Alma: As few as that?

John: It's only been three or four times that we've -- come face to face. And each of those times -- we seemed to be trying to find something in each other without knowing what it was that we wanted to find. It wasn't a body hunger although -- I acted as if I thought it might be the night I wasn't a gentleman -- at the Casino -- it wasn't the physical you that I really wanted!

Alma: I know, you've already ...

John: You didn't have that to give me.

Alma: Not at that time.

John: You had something else to give.

Alma: What did I have?

(John strikes a match. Unconsciously he holds his curved palm over the flame of the match to warm it. It is a long kitchen match and it makes a good flame. They both stare at it with a sorrowful understanding that is still perplexed. It is about to burn his fingers. She leans forward and blows it out, then she puts on her gloves.)

John: You couldn't name it and I couldn't recognize it. I thought it was just a Puritanical ice that glittered like flame. But now I believe it was flame, mistaken for ice. I still don't understand it, but I know it was there, just as I know that your eyes and your voice are the two most beautiful things I've ever known -- and also the warmest, although they don't seem to be set in your body at all ...

Alma: You talk as if my body had ceased to exist for you, John, in spite of the fact that you've just counted my pulse. Yes, that's it! You tried to avoid it, but you've told me plainly. The tables have turned, yes, the tables have turned with a vengeance! You've come around to my old way of thinking and I to yours like two people exchanging a call on each other at the same time, and each finding the other one gone out, the door locked against him and no one to answer the bell! (She laughs.) I came here to tell you that being a gentleman doesn't seem important to me any more, but you're telling me I've got to remain a lady. (She laughs rather violently.) The tables have turned with a vengeance! -- The air in here smells of ether -- It's making me dizzy ...

Summer And Smoke is an oddly constructed play. Aside from the unorthodox construction used by Williams in

dividing his play into two parts and 12 scenes, the placing of the scene of climactic action in the seventh scene of the play and dribbling the action out for five remaining scenes makes all that comes after appear somewhat anti-climactic. Further, the playwright's device of making the scene of highest dramatic action in the show not involve directly the two principal characters is, if not completely foreign, at least an unusual approach.

But Williams, as usual, is not writing a play of violence and terror but of the tragedy of characters who cannot adjust to the strain of being mature human beings. The shock of the death of the father was less a climactic scene of action in Williams' writing dimension than a device to affect the personal relationships of the two protagonists. Accepted on its own basis, Summer And Smoke is a fragile, tragic drama of frustration and heartbreak.

Part of the weakness of Summer And Smoke as a stage play may have been due to its direction. Harold Clurman is especially acute as a critic in analysing the shortcomings of staging a play. Concerning Summer And Smoke, he writes:

It is the function of the director of a play as subtly difficult as Summer And Smoke to articulate a coherent interpretation which the audience can actually see. It is evident that such an interpretation never existed in regard to this play. The production, in fact, provides an example of how

a group of talented people, when there is no firm hand to guide them, may contribute to a play wholeheartedly but without valid effect ... 60

When Summer And Smoke was done on Broadway with the extravagances of a Broadway production and Margaret Phillips as the star the play was not a critical success. But when, approximately four years later, it was revived on a much more limited scale in the Greenwich Village Circle-In-The-Square arena production directed by Jose Quintero and starring Geraldine Page, the show was generally much better received by the critics and enjoyed an extended run in the small Village theater. Direction may have been a part of the problem of the original production. The extraordinarily luminous performance of Miss Page in the revival accounted in no small measure for the success of that production.

Joseph Wood Krutch, with three Williams' cases of frustrated Southern female gentility behind him, makes a very perceptive analysis of this character and the playwright's approach to it in his review of Summer And Smoke in the Nation:

In both cases [Streetcar and Summer And Smoke] the tragedy lies, not in the fact that the heroine resists, but in the fact that she has so little to resist with. 'Gentility' is the only form of idealism or spirituality accessible to her; perhaps, Mr. Williams seems to be saying, the only form now accessible to anyone, and our culture

60. Harold Clurman, The New Republic, CXIX (October 25, 1948), p. 26

is ugly just because we have no living equivalent for what is by now a mere quaint anachronism. If I read him aright, he is not so much ridiculing his Southern 'ladies' and Southern 'gentlemen' as he is reproaching the rest of the world for having found no equivalent of what their ladyhood and their gentlemanliness once represented. ⁶¹

John Gassner, one of Williams' original teachers, had some harsh things to say about Williams upon the appearance of Summer And Smoke:

In truth, I very much fear that Summer And Smoke only brings out the weaknesses I have suspected in its author for a long time -- an insufficient exertion of intellect to match his splendid talent for humanizing characters and a fondness for capitalized Art that falls somewhat short of maturity.

If virtue were properly rewarded, Summer And Smoke would be a masterpiece, instead of being simply a worthy work that fails to come off ... Mr. Williams had much to show us but little to tell us this time. Reality concerned him as strongly as ever before, but he could place no positive interpretation on it. He had much to deplore in the life he was evoking but nothing to promote and nothing to challenge. A notable piece of dramatic writing was aborted in Summer And Smoke, not by an author's dishonest practice in ineptness, nor by a lack of those virtues for which Williams is distinguished from other playwrights, but by an inanition of the bloodstream that characterizes our generation. ⁶²

The critic of The Commonweal found approximately the same deficiency in the work:

It is fairly safe to conclude that this Tennessee Williams' variation is early stuff and, despite one or two excellent performances, not seriously worth its present production. It is

61. Joseph Wood Krutch, The Nation, CLXVII (October 23, 1948), p. 473

62. John Gassner, Forum, CX (December, 1948), p. 353

dull; over-finagled on the setting side; vastly overdressed on the costume side; crammed with a kind of nursery symbolism; and offers, finally, no apprehensible progression in the writer's work -- certainly no clue to his conscious mind ... 63

The New York Times' critic, however, is almost always to be found in Williams' corner, even when, on rare occasions, he finds it necessary to gently slap his wrists. Concerning Summer And Smoke, Mr. Atkinson launches into paens of praise for the playwright's talent:

Although Tennessee Williams writes a gentle style, he has a piercing eye. In Summer And Smoke ... he looks again into the dark corners of the human heart, and what he sees is terrifying. This is a tone poem in the genre of The Glass Menagerie and A Streetcar Named Desire ... again the insight into character is almost unbearably lucid. Although it derives from compassion, it is cruel in its insistence on the truth. Mr. Williams is full of scorn for the rootless people he pities. He will not raise a finger to spare them from misery ...

As a poet Mr. Williams is less concerned with events than with adventures of the spirit ... Mr. Williams writes brief scenes, generally for a few characters. But he is a writer of superb grace and allusiveness, always catching the shape and sound of ideas rather than their literal meaning. As the title suggests, Summer And Smoke deals in truths that are insubstantial. But as Mr. Williams sees it, these are the truths that are most profound and the most painful, for they separate people who should logically be together and give life its savage whims, and its wanton destructiveness. Although he is dealing in impulses that cannot be literally defined, the twin themes of his tone poem are clearly stated: spirit and flesh, order and anarchy. He has caught them in the troubled brooding of two human hearts ...

63. Kappo Phelan, The Commonweal, IL (October 29, 1948), p. 68

Mr. Williams and his two principal actors have performed the miracle of translating a drab corner of life into something that is tremulous with beauty. ⁶⁴

Mr. Atkinson's report was distinctly in the minority. To the Daily News critic, "The new Tennessee Williams' drama, Summer And Smoke, is a juvenile and sadly delinquent effort. Mawkish, murky, maudlin, and monotonous." ⁶⁵ And the Journal-American critic reported that "Last night ... wisecrackers called it A Kiddy-Kar Called Conversation. It is a somewhat better play than that, with pretty patches of hifalutin' writing ... but A Kiddy-Kar Called Conversation certainly does give you a good idea!" ⁶⁶ Another of the newspaper critics observed that "So ordinary are these people, and so intangible their significance, that the play comes out in performance more like Nirvana and ectoplasm than even summer and smoke." ⁶⁷

Only one of the newspaper critics went along with Mr. Atkinson's evaluation of the play. Robert Coleman, who was distinctly unimpressed by A Streetcar Named Desire (page 86) remarked, "Though Summer And

64. Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, October 7, 1948

65. John Chapman, New York Daily News, October 7, 1948

66. Robert Garland, New York Journal-American, October 7, 1948

67. William Hawkins, New York World-Telegram, October 7, 1948

Smoke may prove less popular than previous Williams' works, it is in our opinion, by all odds, his best script. It evidences growth and maturity in one of our finest playwrights ... " 68

Summer And Smoke was the beginning of a number of not-too-successful plays on Broadway by Tennessee Williams. It was not until 1955 that he was to come into his own once again.

Declining gentility and Southern womanhood was put aside when Maureen Stapleton, as the tempestuous Serafina Delle Rose, took up residence at the Martin Beck Theater in Tennessee Williams' next play, The Rose Tattoo, on February 4, 1951. But the spirit of frustration was still hovering over the Williams' play as the pious Serafina, troubled by the faithfulness of her late husband, binds her hands to the future until the symbol (always a symbol) of the rose tattoo and the village gossips frees her for her more natural talents.

The South is still here, but it is another and completely different South from that of his preceding plays. In The Rose Tattoo the Gulf Coast, populated by colorful and rowdy Sicilian fisher-folk, is the center of the action. Despite the setting, the play is predominately foreign in tone, reflecting Williams'

68. Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, October 7, 1948

sojourn in Italy while he was writing the play.

The springboard for the play is said to be taken from T. S. Eliot's translation of *Anabasis*: "... the streams are in their beds like the cries of women and this world has more beauty than a ram's skin painted red." 69 The symbolism of the line with the red of the rose is, admittedly, a bit obscure to this writer, but Williams' symbols, despite his protestations of innocence, do not always manifest themselves clearly.

The drama critics of the New York newspapers are generally considered to be the most influential external influence (separate from the play itself) on the success or failure of a show, since they have a more direct and immediate access to the New York theatergoers' attentions than the critics in the periodicals. The occasion of the premiere of The Rose Tattoo found these seven gentlemen almost evenly divided in their critical judgments (a not unusual situation in the critical fraternity). Three of the gentlemen of the press expressed generally favorable opinions, two disliked the show, and two were of a "yes-and-no" mind. The favorable reviews were to be found in the Times, Herald-Tribune, and Daily News.

From Brooks Atkinson of The Times came the opinion:

69. Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, February 5, 1951

... his folk comedy about a Sicilian family living on the Gulf Coast is original, imaginative and tender. It is the liveliest idyll written for the stage in some time ...

As a play, The Rose Tattoo lacks the intensity of The Glass Menagerie, A Streetcar Named Desire, and Summer And Smoke. It moves along loosely and loquaciously. But to those of us who were afraid that Mr. Williams had been imprisoned within a formula it is especially gratifying. For this is a comic play that is also compassionate and appreciative. Some of it is hilarious; those gusty and volatile Sicilians blow hot and cold at bewildering speed.

But Mr. Williams does not condescend to them. The Rose Tattoo is not written from the outside. Mr. Williams admires their vitality and their native understanding, and delights in their wholesomeness. The love affair between the widow and the truck driver is not far from low comedy. But there is a love affair between the widow's daughter and a sailor that has all the lyric rapture and sincerity of young poetry. As sheer writing it is one of the finest things Mr. Williams has done. Forget the sprawling workmanship of the play as a whole. The respect for character and the quality of the writing are Mr. Williams at the top of his form ...

... this is a happy occasion in the theatre. Mr. Williams can compose in the halcyon style as well as the somber one. Now we can be sure that he is a permanent source of enjoyment in the theatre. 70

John Chapman, of the Daily News, had a few reservations, but his was a predominantly favorable criticism:

Tennessee Williams has fairly out-Saroyaned the amiable Armenian named William in his newest play ... There also is more than a touch of Steinbeck in [it] ...

70. Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, February 5, 1951

But the play is no imitation; it is all Tennessee Williams, and it reveals again his preoccupation with baffled and love-hungry people. Its mood is comic, not tragic, and its humor is first-rate ...

Mr. Williams' human insight is unimpaired and his ability to write vivid scenes is, as always, exceptional. But his notion of play construction is still his own and The Rose Tattoo does not go in any one direction very long at a time ... There is also too much meaningless business involving a neighborhood witch and the pursuit of a goat ... 71

Otis Gurnsey, Jr., writing for the Herald-Tribune, also had some misgivings in a review that labeled The Rose Tattoo "certainly the finest new American play of the season:"

Tennessee Williams' visits to Italy have borne rich fruit in The Rose Tattoo, an excellently written and brilliantly acted comedy-drama of Sicilian-Americans at the Martin Beck ... the new work shuttles between passion and humor as it studies a set of characters living under tin roofs on the Gulf Coast. It is not as vaporous as previous Williams' scripts; there is substance in these people and their emotions, as though the dreamer has been subjected to a maturing agent. There are erratic moments and weaknesses in construction, but these do not matter much in what is certainly the finest new American play of the season.

The Rose Tattoo is curiously disconnected, as if the playwright had changed his mind in medias res ... but in the courtship of Serafina and Mangiacavallo -- in Sicilian origin the wife of a 'baron' and the grandson of a village idiot -- it is a subtle and beautiful piece of theater ...

Not everything in The Rose Tattoo is exactly right, but its flaws are petty compared to its virtues. It throws more than mere credit on Williams,

71. John Chapman, New York Daily News, February 5, 1951

Miss Stapleton, Wallach and the other collaborators; it is a rare and warm experience, distinguished in form and striking in effect. ⁷²

The critics of the Journal-American and Daily Mirror saw nothing good about the play except the performance of Maureen Stapleton as Serafina Delle Rose.

Robert Coleman of the Daily Mirror protested:

We know of no modern playwright who can create moods like Tennessee Williams. But, unfortunately, Williams is prone to create his moods on a level of frustration and neuroticism. Even when he tries to be affirmative, he is usually negative. And we believe that the world today needs moral affirmation and not negation ...

We can only say that Williams, in paraphrasing Eliot and Xenophon, has taken a journey downward to the very depths of human degradation. He has penned a play that has moments of compassion, beauty and sheer nastiness.

In the last act of The Rose Tattoo, for instance, a lecher drops an unmentionable article on the stage. And there are episodes that can be construed as sacreligious. Personally, we were revolted. We do not think these dubious elements add anything to a confused play. Rather, we believe they are going to antagonize decent playgoers ... ⁷³

The Journal-American drama critic also had some harsh words to say about Williams' new drama:

Miss Stapleton, in particular, delivered one of the most arduous and exacting performances of the year but regrettably the theme is thin, frequently offensive and never sufficiently provocative.

72. Otis L. Guernsey, Jr., New York Herald-Tribune, February 5, 1951

73. Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, February 5, 1951

Many persons, among them Mr. Shakespeare, have devised a drama around the single idea of a seduction but the more successful have done it with greater taste and ingenuity. Never before, to my knowledge, has a rather simple biological situation involved so many extraneous characters and so many words -- or been so pretentiously elevated ...

I don't think Rose Tattoo is a good show, but I'm looking forward to seeing these new players back on the boards in something more worthy of their abilities. ⁷⁴

In the World-Telegram William Hawkins weighed the good against the bad in The Rose Tattoo and decided that:

In its favor the play has atmosphere and warmth. Its theme seems fresh and engrossing, and most of the talents involved in the production are youthful.

On the other hand the humor often seems glued to the surface, and passages of the play are endlessly chatty and repetitious. This is particularly true of the second act where the widow keeps up a clamor of every notion that comes into her head, and her new suitor responds with brashly pronounced gags ...

... he is again dealing with a neurotic woman. The difference is that here his mood is humorous and the ending is relaxed and happy ... ⁷⁵

And Richard Watts, Jr., of the Post, was touched somewhat unfavorably by the playwright's use of symbols and portions of his broad, heavy humor:

... my chief reaction to it is one of disappointment. There are some excellent individual

74. John McClain, New York Journal-American, February 5, 1951

75. William Hawkins, New York World-Telegram, February 5, 1951

scenes, written with warmth, understanding and a kind of lyric, peasant simplicity, and, indeed, almost the entire second act is delightful in its mingling of humor and compassion ...

As long as Mr. Williams is describing the somewhat rowdy but wistful romance between his Sicilian heroine and a melancholy truck driver with an inferiority complex, he writes with admirable humor, compassion and simplicity. He is also in fine form telling of the passionate daughter and a virginal young sailor. But, unfortunately, he is not satisfied with his dramatic simplicity. The somewhat self-conscious poet in him demands symbolism, and so he has added the symbol of the rose tattoo, and it is here that it strikes me he has come perilously near to burlesque ...

... Furthermore, the humor frequently seems far too heavily broadened for comfort ...

... The Rose Tattoo is only intermittently satisfactory.⁷⁶

The general consensus of opinion in New York is that the most influential of the newspaper critics are those of The Times and the Herald-Tribune since they reach the largest segment of the theater-going public. The two favorable reviews in these newspapers were possibly partially responsible for carrying The Rose Tattoo through a respectable run of 306 performances.

In the printed version of The Rose Tattoo Tennessee Williams prefaced the drama with an extended philosophical treatise on The Timeless World Of A Play, taking his theme from a line in one of Carson McCuller's

76. Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, February 5, 1951

poems, "Time, the endless idiot, runs screaming 'round the world." 77 He might have been writing the preface for his next play, Camino Real, which followed The Rose Tattoo on Broadway by about two years. For, in a foreward to the later play, published in the Sunday Times before Camino Real's opening, Williams wrote:

More than any other work that I have done, this play has seemed to me like the construction of another world, a separate existence. Of course, it is nothing more nor less than my conception of the time and world that I live in, and its people are mostly archetypes of certain basic attitudes and qualities with those mutations that would occur if they had continued along the road to this hypothetical terminal point in it. 78

With the playwright's explanation so readily available it is strange that many people left the play wondering "what it was all about." The playwright goes on to explain; "My desire was to give these audiences my own sense of something wild and unrestricted that ran like water in the mountains, or clouds changing shape in the gale, or the continually dissolving and transforming images of a dream." 79

The play, then, was clearly composed to create in the individual mind in the audience whatever each wished to carry away from the performance. This writer received the impression when attending the

78. Tennessee Williams, Foreward to Camino Real (New York: New Directions, 1953), p. viii

79. Ibid., p. ix

performance of Camino Real in New York that those present were either completely intrigued by the entire proceedings (as this writer was) or wholly puzzled and disgusted by it. A reconnoitering of the lobby between the acts and at the end of the play revealed all kinds of explanations, no two alike.

The truth, in this observer's opinion, is that Camino Real is a play to be seen -- not to be explained or read. Camino Real is a theatrical tour de force, a spectacle in spangles, a visual impression. Never should the play be studied, neither as poetic nor dramatic literature, for it is not that at all. Why Williams went to the trouble of making extensive revisions in the play for the published version is somewhat difficult to understand. The playwright himself has written in an "Afterword" to the play:

... in my dissident opinion, a play in a book is only the shadow of a play and not even a clear shadow of it. Those who did not like Camino Real on the stage will not be likely to form a higher opinion of it in print, for of all the works I have written, this one was meant most for the vulgarity of performance. The printed script of a play is hardly more than an architect's blueprint of a house not yet built or built and destroyed. 80

Wolcott Gibbs, no doubt, was speaking with just a little "tongue-in-cheek" attitude when, in searching for meanings in Camino Real, he confesses:

80. Tennessee Williams, "Afterword," Camino Real (New York: New Directions, 1953), p. xii

All that I can deduce from it is (1) a clean-living American boy is better than any decadent foreigner, living or dead; (2) no man's aspirations, such as fighting for nothing, are too absurd to command a certain amount of respect, at least from women; and (3) pawnbrokers are always in the market for outsize golden hearts ... 81

To which this writer would add, with at least as much "tongue-in-cheek", that Mr. Gibb's impressions are just as valid as the next man's impressions.

If Wolcott Gibbs must have his fun, the drama critic of Newsweek is very serious:

It is reasonable to suppose that Tennessee Williams thought that he had something to say in his latest play, and that he thought he was saying it. It isn't possible that he was deliberately playing an elaborate, depressing joke under the cloak of murky symbolism. Judging from the out-of-town reports, and from a limited reaction on opening night at New York's National Theater, there are people who know precisely what the playwright had in mind. But for the theatergoer of only normal intelligence and tolerance, the end result is a grand slam of bafflement and boredom, and a defeating sense of watching something that should be happening and never does ... 82

Brooks Atkinson seems to more nearly catch the spirit of the Williams' drama when he reports:

... Since Camino Real is a kind of cosmic fantasy, one must not interpret it literally. But to one theatregoer it seems to be the mirror of Mr. Williams' concept of life -- a dark mirror, full of black and appalling images ...

... Mr. Williams' pessimism is frightening. Camino Real goes beyond melancholy into melancholia.

81. Wolcott Gibbs, The New Yorker, XXIX (March 28, 1953), p. 69

82. T. H. Wenning, Newsweek, XXXXI, (March 30, 1953), p. 63

For the fantasies that boil through the central plaza of the play have a psychopathic bitterness in them.

Still, this is what Mr. Williams thinks, and it has to be reckoned with. In the first place, he is honest about it. He does not hide behind any of the usual formalities. Some of it is explicit enough to be revolting. In the second place, Mr. Williams is an artist. Breaking with the realistic theatre entirely, he has now written a long incantation with a long cast of characters and a constant flow of mood and experience and the great mass of it is lucid and pertinent.

People who say they do not understand it may be unwilling to hear the terrible things it records about an odious no-man's land between the desert and the sea. A sensitive, virtuoso writer, Mr. Williams knows how to create an intelligible world. As theatre, Camino Real is as eloquent and rhythmic as a piece of music ... 83

But the prevailing critical opinion was strongly against Camino Real. One critic saw it as "... an enormous jumble of five cent philosophy, \$3.98 words, ballet, music, symbolism, allegory, pretentiousness, portentousness, lackwit humor, existentialism and overall bushwah ..." 84 Another bemoaned the fact that:

... our most distinguished playwright, one of our best directors, and a large portion of the intellectual audience should have conspired in so flagrant a dramatic abortion is, I should say, another tragic illustration of the malign state of our present cultural climate. 85

83. Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, March 20, 1953

84. John Chapman, New York Daily News, March 20, 1953

85. Richard Hayes, The Commonweal, LVIII (April 17, 1953), p. 52

And another quickly dismissed Camino Real as "... full of sound and fury, signifying very little ..." 86

The avant-garde of the current school of American playwrights appears to have move a bit too rapidly in the development of his dramatic technique for the comprehension of much of even the most sophisticated theater audiences. Speaking after the production of Cat On A Hot Tin Roof, Williams is reported to have said of Camino Real; "Well, I think I was entitled to that one. Every author has to do something like that sometime in his writing career. It was a kind of literary catharsis ..." 87

Camino Real closed at a large financial loss after 60 performances at the National Theater. This was the shortest run for any Williams' play on Broadway.

When Cat On A Hot Tin Roof opened at the Morosco Theater in March, 1955, the unorthodox theatricality that had become Tennessee Williams' trademark was instantly recognizable. Williams had once again written a slashing, vicious, relentless, searing drama in a style that had become almost Williams' own.

"Cat On A Hot Tin Roof is Mr. Williams' finest drama. It faces and speaks the truth," 88 was the

86. Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, March 20, 1953

87. Arthur B. Waters, "Tennessee Williams: Ten Years Later," Theatre Arts, XXXIX (July, 1955), p. 96

88. Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, March 25, 1955

unequivocal word from Williams' admirer at The Times. "Far and away the finest play of the year," ⁸⁹ was the positive verdict from Newsweek. "It is a powerful and provocative evening; you are torn between fascination and revulsion, but you are held," ⁹⁰ reported the Journal-American aisle-sitter.

These verdicts were underlined when first the New York Drama Critics' Circle, then the Pulitzer Prize committee, bestowed their 1955 awards on Cat On A Hot Tin Roof as the best new drama of the year. After eight years of groping, of experimentation with form, of non-obedience to proletarian public theatrical tastes, Tennessee Williams had produced a resounding triumph for unconventional theater artistry.

In one tenuous sense Cat On A Hot Tin Roof represents a long reaching back to The Glass Menagerie, where characters are probed and nothing much else happens. As with all Williams' plays, Cat On A Hot Tin Roof is obsessed with the motives of the characters -- characters quite removed from the average theatergoer's circle of acquaintances. However much sordidness, sickness, mendacity, and viciousness there is in everyday life that a person may encounter, seldom does

89. T. H. Wenning, Newsweek, VL (April 4, 1955), p. 54

90. John McClain, New York Journal-American, March 25, 1955

it coil up and strike with the power that Williams packs into a two hour drama. The situation of the play is as if Williams were to take all of the evils of the world that enter a person's existence in a six month or one year period and deftly weave them into two hours of theater. The audience says, "but this is not so!" And Williams replies, "But this is so. I have simply sped up the picture some thirty or sixty times or so and edited out the non-essentials." By this token Williams comes to be known as a "theatrical writer" -- a writer who intensifies and, hence, shocks the emotions of the audience. Louis Kronenberger writes:

A sense of the theater is one of Playwright Williams' greatest gifts, as it is a part of Director Kazan's genius. But perhaps their constant dual reliance on so galvanic but gaudy a virtue finally turns it into something of a vice. The play [Cat], in exchange for abounding in theatrical trapdoors, loses the slow, relentless, staircase climb of drama. Too much explodes, too little uncoils; much more is highlighted than truly plumbed ... The disturbed people in Cat On A Hot Tin Roof seldom become truly disturbing; the audience merely reacts where it should be made to respond. ⁹¹

But others see Williams' theatrical sense serving him in good stead in Cat On A Hot Tin Roof. Walter Kerr is one who sees no "theatrical trap doors" standing in the way of a searing evening of drama:

91. Louis Kronenberger, Time, LXV (April 4, 1955), p. 98

Brilliant scenes, scenes of sudden and lashing dramatic power break open ... Throughout the play images of searing intensity hold you fast to its elusive narrative ... There is, indeed, no one moment in the evening when the stinging accuracy of Mr. Williams' ear for human speech, or director Elia Kazan's passion for brutal but truthful statement, is not compellingly in evidence ... 92

Richard Watts, Jr., is equally moved by the play's "enormous theatrical power":

Cat On A Hot Tin Roof is a play of tremendous dramatic impact. There are many other things to be said of Tennessee Williams' tormented and tormenting new drama, with its emotional intensity, its almost sadistic probing into lost souls, its neurotic brooding, its insight into decadence, and its torrent of language both lyric and lewd. But the main impression that emerges from a first viewing of Elia Kazan's entirely brilliant production, which had a tense opening performance at the Morosco Theater last night, is of that enormous theatrical power ... 93

Cat On A Hot Tin Roof achieves the exceptional feeling of theatrical power in one sense because it literally throws itself at the audience -- even to the point of being performed on a stage that extends out into the auditorium. The first two acts break down into a series of monologues which are often thrown directly out into the audience, the characters baring their faults for all to see. The theatrical shock generated can perhaps be compared to having a person walk into a crowded room, pull out a gun, and announce, "I've just murdered my wife." In the

92. Walter F. Kerr, New York Herald-Tribune, March 25, 1955

93. Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, March 25, 1955

production the shock is generated from the first moment when Maggie the Cat rushes from offstage to the downstage tip of the projecting stage proclaiming that something was spilled on her dress, and proceeds to take her dress off.

In Maggie the Cat Williams has brought to his newest play a tougher image of Blanche du Bois. The playwright says of his two disparate Southern heroines:

Blanche du Bois and Margaret share certain attributes, notably strongly passionate natures, but they are really as unlike as a moth and an eagle. Both find themselves brought into turbulent, headlong collision with the rock of life, but whereas Blanche is weak and pitiful -- almost a mental case -- Margaret is sturdy, strong and resilient ...⁹⁴

The characters here are naked portraits, not subtle portraitures as they are in The Glass Menagerie. There are, on the surface, unmotivated violences, unlike those in A Streetcar Named Desire. Here are turbulent and catty characters, unlike those in Summer And Smoke. Here the characters are sly and devious, unlike the complicated, but disarming, Serafina in The Rose Tattoo. Here are real and intelligible people, unlike the caricatures in Camino Real. The experience of witnessing Cat On A Hot Tin Roof is like sitting in the front row of the

94. Arthur B. Waters, "Tennessee Williams: Ten Years Later," Theatre Arts, XXXIX (July, 1955), pp. 73 & 96

theater and looking at the characters on stage through high powered field glasses.

The nakedness of the play extends not alone to the portraits but to the language of the play and the makeup of the stage as well. The turbulent characters have plenty of room in which to be turbulent. The nakedness and rawness of the language provides plenty of room in which to fall.

There is about Cat On A Hot Tin Roof an air of artificiality -- the artificiality of such names as "Big Daddy" and "Big Mama", the artificiality of the actor throwing the remarks into the audience, the artificiality of Mae leading the children in "Skinamarinkadinka-dink, Skinimarinka-do, We love you" routine with Big Daddy, the artificiality of a stage setting that is at the same time interior and exterior. The stage is, of course, an artificial invention for imaginative arrangement, and if the production appears artificial in this instance the reason may be that Williams and Kazan are making a legitimate use of a device beyond the conventional acceptance of that device. Here is where Williams brings the new, the challenging, the different to the theater. This is the avant-garde playwright who, during his decade of imaginative playwriting, has refused to let the theater stand still. He is an experimenter not alone with

the words of the theater, but with the theater itself. This playwright is in every sense a man of the theater.

For Mr. Atkinson the latest product of the playwright's pen represents the end of Williams' period of experimentation. He says:

The new play is the work of a mature artist who effortlessly dominates the characters and the theatre. The characters express his theme without any external manipulation on his part, and the play is pure theatre. Mr. Williams' craftsmanship is now so much a part of his writing that he can forget it. 95

Almost as if by design for comparison's sake, there opened on Broadway about a month after Cat On A Hot Tin Roof an omnibus show called All In One. Included in this potpourri of opera, dance, and theater was a production of one of the earliest of Williams' one-act dramas, 27 Wagons Full Of Cotton. The occasion was one that invited comparisons. Said Walter Kerr, "... a fifteen year old Tennessee Williams' vignette that foreshadows nearly all of the author's virtues ..." 96 The Theatre Arts critic wrote:

The Tennessee Williams comedy has in it all the elements of sensuality and sadism which I disparaged in Cat On A Hot Tin Roof, and yet, what a difference there is in the employment

95. Brooks Atkinson, New York Times Sunday Drama Section,

96. Walter F. Kerr, New York Herald-Tribune, April 20, 1955

of sex and brutality in this play. For here these elements serve the artistic end of revealing character and exploding the catastrophe ... 97

The day may soon come (or perhaps it is already here) when, like the British Empire, the sun may never set on a play by Tennessee Williams. Certainly he is the contemporary American theater's most prolific writer. Certainly, too, he is the contemporary theater's most talented writer. With all his experimentation in dramatic writing he has completely earned the right to be looked upon as the avant-garde of the contemporary theater. And when he learns, as all the great playwrights of the past have learned, to expand the horizon of his human experience to take in all the experiences of man in joy as well as sadness and depravity -- then it will be possible to predict, in all confidence, that Tennessee Williams will come to be regarded as one of the American theater's greatest playwrights. Mr. Williams is 41 years old. There is still plenty of time for decision.

Another playwright of the contemporary American theater is John Patrick, a man who scored his first success in The Hasty Heart at the same time Tennessee Williams was bringing The Glass Menagerie to the stage. This study will turn next to the man who, through his most recent success, is sometimes known as "The Playwright Of The August Moon."

CHAPTER III

JOHN PATRICK: A STUDY IN SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Item from the New York Herald-Tribune, March 15, 1950: "After finishing Curious Savage Patrick was working on a dramatization of Dickens' Bleak House, commissioned by his producers Lewis and Young. Cornelia Otis Skinner is mentioned for one of the roles in Bleak House." ¹

Item from The New York Times, December 25, 1951: "After Lo And Behold! opened Patrick set to work on a new project labeled The Damascus Story and expects to complete it in the Spring. The Theatre Guild is mentioned as a possible sponsor." ²

Item from The New York Times, November 28, 1953: "John Patrick, author of Teahouse, reported yesterday he expected to start work soon on a dramatization of The Plantation, a first novel by Ovid William Pierce." ³

"The Playwright of the August Moon" is a prolific man. If he has not always completed the projects he originally planned his accomplishments are yet

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1. New York Herald-Tribune, March 15, 1950
 2. New York Times, December 25, 1951
 3. New York Times, November 28, 1953

sufficient and worthy to merit him a position as one of the modern theater's outstanding playwrights.

But the theater is not Mr. Patrick's sole love. In fact, he seldom attends the theater. When his second Broadway play, The Willow And I, premiered on Broadway Patrick was in Africa on a safari. His first love appears to be his 65 acre farm in Ramapo Township, Rockland County, New York, where he produces dairy products, fruits, goats, sheep, and stock cattle. He lives in a small white cottage "bought off the floor of Wanamaker's store," and calls his farm "Hasty Hill" because it is hilly and because he bought it with the proceeds from his first successful play, The Hasty Heart.⁴

Patrick is possessed of a wry and puckish sense of humor, as many of his plays will attest. Now 49 years old and unmarried, he observes, "I have no children. I breed sheep instead. You take a lamb, lavish affection on it, and when it matures, you don't have to send it to college. You can eat it."⁵ He goes on to note; "When I told someone that in England, everyone was shocked. I really meant that in a group of lambs there are always a couple of bullies. You can spot them as they push around and

4. Harry Gilroy, "The Playwright Of The August Moon,"
The New York Times Magazine (November 15, 1953), p. 17

5. Look, XVIII (June 29, 1954), p. 17

you say to yourself, 'aha, my lads, you're working your way into the freezer'." 6

John Patrick Goggan (he later dropped the last name for professional purposes) was born in Louisville, Kentucky, on May 17, 1906. While still a baby his family moved and Patrick received his early education in several boarding houses throughout the South. In the realm of higher education he studied at Holy Cross College of New Orleans, at Harvard, and at Columbia. After leaving Columbia he took to writing for a West Coast radio station. According to a reported story, he won the job under a curious set of circumstances. The station advertised auditions for singers and, although he was not a singer, he fortified himself with gin, answered the audition, and won. After three weeks of this, however, the station manager thought it would be better to try to make a scriptwriter out of him. 7 This experiment proved so successful that he shortly went with NBC in New York to write radio script adaptations for Helen Hayes, including adaptations of Arrowsmith and Kitty Foyle.

6. Louisville Courier-Journal, March 9, 1954

7. Elliot Norton, "Here And There With Playwright Patrick," New York Times Drama Section, December 31, 1944.

His first play remains unidentified to this day. But four days after arriving in New York in 1935 he met producer George Kondolf at a penthouse party. The next day Kondolf bought another play he had written, entitled Hell Freezes Over. The play, a story of a group of men trapped in a wrecked dirigible in the icy wastes of the Polar Plateau, was first tried out in White Plains with Louis Calhern, Myron McCormick and George Tobias as members of the cast. It was further distinguished by being the first professional directing job of a young man named Joshua Logan.

Brought into New York City on December 29, 1935, some of the critics described it as the worst play they had ever seen. Howard Barnes, however, writing in the New York Herald-Tribune, noted, "Mr. Patrick has spun moments of terrifying intensity, even if he has not completely succeeded in making one forget wind machines and grease paint ..." ⁸ And Robert Garland sized it up by saying, "Hell Freezes Over is melodrama with a crunch, snowbound, maybe, but torn between zip and zero. Zero wins in the long run!" ⁹ Barnes also noted that "Joshua Logan has

8. Howard Barnes, New York Herald-Tribune, December 30, 1935

9. Robert Garland, New York World-Telegram, December 30, 1935

done invaluable service to the production in his sure staging of its episodes ..." 10 The play ran for 25 performances.

It remained for George Jean Nathan to sound the prophetic note in his criticism of the play. Nathan wrote that the "playwright should be tossed back in the Hollywood ashcan." 11 Patrick apparently took this criticism seriously and went to Hollywood for two and a half years.

He was given a sizeable contract and an office to work in by his Hollywood employers. For the first six weeks he did practically nothing. Then his option was picked up for six more months. During the two and a half years he was with the studio he worked (mostly in collaboration with others) on 24 pictures. He managed to escape having to look at most of the pictures he worked on but three of them he saw "under orders" -- one a Charlie Chan masterpiece, another "something about 'Mr. Moto'," and a third linked Jane Withers with the Dionne quintuplets! Two and a half years were enough for an aspiring playwright. He fled Hollywood "to get away from the Hollywood atmosphere" and ended up in Boston.

10. Howard Barnes, New York Herald-Tribune, December 30, 1935

11. Harry Gilroy, quoted in "The Playwright Of The August Moon," New York Times Magazine (November 15, 1953), p. 56

While in Boston he became interested in some Civil War history and wrote a play entitled The Gentle Ghost, dealing with the conspiracy trials of 1865. The play was not immediately produced, but after World War II was over it reached Broadway under another title, The Story Of Mary Surratt.

During his stay in Boston Patrick enlisted in the American Field Service, but he was assigned to a British unit because it was the only branch that offered immediate front line action. He served first with Montgomery's Eighth Army in Egypt, then was transferred to the British Ninth in Syria, and ultimately wound up with the British in Burma.

While serving with the British Ninth Army Patrick met a Scot Sergeant, a sensitive young mechanic who kept to himself and feigned surliness to keep from being hurt. Patrick finally broke through the young Scot's reserve and they became fast friends. Then one day Patrick was taken with malaria in Syria. The Scot defied orders and secured an allotment of quinine for him. For that act he was brought up on charges, reduced in rank to Private, and transferred to another outfit. Patrick combined this event with a subsequent bout with malaria in a bamboo hospital in Burma, and out of it came his first big dramatic hit, The Hasty Heart, written in part on board ship on his trip back to the States.

Prior to that production, however, Patrick had written a play, heavily psychological in nature, presented on Broadway in 1942 under the title The Willow And I. The play was not particularly well received. One critic ascribed its shortcomings to "... an over-literary style, a lack of sound theatre speech, and partly to the fact that the plot, for all of its murder and madness, lacks substance ..." ¹²

The plot, to which Miss Gilder alluded, concerns two sisters, both in love with a young doctor. The less aggressive sister, Mara Sutro, wins him but on her wedding day she is paralyzed by shock incurred when she tries to prevent her younger sister, Bessie, from committing suicide. With her sister out of the way, Bessie marries the doctor and the invalided Mara is kept in their home out of a sense of obligation.

Forty years later, after the doctor has been killed in the war and his son grown up in his image, Mara is returned to her senses by a severe thunder-clap, but she lives only in the moment 40 years previous. Bessie tries to make Mara believe she (Mara) tried to kill herself because she couldn't face the reality of existence with the young doctor, Robin. Mara does not believe this, but fears that

12. Rosamond Gilder, Theatre Arts, XXVII (February, 1943), pp. 76-77

Robin had lost his love for her in marrying Bessie. A chance remark by Kirkland, Bessie's son, proves to her that Robin had her in his heart to the end and Bessie is crumpled by the knowledge that Mara has had the final triumph. Roles in the production were played by Martha Scott, Barbara O'Neill, Cora Witherspoon, Edward Pawley and Gregory Peck. The latter, now a well known motion picture star, was described by one critic; "Mr. Peck, a comparative newcomer, has about him a suggestion of Gary Cooper." ¹³

"The whole thing ... is little more than dull and pretentious trash," ¹⁴ railed one of the critics. "It will probably make a first class second grade picture ...," ¹⁵ said another. And a third sarcastically observed, "It seems a pity the authors of The Willow And I and Mr. Sycamore didn't get together and abandon the theatre in favor of reforestation." ¹⁶

But all of the critics were not unkind to the new playwright. Elliot Norton, reviewing the tryout performance in Boston, found The Willow And I to be

13. James N. Vaughn, The Commonweal, XXXVII (December 25, 1942), p. 256

14. Louis Kronenberger, PM, December 11, 1942

15. Burns Mantle, New York Daily News, December 11, 1942

16. John Anderson, New York Journal-American, December 11, 1942

"One of the strongest and most beautiful plays in recent years ... Because it is in good taste and never lurid it will depend for its success on playgoers of perception." ¹⁷ And one critic was more than perceptive when she sagely observed that this "... is an exasperating play in which many respects seldom manages to achieve more than a fraction of the effects it is after, but it has moments that indicate that we may yet be hearing more from Mr. Patrick one of these days ..." ¹⁸

In The Willow And I John Patrick revealed a characteristic that will be discerned in all of his subsequent plays, a penchant for the philosophical line. Sometimes he lays his philosophy on with a trowel. On other occasions he is a bit more casual, as in this exchange from The Willow And I:

Mara : Are you afraid to be beholden to me?

Duke : I don't know what you mean ...?

Theodore: (contemplative) Beholden -- that was a good word in its day. It acknowledged indebtedness. But to admit a moral obligation seems to have become an anachronism.

And, on another occasion, he puts an original philosophic twist to the old adage, "Absence makes the

17. Elliot Norton, Boston Post (no date)

18. Wilella Waldorf, New York Post, December 11, 1942

heart grow fonder":

Mara : It shocks me to hear you speak of those I loved without grief ... how could you forget them so quickly?

Theodore: We haven't forgotten them. But there were intervals -- loss was separated and cushioned by time.

Mara : Then time betrays us. It teaches indifference and makes love seem shallow and pitiful.

Theodore: It teaches us to forget pain. And risk it again. And forget again.

Mara : Then the heart's capricious and unworthy of love.

If there were still doubts that Mr. Patrick be of a philosophic turn of mind after these illustrations it should be dispelled by a few words of the playwright in his preface to The Willow And I:

...[The playwright] cannot encompass the whole. Sympathy is vitiated if required to blanket the universe. He has no choice but to interpret the whole by an infinitesimal part. The individual must reflect what is universal. We must find significance in the insignificant. We must turn to the simple bonds that link us to Adam. 19

Turning specifically to the play at hand, Patrick continues:

That is why the emphasis in this play is placed on what is personal and fundamental. If the reader chooses, he may find in it the common denominator by which he can get the sum of the world's security. The problem confronting Mara Sutro is the problem of everyone who seeks some

19. The Author's Preface to The Willow And I (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1943)

points of reference in a world that 'has changed swiftly in the night.' 20

Although Patrick's first two plays were heavy and undisguised philosophical treatises, he made a quick about face at this point and his subsequent plays (with the exception of The Story Of Mary Surratt, which was originally written about the same time as The Willow And I), have all been witty, puckish, wry, eccentric, and light hearted by turn. The Willow And I, in effect, marked an end of one phase of Mr. Patrick's growth as a playwright.

His next production made John Patrick a playwright to be reckoned with in the Broadway theater. It also revealed him as a man of extraordinary sentiment and warm heartedness, characteristics to which those close to the playwright will attest. 21 His sentiment extends even to animals. He has turned his 65 acre farm, Hasty Hill, into a game preserve, even forbidding himself to hunt there "because he believes that all animals are to be loved, or at least not killed except in self defense for necessary food." 22

His fondness for animals is further apparent in

20. Ibid.

21. Harry Gilroy, "The Playwright Of The August Moon," New York Times Magazine (November 15, 1953), p. 59

22. Ibid., p. 17

the five cats he has around his house. His ever present sense of humor did not fail him when, upon hearing a friend enthuse about the new play "Eadypus" (Oedipus) just opened on Broadway, he facetiously named his five-cat brood "Eadie-Puss," "Octi-Puss," "Platy-Puss," "Rump-Puss," and "O-Puss Five"! ²³

In The Hasty Heart he has transferred this animal sentiment to the young Scot he met in the Service in the Middle East and there emerged a portrait that some critics felt insulted their sense of sentiment ("so sentimental as to seem psychologically silly," said one ²⁴ -- who otherwise admired the play). But most of the critics were frankly pleased by the warm and humorous portrait playwright Patrick drew of his assorted soldier characters in the Burma medical ward and evidently the public felt the same about it because The Hasty Heart continued for a run of 207 performances.

One of the theater's most astute critics sums up the effect of The Hasty Heart on the viewer:

Capt. John Patrick's The Hasty Heart turns out to be something of a tour de force. The entire action takes place in a convalescent ward behind the Burma front. There are no civilians in any way concerned, and only one woman -- the

²³. Ibid.

²⁴. Kappo Phelan, The Commonweal, XIL (February 2, 1945), p. 396

ward nurse -- appears upon the scene. Yet the play is only by the accident of time and place a play about the war, and what happens could be told in so few words as to leave one wondering as to just how the material can be made to fill an evening. Yet the interest never really lags, and it seems to be sustained less by the atmosphere upon which it must to some extent depend than by the spiritual history of the one queer character around whom everything turns. Moreover, this central character is a young Scot who manages to unite in himself all the traditional Scotch characteristics and to cultivate them to so preposterous a degree that he might seem at first sight the hero of a burlesque rather than the hero of a play which is tragic at its best, and at least pathetic at those moments when it approaches closest to the sentimentality which it manages usually to escape. 25

But critic Krutch's observations must be clarified. What does he mean by a "tour de force"? He explains:

I have called the play a 'tour de force' for the simple reason that it is more effective than sober thought convinces me it ought to be, because I cannot escape the conviction that it has been somehow 'put across.' I have some difficulty in really believing either that any man could be quite so dour or, at least, that if any man ever were he could be so converted. Three changes of heart so catastrophic as these and all within a few days are difficult to credit, and even if they are accepted they can be accepted only on the supposition that Lachlin is too extraordinary a freak not to be at most a pathetic oddity rather than a tragic hero. Moreover, I somewhat resent so violent an assault upon my capacity for response to sentimental appeals, even when, as is here the case, there is a good deal of humor to relieve the sentiment. But I must nevertheless admit that The Hasty Heart is put across, whether it should be or not. For one thing there is an extraordinary performance by Richard Basenhart (sic)

25. Joseph Wood Krutch, The Nation, CLX (January 20, 1945), p. 81

... For another, besides very smooth performances by the rest of the cast, there is careful writing and very careful direction. But the whole thing does seem a bit gratuitous. Why should we want to feel so much about so unusual a character imagined in so unusual a predicament? ²⁶

Mr. Krutch, in the somewhat long but extremely perceptive extract from his critical review of The Hasty Heart, has pinpointed a characteristic that can be found to be true of so many plays -- the point of view that inspires the remark, "How can a play that reads so badly turn out so well on the stage?" Mr. Krutch seems to answer it only in part by attributing it to "fine acting," "careful writing," and "very careful direction." There is, perhaps, something more involved here, the quality that has been termed "empathy." When the audience, as apart from the single spectator, laughs at the antics of the other soldiers in their well-intentioned efforts to cheer up the Scot, they individually become a part of the scene. And, since most human beings are essentially sentimental, rather than coldly intellectual, creatures, the dourness of the Scot becomes a challenge to the collective audience's sentimental prowess. They become as the other individual soldiers in the play. That, at least, was clearly the reaction of this writer upon first viewing The Hasty Heart.

26. Ibid.

Lachlin McLaughlin was neither a symbol of cold stubbornness nor of sentimental nonsense. Rather, he was someone the audience (meaning the individuals in the audience), no less than the other characters in the play, wanted to win by the warmth and understanding and -- sentimentalism -- that was in them.

In The Hasty Heart Patrick did more than write "carefully." He wrote in the wisdom of the natural sentimentality of the human being and he made self-identification possible -- the women of the audience through the love of the ward nurse for the frigid Scot, the men in a military situation not uncommon to a large number of men these days. Poor acting and poor directing, it is true, could have ruined the audience's illusion and made the play so much maudlin nonsense. But, as Mr. Krutch has observed, fine acting and careful direction was the playwright's good fortune and the play emerged on the stage with such charm as to temper the tragic overtones of the story.

At least one critic, however, accepted the play intellectually and found it wanting. Wrote Wolcott Gibbs, in The New Yorker:

I was not, I'm sorry to say, among those especially stirred by John Patrick's The Hasty Heart at the Hudson ... one of the difficulties about The Hasty Heart is that almost throughout the play the central character is drawn as such

a sullen and arrogant young man (Mr. Patrick undoubtedly had some idea about national pride and personal inferiority in mind, but it didn't quite come over that way) that it isn't easy to understand just what the heroine found so appetizing about him or why the others didn't anticipate the slow course of nature and break his neck. There were signs in the audience that many found this touching and profound. I can only say that when the protagonist of a play strikes me as a disagreeable bore, it is a matter of considerable indifference to me what happens to him ... 27

Happily for Mr. Patrick -- happily for that apparently large number of playgoers who accept the dictum of the critics as the final word on all matters theatrical -- virtually all of the remaining critics dissented from Mr. Gibb's minority decision of one. In a comparative analysis, Rosamond Gilder noted that:

In The Hasty Heart he [Patrick] has moved definitely forward [from The Willow And I] in his ability to handle his material and simplify and strengthen his plot structure. His dialogue has gained in crispness and force; but his preoccupation with psychology, with inner states of mind and their reaction on conduct and character, shows that he has developed rather than changed his point of attack ... 28

John Mason Brown expresses his point of view in a typical Brown style:

His drama may be merciless in its tugs at our sympathies. At moments it may sound as if it were the work of a baritone Barrie; indeed, as if a group of stricken young men instead of

27. Wolcott Gibbs, The New Yorker, XX (January 13, 1945), p. 38

28. Rosamond Gilder, Theatre Arts, XXIX (March, 1945), p. 138

the old lady were showing their medals. Yet, in spite of its shortcomings as literature, The Hasty Heart does what it sets out to do behind the footlights. It is more than sentimental. However it overstates them, its basic concern is those emotions which, especially among men in wartime, resist statement. This is the source of its truth no less than of its effectiveness. This is why it reaches the hearts of those who sit before it. 29

We may assume that John Mason Brown, a former Commander in the Navy during World War II, knows whereof he speaks.

John Patrick would write many plays before again tasting the sweet fruits of success. But continuing royalties from The Hasty Heart, some motion picture work, and a successful Rockland County farm combined to keep the playwright in comfortable circumstances.

The production of The Story Of Mary Surratt in February, 1947 (a final version of his previously written The Gentle Ghost) revealed a new facet of the Patrick personality -- a passionate sense of justice. The playwright was considerably incensed over the gross miscarriage of justice in the 1865 conspiracy trial of Mary Surratt, and the production in 1947 seemed almost prophetic in its anticipation of the judicial and political hysteria yet to come in America.

29. John Mason Brown, "Seeing Things," Saturday Review Of Literature, XXVIII (March 3, 1945), p. 27

From the critical reception of The Story Of Mary Surratt it became evident, however, that on this occasion Mr. Patrick's sense of outrage was not quite equalled by his sense of the theater. The Story Of Mary Surratt was neither a financial nor a critical success, though it did gain a sort of "success d'estime" by being selected as one of the ten best plays of the season in the Burns Mantle Best Plays book for 1946-47. The box office, however, closed after eleven performances of the play.

A contemporary significance could be attached to the production of The Story Of Mary Surratt. Joseph Wood Krutch, noting that playwrights who use historical themes usually do so in order to make some implication for the day, asks, "... there are moments when one wonders whether he means to suggest a protest against the whole conception of 'war guilt' and to hint that more injustice than justice is likely to be the result of any series of military trials." ³⁰ It is doubtful that playwright Patrick was directly inspired by the "war guilt trials" then in session or recently completed in Germany and Japan since, as has been previously noted, the story had taken shape four or five years earlier under the

30. Joseph Wood Krutch, The Nation, CLXIV (February 22, 1947), pp. 226-27

title The Gentle Ghost. But even at that time, of course, the more passionate torchbearers of justice were deeply concerned with the treatment that had been meted out to the Jews in Germany and questions of war guilt had begun to stir in the more active minds.

If, however, this were Mr. Patrick's intent in writing his historical drama critic Krutch remains unconvinced of the accomplishment of his intentions. "But he never explicitly states any charge either so specific or so sweeping as this," the critic complains, "it is merely that war is evil not only because it slaughters so many in battle but also because the whole atmosphere it creates is unfavorable to everything civilized or humane ..."³¹ This lack of "explicitness" seems to disturb Mr. Krutch more than anything else for he has otherwise noted that "... whatever its further merits or defects may be, The Story Of Mary Surratt cannot fail to hold the interest and to make an impression ..."³²

Another critic credits the playwright with being alert to another, and completely different facet, of the contemporary scene. "The several plays and

31. Ibid., p. 227

32. Ibid., p. 227

pictures spawned by the Dreyfus trial have shown that a writer has a good head start when he treats of a real life person railroaded by a military court ..."³³ The momentum of the "head start" was apparently not sufficient for Mr. Patrick in this instance.

Still others, heeding the classical theory of tragedy, questioned the not uncommon stature of the playwright's heroine. The Times critic observes, "As a drama it falls somewhat short of its mark, most of all, probably, because it is held to earth by the comparative minor stature of its heroine ..."³⁴ Another finds some small compensations in the commonness of the principal figure of Mr. Patrick's play by noting;

Using a transcript of the trial as it appears in the Congressional Library, Patrick made Mary Surratt a sympathetic, bewildered and tragic figure. And if his creation is of minor proportions, he has Dorothy Gish to play the martyr role with conviction and restraint ...³⁵

But the most persistent criticism of The Story Of Mary Surratt was the fierce partisanship the playwright had shown in his attitude toward his heroine.

33. John Lardner, The New Yorker, XXII (February 15, 1947), p. 50

34. Lewis Funke, New York Times, February 10, 1947

35. Newsweek, XXIX (February 17, 1947), p. 88

Louis Kronenberger complains:

... certainly the prime trouble with Mr. Patrick's approach is that by championing Mrs. Surratt as an innocent woman, he denies us all the psychological excitement of sifting the evidence, of guessing whether she was innocent or guilty. For just that reason, the Mary Surratt of history is a much more dramatic figure than Mr. Patrick's Mary; she still brings out the bloodhound in us ... 36

And another writes, "Unfortunately, The Story Of Mary Surratt is too stacked a tear jerker to rate as very satisfactory theater." 37 A third says, "I knew, of course, that the lady would hang and I was convinced before the evening was over that injustice was being done -- but Mr. Patrick's anger at this injustice was insufficient to bring me to the boiling point that makes a good audience ..." 38 And a fourth notes, "Intense partisanship has robbed the play of all psychological suspense: the audience has no opportunity to play either detective or judge." 39

Other critics, more alert to the overall implications of historical tragedy, seem, to this writer, to have put their finger more closely on the basic weakness of Mr. Patrick's script. Richard

36. Louis Kronenberger, PM, February 10, 1947

37. Howard Barnes, New York Herald-Tribune, February 10, 1947

38. John Chapman, New York Daily News, February 10, 1947

39. Time, IL (February 17, 1947), p. 53

Richard Watts, Jr. impressed this point when he wrote:

Mr. Patrick has told the sad story of the doomed heroine simply and straightforwardly, but he is considerably too shallow and superficial about the implications of the tragedy ... Mary Surratt, the scotless heroine of a melodramatic plot, is not only less believable but less dramatic than Mary Surratt, the incidental victim of a period of national madness ... the play, which could have been a challenging reminder of the perils of national hysteria, is just a mild drama of pathos. ⁴⁰

And Howard Barnes, in a similar vein, observes:

What he has failed to do is to envelope his human drama in the larger outlines of his subject matter. Mary Surratt may have been the victim of overweening and vengeful machinations, but the exposition veers rather wildly between straight pathos and an indictment of anti-democratic subterfuges ... ⁴¹

Only one critic, Robert Garland, was unqualifiedly enthusiastic: "As either theatre, history or a treatise on American mass psychology, The Story Of Mary Surratt is to me required playgoing." ⁴²

If The Story Of Mary Surratt was to be considered neither a critical nor a financial success it did, nevertheless, increase the respect of the critics for Mr. Patrick's as yet unrealized potentialities. Just as Miss Waldorf gave a nod to a promising

40. Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, February 10, 1947

41. Howard Barnes, New York Herald-Tribune, February 10, 1947

42. Robert Garland, New York Journal-American, February 10, 1947

playwright's future after viewing The Willow And I (page 124), another of the critical fraternity could write the following after seeing The Story Of Mary Surratt:

[In the last act] The playwright wanders off into a false lot of images about the little coral animals and how they built up toward the surface, and this provides the actress [Miss Gish] with a bit of very undramatic trash by way of imagery, and present us with an instance of the will instead of the imagination where images are involved. I am still not sure whether one is born knowing this sort of thing or, if not, can learn it. If the author of The Story Of Mary Surratt can learn it -- for at present he has not -- he may become one of our best dramatists. And this is because he has at the center a noble intention and because he finds themes that are in themselves moving and dramatic. He has grace, beauty, and depth of mind, where most of our Broadway playwrights have only getting on. How can anyone not wish such a writer well? ⁴³

There were to be three more Patrick plays on Broadway before the playwright was to fulfill this generous prophecy by The New Republic's astute critic. His next attempt was a pixie-like foray into a private home for the insane which he titled The Curious Savage after the principal character in the play, a Mrs. Savage. However much it may have expressed the basic nature of playwright Patrick it pleased the public and the critics little more than his previous effort. The playwright eschewed

43. Stark Young, The New Republic, CXVI (February 24, 1947), p. 40

any effort to be meaningful. He told the critic of the New York Post; "If The Curious Savage has meaning, I originally never meant it to have ... All I wanted to do at the starting point was to write an amusing play about charming people." 44

There was a considerable degree of unanimity on the people being charming but more doubts about the play being amusing. The Times' erudite critic sounded the chief note of dissent by writing:

Things in the theatre are criticized frequently as being in bad taste. Some people think that Olsen and Johnson are in bad taste, which seems plausible. But this column would like to suggest that The Curious Savage is also bad taste, and that the delusions and crochets of people who are mentally ill are not genuinely amusing ... the writing ... is not subtle, and the performance is a lark. To at least one theatregoer, this jovial portrait of psychopathic people is embarrassing ... 45

This thought is echoed by The Nation's critic, writing; "The Curious Savage is a laborious and tasteless 'comedy' built on the idea, if it can be called an idea, that the people inside mental institutions have more sanity and goodness than those outside -- for which the only evidence is that people outside actually indulge in such ideas." 46

44. Vernon Rice, "Curtain Cues," New York Post, October 24, 1950

45. Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, October 25, 1950

46. Margaret Marshall, The Nation, CLXXI (November 4, 1950), p. 418

The same objection is made by the critic of Newsweek:

The Curious Savage is a strange dish to set before an audience seeking light entertainment ... the author has chosen a mental institution and its inmates as the scene and cast for comedy, and just how amusing one finds insanity is very much a matter of taste ... His attitude is sympathetic, but it is difficult to avoid the feeling that one shouldn't be laughing at these people, however safe they are in their dream world. 47

Still another critic takes virtually the same approach:

A sanatorium for the insane does not strike me as the most agreeable setting for a comedy ... Nor do I think Mr. Patrick quite gets over this handicap. But, on the whole, he has managed things engagingly enough to remove the greater part of the embarrassment and substitute an oddly likeable charm. 48

But for each of these dissents to the playwright's choice of setting and characters there is, oddly enough, a champion of his choice. The Theatre Arts reviewer, for example, sees it as an:

... entirely tasteful and occasionally penetrating if unpretentious play [but it] has been given a most vexing production. Confusion seems to exist as to whether Mrs. Savage is insane or not. Her eccentricity is played up for all it's worth. The rest of the cast behave in the same farcical fashion until the lines finally indicate with overwhelming clarity that no one is meant to be laughing at the insane. For the most part the playwright has written with delicacy and has been interpreted with boisterous cartoons. 49

47. T. H. Wenning, Newsweek, XXXVI (November 6, 1950), pp. 88-89

48. Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, October 25, 1950

49. Theatre Arts, XXXIV (December, 1950), p. 17

This matter of direction may, indeed, be the key to the controversy. In the reading of the play this writer was not adversely impressed by the alleged "poor taste" of the playwright in the choice of his subject and setting and could well agree with John Chapman in finding that "... Mr. Patrick has managed, with gentle insight and good sense, to make it [insanity] pretty funny." 50 Not having seen the original production this writer is unwilling to comment upon that phase of the direction, but Walter Kerr, writing in The Commonweal, seems to support the opinion of the Theatre Arts critic. He writes:

It is with the inmates that Peter Glenville's direction falters seriously. Instead of allowing them to be casually and matter-of-factly unbalanced, he frequently forces them into an amateur's concept of lunacy, and this does some damage to Mr. Patrick's pleasant and relaxed script. 51

And still further support for the malignment of playwright Patrick's script comes from Time Magazine's critic:

Some of Playwright Patrick's individual remarks are original and funny; several of his scenes are brisk and entertaining. But the play as a whole suffers badly from a frantic mixture of styles (all the way from George Abbott to Barrie) and from a sameness of subject matter. The 'guests' at The Cloisters can only trot out

50. John Chapman, New York Daily News, October 25, 1950

51. Walter F. Kerr, The Commonweal, LIII (November 10, 1950), p. 121

their obsessions; the old lady can only defy and deceive her stepchildren. And the staging, which might have given the play a nice airy unreality, makes most of it noisily blunt. 52

But the most decisive note in support of this theory comes from Harold Clurman, who is not unfamiliar with the problems of stage direction. He is even more vehement in his condemnation of the direction of The Curious Savage. Writes Mr. Clurman:

I managed to enjoy The Curious Savage despite my belief that even the best play wrongly done is a bad play. John Patrick's Curious Savage ... reveals a talent for an affectionately daft humor. What is suggested in a delicately playful fashion is how nearly impossible it is for good people to live within rational dimensions when the norm of reasonable behavior is stuffy and vulgarly prosaic. On the other hand, the director Peter Glenville's Curious Savage is stagey where it should be poetic, stylized in the most pedestrian manner where it should be fanciful and relaxed. All the actors (including Lillian Gish) struck me as rigid with direction. Mr. Patrick's lovable lunatics are turned into puppets without personality 53

As previously quoted (page 139), all the playwright presumably had in mind in writing The Curious Savage was "to write an amusing play about charming people." But, as Mr. Patrick has been revealed in the course of this study, this would hardly be his play if there were not a bit of philosophy present in it somewhere. This writer gets the unmistakable impression that Mr. Patrick is summing up his real reason for writing

52. Louis Kronenberger, Time, LVI (November 6, 1950), p. 57

53. Harold Clurman, The New Republic, CXXIII (November 13, 1950), p. 21

The Curious Savage in this passage in the latter part of the play, as Mrs. Savage is preparing herself once again for the outside world:

Mrs. Savage: I don't think I want to leave at all.

Dr. Emmett : Why do you want to stay?

Mrs. Savage: Suddenly -- I'm weary. I would like to rest -- I would like to be relieved of decision. I would like to be protected against uncertainty and accident. I would like to close my eyes at night and know that there are walls to guard my sleep.

Dr. Emmett : But the peace you find here is the moon reflected on a dark lake. Strike the surface and you destroy it. Is that the kind of peace you want?

Mrs. Savage: I want what everyone wants -- to want nothing. These people have found contentment.

Present, too, in The Curious Savage is a foretaste of the sharp, but friendly, satire that Patrick is to develop almost to perfection in subsequent plays. In a scene between Mrs. Savage and the Inmates the first real suggestion, however clumsily and baldly constructed, is given of the satirical vein that is in playwright Patrick:

Hannibal : I gather the notices were good that time?

Mrs. Savage: Well, they were sincere. But it didn't make any difference.

Florence : What did they say?

Mrs. Savage: The Times said my play set the theatre back 50 years. It couldn't possibly -- because I stole the plot from Madam X and that's only 40 years old.

Fairy : Wouldn't you think they'd know?

Mrs. Savage: But the Wall Street Journal was wonderful. It said I brought something new to the theatre.

Fairy : Money?

Florence : Oh, Fairy -- really! Money isn't new.

Jeff : What did Wall Street say?

Mrs. Savage: It said I had a 'tenacious mediocrity unhampered by taste.'

Jeff : But that wasn't good.

Mrs. Savage: It was perfect. In our ads we simply said 'tenacious' and 'unhampered.'

Jeff : And you ran for a year?

Mrs. Savage: We'd have been running yet if my daughter hadn't come home and stopped me ...

The Curious Savage was not so well favored by its adverse critical reviews. It closed after thirty one performances on Broadway.

About a year later the persistent Mr. Patrick was again represented in the New York theater. This time the play, Lo And Behold!, was an adventure into the realm of half-fantasy, half-farce. It concerned a Nobel Prize winning author who committed suicide and returned after his death to haunt his own house, but was moved in on by an Indian maiden who had been

pushed off lover's leap, a frustrated composer, and a Southern belle with a phony liberal attitude. In the farcical area of the play his pretty cook, who unwittingly had prepared his suicide meal, returned to his house and is mistaken for his illegitimate daughter and gets into romantic complications with the writer's doctor.

There would appear to be plenty of material here for an intriguing story and Mr. Patrick sets his wry, off-beat humor to work on it. But the problem of combining farce and fantasy has but seldom been attempted in the theater and then usually unsuccessfully. Noel Coward's Blithe Spirit may most nearly approach it, but the realistic aspects of that play cannot too accurately be described in terms of farce save, possibly, for the ebullient presence of Madame Arcardi. "It is difficult enough to sustain fantasy," writes Robert Coleman in his review of Lo And Behold!, "but almost impossible to work it into counterpoint with farce. The two are essentially alien" 54

Mr. Patrick does not succeed in successfully breeching this chasm between farce and fantasy. The critics, as with The Curious Savage, were generally

54. Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, December 13, 1951

captivated by the playwright's odd humor. A single example of this off-beat comedy may be seen in this excerpt wherein the recently departed Nobel Prize winning author is protesting the presence of other "ghosts" in his house:

- Ken : What's wrong, sir? Why can't you be one of us?
- Milo : Thank you -- no. I never fraternized with you in life -- I see no reason to fraternize with you now.
- Minnie : Does fraternize mean what I think it means?
- Honey : It means consorting with Yankees, Sugah.
- Minnie : I think it means something else.
- Milo : Of all the world's illustrious dead -- why do I get you? If I must share my home -- why wasn't I sent an Aristotle or a Thomas Aquinas -- at worst a Judas Iscariot. Instead -- I must endure a shoddy Chopin -- a Southern magpie -- and a moronic Mowhawk.
- Minnie : How many times do I have to tell you I'm no Mohawk?

Walter Kerr is one of the critics much amused by Patrick's humor (a singular tribute to any playwright!) and has long been awaiting that masterpiece that is within him. Of Lo And Behold! he writes:

John Patrick ... strikes me as having a delightful sense of humor, and I keep hoping with each new play that he will hit on his Harvey. Lo And Behold!, I am afraid, is still short of the mark. It is full of funny lines, as always; it has its share of perceptive character touches; and it is woefully

shy on narrative or honest substance. 55

Kerr continues with what appears to this writer to be the most perceptive criticism of Patrick's talent on record:

As nearly as I can get hold of Mr. Patrick's problem, it is this: his is an off-center brand of humor, tangential, deadpan, surprising -- and, for maximum effect, it needs to bounce off an otherwise plausible, rational, and human springboard. It needs contrast, something ordinary to depart from. But Mr. Patrick has a habit -- in his later plays, at least -- of making his narratives as fey as his wit, of piling the absurd on top of the absurd, and of letting the two parts of his play cancel each other out. The shock of the unexpected, which is Mr. Patrick's principal stock in trade as a writer of comedy, is impossible on a stage peopled with lunatics (The Curious Savage) or ghosts (Lo And Behold!). Because everything is unexpected in such circumstances, there is nothing left to twist, and we are finally worn down by an overabundance of random invention 56

This seems to be an especially pertinent criticism to keep in mind when shortly Mr. Patrick's The Teahouse Of The August Moon is discussed.

The element of expected "unexpectedness" was the gist of the review of that equally discerning critic, Joseph Wood Krutch. He writes, "I joined in the laughter of an audience which seemed to find it highly satisfactory, but I always had the feeling that what might have been a farce comedy with a special tone and flavor degenerated into the commonplace and was

55. Walter F. Kerr, The Commonweal, LV (December 28, 1951), p. 300

56. Ibid.

funny in mostly expected ways" 57

By odd contrast, Wolcott Gibbs, who heretofore has taken a dim view of all of Mr. Patrick's offerings (including The Hasty Heart -- page 130-31) found in Lo And Behold!, which is probably one of the weakest of Mr. Patrick's plays, some things of value:

While Lo And Behold! ... doesn't compare with Noel Coward's Blithe Spirit in wit, invention, or precision of design, it is still, for at least half its length, a pretty funny show. The virtues of the piece at the Booth are that its author has a lively and impudent mind, capable of thinking up novel and entertaining people and situations and that, on the whole, the acting and direction are of a superior order. The faults, I guess, are that the humor is somewhat broad and monotonous, producing almost endless variations of the same jokes, and that the flesh and blood romance with which the spectres are concerned isn't quite worth all the trouble they take with it. Fairly drastic rewriting would probably have remedied these defects. 58

Gleanings from the other critics indicate that they did not, in general, take very kindly to playwright Patrick's efforts into the realm of farce-fantasy:

"Lo And Behold! is a dull bit of shenanigans dusted with funny remarks ..." 59 comments one. Another says, "... aside from flashes of sharp enlivened dialogue, their astral antics have been obvious stuff

57. Joseph Wood Krutch, The Nation, CLXXIII (December 29, 1951), p. 574

58. Wolcott Gibbs, The New Yorker, XXVII (December 22, 1951), pp. 48-49

59. Louis Kronenberger, Time, LVIII (December 24, 1951), p. 44

for lo and behold these many years." 60 And, from the dispeptic George Jean Nathan; "... The play is sponsored by The Theatre Guild, which may be recalled as having once devoted its efforts to drama of some distinction." 61

On the other side, however, William Hawkins was present to proclaim it "One of the most agreeable plays to turn up in a long time" 62

Lo And Behold! was treated little better by the public than Mr. Patrick's previous effort. The play quietly expired after its thirty eighth performance. But, as there has been after the premiere of each of Mr. Patrick's other productions, there remained someone to see good fortune in the playwright's future, and this time critic Walter Kerr was very close to the final realization of what had been so long prophecized by so many. Reviewing Lo And Behold!, Kerr said; "When John Patrick gets past his absorption with the merely eccentric and begins to lavish his talents on something reasonably down-to-earth, he is going to write a nice, fat hit. Even Lo And Behold! is resoundingly funny at times." 63

60. T. H. Wenning, Newsweek, XXXVIII (December 24, 1951), p. 43

61. George Jean Nathan, Theatre Arts, XXXVI (February, 1952), p. 73

62. William Hawkins, New York World-Telegram, December 13, 1951

63. Walter F. Kerr, New York Herald-Tribune, December 13, 1951

Mr. Kerr was gazing into a crystal ball. Within the next two years playwright Patrick was to realize all that his best wishers had been heaping on him for years. With a reluctant assist from the book's author, Vern Sneider, Mr. Patrick brought his first adaptation written for the Broadway stage to the Martin Beck Theatre on the evening of October 15, 1953, and the critics and public alike were completely captivated by The Teahouse Of The August Moon. At this writing, nearly two years after the play's opening (July 1, 1955), The Teahouse Of The August Moon is still playing nightly in New York to sold-out houses.

The collaboration between author and adapter was not a happy one. "[Maurice] Evans had bought it [Teahouse] without reading it," Patrick said. "I was willing to take it on because I felt it furnished a good springboard" ⁶⁴ The question arises, was Mr. Patrick thinking of the same "springboard" that Mr. Kerr was thinking of (page 147) in writing about a "taking-off point" for the playwright's odd brand of humor?

The finished product was one that did not please the original author. Mr. Patrick reports that he

64. Paul Nathan, Publisher's Weekly (August 1, 1953), p. 496

received an eight page complaining letter from Sneider because he had "... cut out one of the two girls, to personalize the interest. I made other changes, too, for the sake of dramatic and financial economy." 65 About the letter, Patrick says:

... I rightly refused to read it. I believe that when a writer sells a book for adaptation, whether for the movies or the theater, he should deposit his opinions in the bank along with his check. Novels, plays and pictures are three entirely separate forms, each with its distinct boundaries. Unless an author is capable of making his own dramatization, I think he should leave the job completely to a man who has had practise doing just that kind of thing. 66

Although The Teahouse Of The August Moon does represent Mr. Patrick's first adaptation for the stage it will be recalled that he did his early work in radio in writing adaptations. And, once The Teahouse Of The August Moon was safely on its way in New York, Mr. Patrick went to Hollywood and completed three adaptations for the motion pictures, Irving Stone's The President's Lady, John Secondari's [Three] Coins In The Fountain, and the late Thomas Heggen's Mister Roberts.

Indeed, in The Teahouse the playwright seems to have incorporated a bit of the spirit of Mister Roberts. One discerning critic has noted:

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

What is clear from merely seeing the play is that it lives exactly as the final version of Mr. Roberts lived; only as theatre, only in the world of musical comedy. And in that world it lives as powerfully as Mr. Roberts only perhaps through one character, the bad captain -- here reincarnated as a Colonel ... I hasten to agree that it is a nice show, my objections to a nice show being only the normal objections to a nice girl 67

And another says:

Mix the exuberant earthiness of Mister Roberts with the goodness of A Bell For Adano, then add the unashamed make-believe of the Chinese theatre that Benrimo employed years ago in The Yellow Jacket, and you may have some notion of this comedy dealing with the problems faced by our occupying forces in Okinawa. 68

Another slightly different comparison reads; "... it has roughly the same locale as Mister Roberts and South Pacific and should have roughly the same success. The play has all the virtues of a big, popular hit and not too many of the usual drawbacks" 69 And John Chapman of the New York Daily News sees it in a similiar manner; "The play is in turn uproarious and touching. Without in the least being an imitation it reminds one at this time or that of A Bell For Adano, Mister Roberts, and South Pacific. Not a bad reminder" 70

67. Eric Bentley, The New Republic, CXXIX (October 26, 1953), p. 21

68. John Mason Brown, Saturday Review Of Literature, XXXVI (December 12, 1953), p. 45

69. Louis Kronenberger, Time, LXII (October 26, 1953), p. 72

70. John Chapman, New York Daily News, October 16, 1953

The most impressive aspect of The Teahouse Of The August Moon appears to be the gentle manner the play satirizes the American people and the American military occupation forces. A preview of Mr. Patrick's brand of satire has already appeared in The Curious Savage. The whole of The Teahouse Of The August Moon may be described as pleasantly satirical but the playwright is never malicious about it. The satirizing of Americans is charmingly brought out in the initial scene as the Okinawan interpreter, Sakini, steps before the partitioned bamboo curtain, wraps his gum in a piece of paper, puts it in a matchbox, and turns to explain to the assembled audience:

... Okinawa very fortunate.
 Culture brought to us ... Not have to leave
 home for it,
 Learn many things.
 Most important that rest of world not like
 Okinawa.
 World filled with delightful variation.
 Illustration.
 In Okinawa ... no locks on doors.
 Bad manners not to trust neighbors.
 In America ... lock and key big industry.
 Conclusion?
 Bad manners good business.
 In Okinawa ... wash self in public bath with
 nude lady quite proper.
 Picture of nude lady in private home ... quite
 improper.
 In America ... statue of nude lady in park
 win prize.
 But nude lady in flesh in park win penalty.
 Conclusion?
 Pornography question of geography ...

But most of all the playwright is at his best when he is applying his friendly satire to the American military forces. This type of satire spills over throughout the whole play. One of the more amusing scenes is one in which Mr. Patrick has fun with the Army Brass. Speaking to his First Sergeant, Colonel Purdy says:

Purdy : While we're waiting for Capt. Fisby, I want you to make a note of some new signs I want painted.

Gregovich : The painter hasn't finished the ones you ordered yesterday, sir.

Purdy : There's only one answer to that. Put on another sign painter. Now. I noticed the men were dancing with each other in the canteen the other night.

Gregovich : Yes, sir. (He writes on his pad) "No dancing allowed."

Purdy : (Annoyed) I didn't say that, Gregovich! I don't object to the men dancing. I want them to enjoy themselves. But it doesn't set a good example for the natives to see non-coms dancing with enlisted men. So have a sign posted saying "Sergeants are Forbidden to Dance with Privates."

Gregovich : Yes, sir.

Purdy : Have another sign put up beside that clear pool of water just below the falls -- "For Officers Only."

Gregovich : Where will the men bathe, sir?

Purdy : There is another pool just below it they can use.

Gregovich : If you'll pardon me, sir -- they're not going to like that. They'll be bathing in water the officers have already bathed in.

Purdy : That's a valid objection, Gregovich. We don't want to do anything unreasonable. (He concentrates for a moment.) How far is the second pool below the first?

Gregovich : About three hundred yards.

Purdy : (Satisfied) Then it's quite alright. Water purifies itself every two hundred feet.

Gregovich : Do you think that will satisfy the men, sir?

Purdy : I don't see why it shouldn't. It satisfies science. Well, you might as well take those memos to the sign painter now.

Gregovich : Yes, sir.

The critics were delighted by this style of kidding the occupation forces. Walter Kerr says, "In fabricating what is in effect a satirical fantasy on political ineptitude, Mr. Patrick has not only extracted what was funniest and most apt from the Snelder original. It seems to me that in a good half dozen ways, he has improved upon it." ⁷¹ And Harold Clurman writes:

The Teahouse Of The August Moon is a hit because it is entirely pleasant, benign and sweet. Didn't William Dean Howells once say that the smiling aspects of life seemed to be the more American? There is something almost traditionally American, or rather American theater, about The Teahouse ...

71. Walter F. Kerr, New York Herald-Tribune, October 16, 1953

its satire of Army brass is gentle in the vein of a Saturday Evening Post cover caricature -- it is good-natured, liberal, and constantly indulgent. 72

The most revealing comment, however, comes from Shukei Higa, the Chief Executive of the Ryukyu's Government. After a U.S. Army performance of The Teahouse Of The August Moon at the Kadena (Okinawa) Air Base, making use of real soldiers (with some slight changes in rank) and real Okinawans playing Okinawans (including a real geisha, Yukiko Hama, playing the geisha girl Lotus Blossom in the play), the Island's Chief Executive commented, "I think it's wonderful the way you Americans can laugh at yourselves." 73

An unusual aspect of the 15 performances given at the Kadena Air Base was that they raised \$5000 to build a schoolhouse -- not pentagon-shaped!

There is one dissenter, however, who does not look with favor upon this satirical treatment of America and its emissaries. Eric Bentley, writing in The New Republic, says:

... I am not trying to tie our authors to Malenkov in the way in which they might be tempted to tie me to Sen. McCarthy. It is simply that our criticism of America is only good when its motives are healthy; when it doesn't take the form of rhetorical patterns and the merest folklore; in short, when it is truthful. As for foreigners, I return to my Oriental friend's remark. Messrs. Sneider and Patrick wanted to pay people like my

72. Harold Clurman, The Nation, CLXXVII (October 31, 1953), pp. 357-58

73. Life, XXXVI (June 14, 1954), p. 101

friend a compliment. He took it -- rightly, I think -- as an insult. Our playwrights, Critics Circles, and Pulitzer committees should place the whole question of patriotism and international good will under advisement. Or make sure that we don't take them seriously. 74

In tracing the progress of playwright John Patrick from his early stage beginnings in 1935 to the major triumph of his playwrighting career in 1953 seldom has a Patrick play appeared but that a soothing dose of the tolerant and kindly Patrick philosophy goes along with it. The Teahouse Of The August Moon is no exception to this readily observable rule. In the last act Mr. Patrick has written this charmingly philosophical scene:

Fisby : What does she want?

Sakini : Oh, that crazy Lotus Blossom. She wants you to marry her.

Fisby : Why should she want to marry me?

Sakini : She think you nicest man she ever see, boss.

Fisby : Tell her that I am clumsy, that I seem to have a gift for destruction. That I'd disillusion her as I have disillusioned her people ...

Sakini : She says she think she like to go to America. There everybody happy. Sit around and drink tea while machines do work.

Fisby : She wouldn't like it, Sakini. I should hate to see her wearing sweaters and sport shoes and looking like an American looking like an Oriental.

Sakini : But she want to be an American, boss.
She never see an American she not
like, boss.

Fisby : Some of them wouldn't like her, Sakini.
In the small town where I live, there'd
be some who would make her unhappy.

Sakini : Why, boss?

Fisby : She'd be different ...

Sakini : She says not believe that. In America
everybody love everybody. Everybody
help everybody; that's democracy.

Fisby : No. That's faith. Explain to her
that democracy is only a method --
an ideal system for people to get
together. But that unfortunately ...
the people who get together ... are
not always ideal.

Sakini : That's very hard to explain, boss. She
girl in love. She just want to hear
pretty things.

Fisby : Then tell her that I love what she is,
and that it would be wrong to change
that. To impose my way of life on her.

Sakini : Tassha dene!

Fisby : Tell her I shall never forget her. Nor
this village. Tell her that in the
autumn of my life -- on the other side
of the world -- when an August moon
rises from the east, I will remember
what was beautiful in my youth, and
what I was wise enough to leave beautiful ...

The playwright has succeeded in making this scene
so tender and charming that the philosophy bears not
heavily upon us. One critic, however, sees it not
quite in this manner. For he writes:

At this point [the building of the teahouse]
the play might well end in a friendly and enchanting

tea party. However, the author is determined not to let his audience off without a heaping teaspoonful of homiletic extract. We must suffer a sequence in which such subjects as racial prejudice and the validity of the doctrine of imposing our ideas on the rest of the world are discussed in a pastiche of Poor Butterfly and Happy Talk. There is nothing wrong with the sentiments expressed, but the scene is a heterogeneous patch on an otherwise bright colored tapestry. 75

To the theatergoer, however (and this writer has seen the Broadway production of The Teahouse Of The August Moon twice) the overall impression of the play is one of an all-pervasive charm, of colorful exoticism and warm and gentle and ungagged humor. The device of using the ingratiating Sakini as a sort of off-stage commentator and the divided bamboo curtain for the presentation of partitioned scenes lends a feeling of almost personal participation to the scene. The writer for Theatre Arts Magazine enlarges upon this manner of staging:

One of Patrick's happiest borrowings from Oriental drama is the 'waki' of the Noh play, the interlocutor who, like the stage manager in Our Town, both explains the action to the audience and performs in the play himself and establishes a warm and friendly rapport between actors and audience ... [David Wayne] carries on his commentary as the link between the play's ten scenes -- his gestures, inflection and movement sustaining the drama's non-realistic style. His final appearance adds the last stroke to the picture of enchantment and sends the audience home in a glow of good humor.

75. Henry Hewes, Saturday Review Of Literature, XXXVI (October 31, 1953), p. 29

Like the principals in a Noh or Kabuki play, the people in this fable are more types than fully drawn characters 76

To a reporter seeking to discover Mr. Patrick's working theory, the playwright has replied, "I'll go to any source for material. If it's good, I'll use it -- and try to make it better in the writing." 77

In The Teahouse Of The August Moon the playwright used this theory to good stead by injecting into his play (1) a sign he saw in Syria while ambulance driving in World War II for the American Field Services, (2) an experience a friend had in New Guinea, (3) some philosophy out of a Harvard professor's textbook on sociology, and (4) information from his own vast knowledge of organic farming for one of the key scenes in the show. 78

The "Playwright Of The August Moon" is today a wealthy and successful farmer in Rockland County, New York. At the age of 49 he is both a tremendously successful playwright and screenwriter. He is not married, explaining that he is "probably too old to enter such a complicated arrangement as matrimony."

76. Theatre Arts, XXXVII (December, 1953), pp. 22-24

77. William Glover, "The Week On Broadway," Louisville Courier-Journal, March 9, 1954

78. Ibid.

The marital experiences of some of his friends, he adds, has not been a very convincing advertisement for the institution. 79

Mr. Patrick cannot be considered a gregarious man. He shuns cocktail parties and formal affairs, preferring the company of a small circle of neighborhood friends, mostly outside of the theater. He attributes much of his success to his work on the farm:

When I get up in the morning I make some notes. If things go well I go to work at the typewriter. If not, I get out the tractor and yank out some more trees around the plowed field. I make notes while I do that and pretty soon I go back to the typewriter. But I never work more than two hours at a stretch. I can't lead a pushbutton life and be a writer. Working hard for yourself keeps your sense of the real values of life. 80

Mr. Patrick appears to have one enormous advantage over other playwrights of his era. He did not write his best play at the beginning of his career and has not had to spend the rest of his life trying to live up to his original success. Over the course of his seven produced plays and numerous radio and motion picture scripts he has succeeded in maturing as a writer and artist. The American theater may look forward to a number of fine dramas from the pen of the man who today has certainly earned his place in the front rank of American dramatists.

79. Harry Gilroy, "The Playwright Of The August Moon," New York Times Magazine (November 15, 1953), p. 59

80. Ibid., p. 56

John Mason Brown paid a fine compliment to Mr. Patrick in a passing reference in his column in The Saturday Review Of Literature. Said Mr. Brown:

In the theatre, as outside it, scarcity creates value. Fine dramatists have always been scarce because no medium an artist must master is harder in its disciplines than playwrighting. For some time it has been clear that capable dramatists belong to a shrinking race. Today here and abroad their ranks have thinned to an alarming extent. Although the older dramatists continue to function, never has the theatre stood in more desperate need of new playwrights. Luckily, some have been heard from this year. They have shown promise and deserve encouragement. But even the most interesting of them have depended to a disquieting degree upon their actors not only to give body and substance to what they have written but to develop in their performances scenes or characters left undeveloped in the writing. Except for Mr. Patrick, the veterans among our dramatists have done the same thing. The result is a season to the interest and pleasures of which, up until now, actors have been primary rather than secondary contributors. 81

In the same year that Tennessee Williams stirred the pulses of Broadway playgoers with The Glass Menagerie and John Patrick was delighting the same playgoers with the dour Scot in The Hasty Heart, a housewife from Denver brought to The American Theater a six foot, one and a half inch rabbit named Harvey. Harvey became a Broadway fable and his creator, Mary Chase, a wealthy and troubled woman. This study will next be concerned with the creator of the fabulous Harvey.

81. John Mason Brown, "Seeing Things," Saturday Review Of Literature, XXXVI (December 12, 1953), p. 45

CHAPTER IV

THE FANTASTIC WORLD OF MARY CHASE

Shortly after 8 P.M. on the evening of November 1, 1944, a giant six foot 1½ inch rabbit made his first appearance on the stage of the 48th Street Theater in New York City to the huge delight of the assembled First Nighters. Not only was a new word added to the vocabulary of the stage. Not only was a veteran stage personality, Frank Fay, reborn. But also, and more important, a new playwright had challenged many of the conventions of Broadway theater and emerged as one of the promising writers for the American stage. Mary Coyle Chase had given something new to Broadway and Broadway didn't quite know how to accept it.

But the theatergoing public did. Producer Brock Pemberton never made a better investment. Besides having a star he did not have to pay equity wages, he also had a show that was to gross over \$10,000,000.00 at the box office in its first nine and a half years of existence. And the bewildered new playwright found herself with over a million dollars in the same period of time. It proved to be a joyous occasion on both sides of the footlights.

It was not, however, Mrs. Chase's first foray into

the Broadway picture. Seven years previous, in 1937, Brock Pemberton brought her first play, Now You've Done It, to the New York stage. Originally entitled Me Third, it concerned a western politician known to Mrs. Chase who had campaigned for office with the slogan, "God first, the people second, me third." ¹ Written originally for a Federal Theater Project, it ran for seven weeks on Broadway.

Mary Coyle was born of Irish parents on Denver's tough West side on February 25, 1907. In keeping with the traditions of her parentage she grew up a tough tomboy, always ready and able to hold her own against all comers. But she was also an incurable book lover and she had read Dicken's Tale Of Two Cities at the age of eight, and was reading DeQuincy at ten. At eleven years she got her first taste of the theater when she saw Robert Mantell playing in The Merchant Of Venice in a Denver theater.

The taste for classicism was with her early and when she entered the University of Denver at the tender age of fifteen she startled her teachers by reading Xenophon's Anabasis in the Greek. While at the University of Denver she sharpened her journalistic teeth by working on Denver's Rocky Mountain News as

1. Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, March 1, 1937

a reporter without salary.

After two and a half years at the University of Denver she transferred to the University of Colorado at Boulder. It was while there that Mary Coyle, a brassy Irish lass "from the other side of the tracks," was not invited to join a sorority, an experience which inspired one of her earlier plays entitled Sorority House, first produced at the University Civic Theater, University of Denver. She sold this play to the movies for a few thousand dollars. "We bought a Ford with the money and paid all our bills," said Mary, "but all that was years before Harvey." ²

Completing a major in the classics at the University of Colorado in two years, Mary Coyle returned to the Rocky Mountain News, this time as a reporter with pay. Her friend, Wallis M. Reef, describes Mary Coyle's capacity as a reporter in these terms; "She had the bland, amoral effrontery of a good aggressive cityside reporter and a flip, sharp tongue which contrasted nicely with her madonna appearance." ³ She could be found in all places where women were not expected to go, doing things women were not expected to do. On one occasion she made

2. (Author unknown), "Mary Chase; Success Almost Ruined Her," Cosmopolitan, CXXXVI (February, 1954), p. 101

3. Current Biography, October, 1945

her way into the new, long Moffitt Tunnel then under construction just outside Denver, leaving the construction men on the job aghast at her fearlessness and effrontery.

Her caustic tongue constantly embroiled her in conflicts with her employers on the News, and she was fired three times -- and three times rehired.

In 1928 a quiet and unassuming reporter on the Rocky Mountain News won her heart and on June 7, 1928 she married Robert L. Chase, currently the Managing Editor of the Rocky Mountain News. With the advent of domesticity Mary Chase quit her job on the News, but then immediately became embroiled in a half dozen civic activities simultaneously. On one occasion she became highly incensed at the way the Spanish-American people were being kicked around in Denver and she led a crusade for their rights so vigorous that it is remembered in Denver even unto this day. Mary Chase has often been identified as a stirring crusader for the underdog.

Her first play, Now You've Done It (Me Third), was written in 1934. The second play, never produced and untitled, was suggested by her reporter's life. In 1939 she wrote Sorority House, and the following year a short one-acter entitled Too Much Business.

During the War Mary Chase set to work on a play entitled The Banshee, inspired by the Irish folk tales of her mother and uncles, all of whom had emigrated to America directly from Ireland. As a child Mary had been kept enchanted for hours on end by the constant flow of tales told her by her garrulous uncles, many of them leaving a deep imprint upon her later writings.

The Banshee was a tragedy based upon the legend told by her Irish uncles of the Irish spirit who warns families of an impending death. She sent a draft of the play to Brock Pemberton. He was very much impressed by it but felt its production should be delayed until after the war because of its rather depressingly tragic theme.

Mary Chase took her cue from this piece of advice and immediately set out to write a play with an escapist plot. According to Mrs. Chase, her inspiration for the writing came from a widowed woman she never met but who lived across the street from her in Denver. During the war she received news that her only son had been killed overseas. "I wanted to write a type of play that would cheer up a woman like her," said Mary Chase. She reached back in her memory for a thought her mother, Mary McDonough Coyle, had been at great pains to impress upon her. "Never be unkind

or indifferent to a person others say is crazy. Often they have deep wisdom. We pay them a great respect in the Old Country, and we call them fairy people, and it could be they are sometimes." ⁴ That was how Mary Chase came to write Harvey.

Concerning Harvey, Mary Chase says, "I rewrote it fifty times. My pooka (spirit in animal form) was represented at first by a canary; when I changed it to a rabbit of man's size, although the change had its advantages, the situation required more delicate handling." ⁵ But that situation was not nearly as perplexing as when the money began to shower on her after the success of Harvey. Her privacy invaded, her friends eaten with jealousy, her children made skeptical of her worth, her ex-enemies hypocritically fawning over her -- the loud and brassy Mary Coyle of the Rocky Mountain News began to retreat within herself, appalled by the insincerity of her Denver neighbors. "You expect it [sudden wealth] to bring you peace of mind," she says. "Instead, it plows up every bit of contentment you ever had." ⁶

The following year after Harvey, with the war

4. Wallis M. Reef, "She Didn't Write It For Money, She Says," Saturday Evening Post, CCXVIII (September 1, 1945), p. 109

5. Current Biography, October, 1945

6. (Author unknown), "Mary Chase; Success Almost Ruined Her," Cosmopolitan, CXXXVI (February, 1954), p. 102

ended, Brock Pemberton decided the time was ripe to produce her pre-Harvey play, The Banshee. Retitled The Next Half Hour, the play opened at the Empire Theater on October 29, 1945, to rather luke-warm-to-frigid reception from the assembled critics. The play, cast in a tragic vein so uncharacteristic of Mary Chase's other works, concerned an Irish family emigrated to America. The younger sister of the family had married and produced a family of three of her own, then became a widow. A touch of the Chasean "fantasy" emerges in the knowledge that the widow can hear the cry of the banshee, an Old World creature whose cry presages death in the family. The widow is concerned with the safety of her eldest son who is having an affair with a man's wife down the street, but she is temporarily assuaged when her older brother dies, fulfilling the warning of the banshee. But when she sends the younger son to the woman's house in search of his brother the husband, in a jealous rage, shoots and kills the younger son. In the concluding scene the mother goes out of her head, thus realizing none of the tragedy of her superstitions. The title derives from the mother's desire to sidetrack an impending fate. "Do not attempt to sidetrack it. Let it come, for the next half hour belongs to God."

The most searching criticism of Mary Chase's new play came from Stark Young, writing in The New Republic:

The Next Half Hour is unimportant because it has essentially no tone, no basic power or continuity. It does not face the issue of that banshee and death; it does not echo and declare its inherent passionate fatality and doom ... it has not the healthy glow of comedy nor the final, inescapable tone that marks the tragic pattern, what we call tragedy ⁷

But reviewer Robert Garland of the New York Journal-American saw it quite another way:

Even a professional first-nighter can tell you that The Next Half Hour is a better play than Harvey. Where the play about the rabbit which Elwood Dowd alone can see is fresh and funny, the play about the banshee which Margaret Brennan alone can hear is tragic and terrifying. And that is why Harvey will be at the 48th Street Theatre long after The Next Half Hour has departed from the Empire ⁸

Garland's criticism proved to be probably more prophetic than perceptive. Harvey continued to run on and on for 1775 performances; The Next Half Hour expired quietly with its eighth performance.

Broadway was to wait seven years before it was to see another play by Mary Chase. The failure of The Next Half Hour may have depressed her after the smashing success of Harvey the previous year. She is pictured by her friends as an extremely moody woman,

7. Stark Young, The New Republic, CXIII (November 12, 1945), pp. 639-40

8. Robert Garland, New York Journal-American, October 30, 1945

at most times in high spirits and quite prankish but on other occasions quiet and evasive. Then, too, it was the time her family of three young sons were growing up, demanding an increasing amount of attention and care. Openings of Harvey in various European cities occupied much of her time during this period, since she twice took off for Europe to attend Harvey openings. And a move to a bigger and swankier home in Denver, the city she cannot long bear being away from, was another heavy tax on her time.

But undoubtedly one of the principal factors in the barrenness of her productivity during this seven year interval was her disillusionment over her problems of sudden wealth. Of this distraction she says:

If you lose everything overnight, everyone gives you sympathy. But if you make a great deal of money, no one sympathizes or even seems to understand what a shattering thing has happened to you. I became deeply unhappy, and suspicious of everyone. A poison took possession of me, a kind of soul-sickness. ⁹

When, finally, she did blossom forth in 1952 with her children's fantasy, Mrs. McThing, this suspicion of success was still planted firmly in her mind for she wanted no professional Broadway production of Mrs. McThing. She had conceived it solely as a play for children and she wanted one semi-professional

9. (Author unknown), "Mary Chase; Success Almost Ruined Her," Cosmopolitan, CXXXVI (February, 1954), p. 102

performance at Christmas especially for children and then to be put on by amateurs at schools and camps. But Robert Whitehead, then managing director of the ANTA play series, finally prevailed upon her to permit one brief two week Broadway stand of the play with Helen Hayes in the starring role. After much persuasive argument, Mrs. Chase relented. The two week stand extended into three weeks, then continued to play on for a full year. Mrs. Chase again became inundated with two thousand dollar checks every week for the whole year.

The seven year famine between 1945 and 1952 could not have been entirely unproductive insofar as Mary Chase was concerned because in the Autumn of 1952 another of her fanciful plays made its bow on Broadway. Bernardine was clearly and unquestionably the result of her close association with her growing-up family, treating sympathetically as it did the awkward antics of teen-age boys with their romantic attitudes toward sex and love. Bernardine was not as well received by either the critics or the public as her two preceding resounding successes and finished a season's run on Broadway slightly in the red, though filling the playwright's slightly brimming coffers even more.

With this writing another Mary Chase play is scheduled to make an appearance during the Autumn

months (1955). The tentative title of the play is Angelica, but beyond that bit of information Mrs. Chase prefers to keep mum. But the ardent devotee of Mrs. Chase's plays can hazard a guess that (1) it will probably be a fantasy, (2) it is most likely about young people, (3) it is liable to be warm and sympathetic and probably gently satirical, and (4) it is most likely to successfully defy all the rules of dramaturgical construction. However, Mrs. Chase is always and ever delightful, even if perhaps somewhat predictable.

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The production of Harvey in November, 1944, was possibly an unfortunate milestone in the progress of Mary Chase, playwright. Beyond the "misfortune" of sudden wealth and its temporary derangement of her life was another problem she must continue to wrestle with. One of the burdens a new playwright is often confronted with is the one of living up to the expectations created by a smash hit early in one's career. Harvey was a smash hit. Harvey also (with few dissents) is certainly Mrs. Chase's best play to date. The sad consequence being, of course, that every subsequent play by Mrs. Chase has been measured by Harvey standards and found wanting. Most particularly so since Mrs. Chase has chosen to write each of her

major plays in the idiom of fantasy, a subject peculiarly marked for critical comparisons because the literature of fantasy on the American stage is more limited than that of any other type of theater. And, to a more considerable extent than any other type of theater, it is dependent upon those who act its roles to make it a success.

This fact, as much as anything else, would seem to account for the tremendous success of Harvey and the lesser successes of her subsequent plays. In retrospect it would appear that Mary Chase had written the play especially for the talents of Frank Fay, although in fact she had never met him until Antoinette Perry chose him to create the character of Elwood P. Dowd. Joseph Wood Krutch wrote:

Mary Chase, the author, is -- or was -- very nearly an unknown. But fortune smiled upon her twice; once when it permitted her to clothe her fantasy in so much unhackneyed wit and humor, so much gaiety and so much tenderness, again when it directed the choice of Frank Fay to impersonate her amiable and touching hero. Not once in a blue moon does it happen that a dramatist realizes his own intention so perfectly, and not once in a moon of an even more improbable color does he have also the all but incredible good luck to get for the same play a well-nigh perfect interpretation. Miss Chase, I should guess, is almost scared.¹⁰

Although there were occasional reservations among the critics concerning the perfectness of the

10. Joseph Wood Krutch, The Nation, CLIX (November 18, 1944), p. 624

play, there were none for Frank Fay's performance.

"Without once shifting his level, affectionate daze (sic) Mr. Fay's gestures, attitudes, and quietness are perfect, and he cannot get on or off without prolonged cheers," ¹¹ wrote one critic, and another observed, "... when Mr. Fay is on the stage, quietly explaining his relationship with Harvey, the theatre could ask for little more" ¹²

Success, to be sure, was ascertained and perhaps prolonged by the fabulous interpretive performances of Frank Fay and Josephine Hull, the latter being described by one as "... the most beloved, round, beaming bundle of vagaries on the street. Here, with her hair 'a la Medusa,' another of her sliding satin gowns, still another of her long-stringed handbags, she is adorable, funnier than ever." ¹³ But, to extract a phrase from the Prince of Playwrights, "The play's the thing" And, as a playwright, Mrs. Chase is one of the most amazing phenomena ever to have sprung from the foot of the Rockies.

Dramaturgical form she will seemingly have naught to do with. She prolongs one long act with hackneyed

11. Kappo Phelan, The Commonweal, XXXXI (November 17, 1944), p. 124

12. Lewis Nichols, New York Times, November 2, 1944

13. Kappo Phelan, The Commonweal, XXXXI (November 17, 1944), p. 124

drive, as for example:

Kelly : Where are you going?

Sanderson : I've got to tell the chief about it, Kelly. He may want to handle this himself.

Kelly : He'll be furious. I know he will. He'll die. And then he'll terminate me.

Sanderson : The responsibility is all mine, Kelly.

Kelly : On, no -- tell him it was all my fault, Doctor.

Sanderson : I never mention your name. Except in my sleep.

Kelly : But this man Dowd --

Sanderson : Don't let him get away. I'll be right back.

Kelly : But what shall I say to him? What shall I do? He'll be furious.

Sanderson : Look, Kelly -- he'll probably be fit to be tied -- but he's a man, isn't he?

Kelly : I guess so -- his name is Mister.

Sanderson : Go into your old routine -- you know -- the eyes -- the swish -- the works. I'm immune -- but I've seen it work with some people -- some of the patients out here. Keep him here, Kelly -- if you have to do a strip tease. (exits)

Kelly : (Very angry) Well, of all the -- oh -- you're wonderful, Dr. Sanderson! You're just about the most wonderful person I ever met in my life!

Not infrequently Mrs. Chase gets involved in this sort of thing and her scenes with Wilson, the hospital

attendant, are often particularly painful, as for example:

Wilson: Hello, Dr. Chumley.

Chumley: Oh, there you are.

Wilson : How is every little old thing?

Chumley: Fair, thank you, Wilson, fair.

Wilson : Look -- somebody's gonna have to give me a hand with this Simmons dame -- order a restraining jacket or something. She's terrible. (To Kelly) Forgot me, didn't you? Well, I got her corset off all by myself.

Chumley: We're going up to see this patient right now, Wilson.

Wilson : She's in a hydro-tub now -- my God -- I left the water running on her!

When Mrs. Chase is not rambling on in this uninspired prose she manages to reach some rare heights in imaginative powers. It is obvious from a reading of the play that there is an especial fondness in her heart for Elwood P. Dowd, for it is for him that she has reserved some of her most glowing lines. Such a revealing speech as this one, for example, pours all of Mary Coyle Chase into Elwood P. Dowd:

Kelly : Mr. Dowd, what is it you do?

Elwood : Harvey and I sit in the bars and we have a drink or two and play the jukebox. Soon the faces of the other people turn toward mine and smile. They are saying: 'We don't know your name, Mister, but you're a lovely fellow. Harvey and I warm

ourselves in all these golden moments. We have entered as strangers -- soon we have friends. They come over. They sit with us. They drink with us. They talk to us. They tell about the big terrible things they have done. The big wonderful things they will do. Their hopes, their regrets, their loves, their hates. All very large because nobody ever brings anything small into a bar. Then I introduce them to Harvey. And he is bigger and grander than anything they offer me. When they leave, they leave impressed. The same people seldom come back -- but that's envy, my dear. There's a little bit of envy in the best of us -- too bad, isn't it?

To read that speech, with its warmth and wisdom, its rationalizations and its well-modulated prose is to make us feel we don't even need Frank Fay there to interpret it for us. This is the Mary Chase that makes us wonder how she can be so ordinary at one moment, so extremely gifted the next.

It is characterizations of the nature just cited, among others, that has inspired John Mason Brown to observe:

Harvey has its Saroyan aspects. Its little sermon to the effect that a man nowadays must be either bright or good is advanced in the goofy, giddy, happily cockeyed, and boozy terms upon which Saroyan is generally considered to have taken out a copyright. In the form of the unseen rabbit, too, it makes the same plea for a man's need of his illusions that Mr. Saroyan made with his unseen mice in The Beautiful People. But the Saroyan here is cut; diluted for palates not quite ready to take their Saroyan straight ... Harvey is less the real Saroyan than it is vaudeville's idea of him.

It lacks his final poignancy, his gift of sudden and deep revelation, and his ultimate magic. But in wartime who can complain if oleomargarine is served instead of butter? In any case, audiences that might be allergic to Saroyan are delighted to accept Harvey.¹⁴

There are those who may differ with Mr. Brown's judgment of Harvey being a "poor man's Saroyan" but that it does contain resemblances to Saroyan's works would seem indisputable. Perhaps Harvey does lack the "final poignancy" of most of Saroyan since Mrs. Chase has elected to settle Harvey's fate by a sort of "deus ex machina" device (the taxicab driver), whereas the determination of that fate by a decision of Elwood's would, perhaps, retain that "final poignancy" that critic Brown finds lacking. The employment of a disinterested cab driver to set in motion the retention of Harvey as Elwood's indomitable partner-in-Charles is a treatment unworthy of the gentle Mr. Dowd. The introduction of unintegrated characters into her plays at miscellaneous moments is a failing that can too often be attributed to the unorthodox dramaturgy of Mrs. Chase. Walter Kerr cryptically comments on her uncertain style; "There never was a more feminine playwright; every bureau drawer is left open."¹⁵

14. John Mason Brown, Saturday Review Of Literature, XXVII (December 30, 1944), pp. 10-11

15. Walter Kerr, New York Herald-Tribune, October 17, 1952

But one can be more critical of Mr. Brown for questioning Mrs. Chase's relative "gift of sudden and deep revelation." One of the most sudden and deep revelations in any play ever produced comes in about the middle of the play when Mrs. Chase makes her principal character say, "For forty years I struggled with reality; but I am happy to say that I conquered it at last." Remarks one critic:

When that has been said one realizes that Harvey is strong rather than merely whimsical because it is based upon an enduring psychological fact, because there are moments when nearly every man is ready to say with Dryden, 'There is a pleasure, sure, in being mad, which none but mad men know,' or, in our own idiom, 'It's great to be crazy!' 16

What more would Mr. Brown ask of his playwright in the way of "sudden and deep revelation?"

One of the gentler aspects of Mrs. Chase's art as revealed in Harvey is her subtle and ungagged sense of wit. One of the rarest little gems of humor occurs when Elwood turns to Harvey and performs a little pantomimed business before the startled Dr. Sanderson:

Sanderson : Is there something I can get for you, Mr. Dowd?

Elwood : What did you have in mind?

Near the end of the play, after Elwood has

16. Joseph Wood Krutch, The Nation, CLIX (November 18, 1944), p. 624

convinced Dr. Chumley that Harvey really does exist, an amusing bit of byplay takes place, illustrating superbly the continuing flow of humor whenever Elwood takes the stage:

- Elwood : Harvey says that he can look at your clock and stop it and you can go away as long as you like with whomever you like and go as far as you like. And when you come back not one minute will have ticked by.
- Chumley : You mean he actually -- ?
- Elwood : Einstein has overcome time and space. Harvey has not only overcome time and space -- but any objections.
- Chumley : And does he do this for you?
- Elwood : He is willing to at any time, but so far I've never been able to think of any place I'd rather be.
- Chumley : I know where I'd go.
- Elwood : Where?
- Chumley : I'd go to Akron.
- Elwood : Akron?
- Chumley : There's a cottage camp outside Akron in a grove of maple trees, cool, green, beautiful.
- Elwood : My favorite tree.
- Chumley : I would go there with a pretty young woman, a strange woman, a quiet woman.
- Elwood : Under a tree?
- Chumley : I wouldn't even want to know her name. I would be -- just Mr. Brown.
- Elwood : Why wouldn't you want to know her name? You might be acquainted with the same people.

- Chumley : I would send out for cold beer. I would talk to her. I would tell her things I have never told anyone -- things that are locked in here. (Beats his breast. Elwood looks over at his chest with interest.) And then I would send out for more cold beer.
- Elwood : No whiskey?
- Chumley : Beer is better.
- Elwood : Maybe under a tree. But she might like a highball.
- Chumley : I wouldn't let her talk to me, but as I talked I would want her to reach out a soft white hand and stroke my head and say, 'Poor thing! Oh, you poor, poor thing!'
- Elwood : How long would you like that to go on?
- Chumley : Two weeks.
- Elwood : Wouldn't that get monotonous? Just Akron, beer, and 'poor, poor thing' for two weeks?
- Chumley : No. No, it would not. It would be wonderful.
- Elwood : I can't help but feel you're making a mistake in not allowing that woman to talk. If she gets around at all, she may have picked up some very interesting little news items. And I'm sure you're making a mistake with all that beer and no whiskey. But it's your two weeks.
- Chumley : (Dreamily) Cold beer at Akron and one last fling! God, man!
- Elwood : Do you think you'd like to lie down for awhile?
- Chumley : No. No. Tell me, Mr. Dowd, could he -- would he do this for me?

Elwood : He could and he might. I have never heard Harvey say a word against Akron ...

"Don't, I beg you," pleads Robert Garland, "let them tell you that the tenant of the 48th Street Theatre is a whimsy, bringing to mind J. M. Barrie, A. A. Milne and he whom Dorothy Parker once referred to as 'Louisa May Woollcott.' Harvey has gayety, gusto, and guts." 17 To be sure, Mrs. Chase's little masterpiece has few of the characteristics of those named (though who would say that "Louisa May Woollcott" has not "gusto"?), but whimsy surely it is, for, by dictionary definition, Elwood (and, indeed, even Dr. Chumley) does "have eccentric ideas and impulses," he is a character of "quaint" dimensions, and Harvey is truly a "fantastic" rabbit.

But by whatever name we chose to call this delightful, slight, and charming piece of playwriting, the fact remains that it has delighted hundreds of thousands of eager playgoers all over the world. In Vienna, for example, Time magazine reports that "... most theatergoers took Harvey to their hearts as simply as a child takes his Easter bunny." 18 To be sure, the Time report states:

17. Robert Garland, New York Journal-American, November 2, 1944

18. Time, LIII (April 25, 1949), p. 31

... many of Harvey's new acquaintances were quite unfriendly. The Communist press hinted darkly that he was actually a Capitalist Trojan Horse which would lull Austrians into forgetting life's serious problems. The Red Army's local papers warned its readers that Harvey is not really a harmless bit of fluff ... the great mission of this rabbit is to overcome reality -- the bad truth one always wants to put away. ¹⁹

Another Viennese critic tried to liken Harvey to Hamlet.

Harvey, like the other plays by Mrs. Chase, appears to defy analysis. Each piece may be from a different puzzle but put them all together and, presto, they come out as delightful theater pieces. That Mrs. Chase has never since been able to match the success of Harvey is certainly in some considerable measure due to the fact that she has not since met characters she has warmed up to as she has to Elwood P. Dowd and his tall, furry friend. Her later plays seem to have been written rather than inspired. One might guess that Mary Chase had daily conversations with Elwood and Friend when she was putting Harvey down on paper. If true, this Denver housewife is the most blessed of all women.

Harvey was followed on Broadway in a year, less two days, by The Last Half Hour. The brief run of the second play seemed to suggest that tragic fantasy

19. Ibid.

was not Mary Chase's milieu. Critics complained about the play's lack of tone and mood, ²⁰ derided her for "conversational padding," ²¹ full of a maze of "symbolism," ²² and called the play "gloomy, plodding, and quite exhausting." ²³ Wolcott Gibbs, noting that the play was reportedly written before Harvey and produced at that time in order to benefit from Harvey's acclaim, wryly suggested; "For their own protection, perhaps, writers should be kept from rummaging around in bureau drawers." ²⁴

In the late winter of 1952 Mrs. Chase's childrens fantasy, Mrs. McThing, was unveiled at the Martin Beck Theatre, reluctantly by Mrs. Chase, happily for ANTA. ANTA had been, and was to be, plagued by a whole series of ill-advised productions and constantly hounded by that most cutting of Broadway reviewers, George Jean Nathan, who could find nothing right with Mrs. McThing (perhaps because it was another one of those ANTA productions):

The play, truth to tell ... is dramaturgical claptrap relieved only here and there by faint flashes of honest perception and authentic fancy. And it amounts in sum ... to the sort of thing

20. Stark Young, The New Republic, CXIII (November 12, 1945), p. 640

21. Lewis Nichols, New York Times, October 30, 1945

22. Howard Barnes, New York Herald-Tribune, October 30, 1945

23. Ward Morehouse, New York Sun, October 30, 1945

24. Wolcott Gibbs, The New Yorker, XXI (November 10, 1945), p. 44

occasionally put on for the hypothetical delectation of youngsters at matinees in the Barbizon-Plaza Hotel. Though advertised as 'a play for children of all ages' ... it is really for children of all ages between 10 and 12, and theatrically backward at that. ²⁵

Walter Kerr, in the New York Herald-Tribune, dissented: "In Mrs. McThing ... Mary Chase has written a play for 'children of all ages.' I can't speak for the other ages, but this kid was crazy about it." ²⁶

The "children of all ages" line is, to be sure, a figment of a press agent's imagination, but the "children of all ages" did, indeed, take over the proceedings and began to make Mary Chase rich all over again. There is no current knowledge of how Mrs. Chase adjusted herself to this situation but the assumption is that by now she has learned to take wealth in her stride.

Considering the fact that the playwright initially wanted only one semi-professional performance of Mrs. McThing as a Christmas play for children and then put on by amateurs at schools and camps, it seems quite unlikely that she ever intended the play to be "for children of all ages." In fact, when someone suggested a similarity between Mrs. McThing and Bernardine (since they were both produced in the same

25. George Jean Nathan, Theatre Arts, XXXVI (May, 1952), pp. 28-29

26. Walter F. Kerr, New York Herald-Tribune, February 21, 1952

year), she replied:

I have no convictions about any similarities. I wrote Mrs. McThing a long time ago to entertain children. In Bernardine I wanted to show the importance of boy's friendships -- how they really understand and help each other. There is a chasm between the generations that parents can't cross. 27

The idea for Mrs. McThing, as with Harvey, came from a childhood memory. A remark of a friend of her mother's was the key to Mary Chase's play. Said her mother's friend:

Last week we buried that whining, querulous old harridan we called our mother, but we all knew it wasn't really our mother. Mother was a happy, pretty woman who was taken away twelve years ago. They left this stick in her place, and it was the stick that we buried. 28

By such means was created the legend of Mrs. McThing's "sticks."

From that point of departure, however, Mary Chase had to plow many a furrow before arriving at Mrs. McThing. The "sticks," for instance, far from being "old harridans," became perfect models of deportment whereas the original beings in the play changed their characters. Mrs. Chase appears to be particularly astute in the use of the word "stick" since it has a special connotation all of its own to the intended youthful audience.

27. (Author unknown), "Mary Chase; Success Almost Ruined Her," Cosmopolitan, CXXXVI (February, 1954), p. 102

28. Ibid.

The appeal of Mrs. McThing to both junior-size and senior-size audiences is very possibly due to a construction of dual-identification. Children can most readily identify themselves with the comic-book aspect of the goings-on at the Shantyland Pool Hall Lunchroom. Adults, on the other hand, very probably find their identification easier with the troubled mother trying to keep up with her errant child. Since the errant child has scenes "playing it straight" with the mother and the mother, in turn, showing up in a number of character scenes with her son, the appeal to "children of all ages" made its mark.

Not all the "kids" of the Press accepted Mrs. McThing with the enthusiasm elicited from the aforementioned Walter Kerr, though it may be recorded that a strong majority voted in its favor. Richard Watts, Jr., observed that:

... a lot of Mrs. McThing is rather too heavily antic and too studiously whimsical ... [and] is often labored, halting, and ineffectual. Its whimsical ideas don't always work out, and when this happens, the effect is reasonably trying ... on the whole, [however] I'm for Mrs. McThing.²⁹

Harold Clurman has written one of the most perceptive criticisms of the play:

There is something about Mary Chase's Mrs.

29. Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, February 21, 1952

McThing resembling ... delightful unexpectancy ... a kind of homely matter-of-factness merges with freakish fantasy, common sense breaks down to a sort of touching goofiness without losing anything in naturalness and poise. Mary Chase has a style because she is a personality. It is not a literary style -- most of the writing is ordinary, some of it flat ... [the play] is spontaneous and theatrical; it expresses itself in action, in a manner of feeling, thinking and living which transcends niceties of speech or common concern for elegance of form. Here is a gentle impishness of being, an affectionate clownishness of thought. It is not careful, economical, or disciplined. It is not even brilliant. It just moseys along ... I am trying to say that the whole (which is the spirit) is greater in Mrs. McThing than any of its parts, and that to criticize it in detail ... is to be foolish about it. Mrs. McThing is not a play to read. On the stage it has a relaxed gaiety which is both good for the heart and tonic for the [presumably absent] mind 30

That part in which Mr. Clurman remarks about the whole being greater than any of its parts is, surely, true of all of Mrs. Chase's plays, a fact which does, in effect, divide the reviewing fraternity into two distinct parts whenever they encounter a Mary Chase play. On the one hand are those who persist in analyzing it bit by bit according to its dramaturgical construction and invariably coming to the conclusion that Mary Chase is a hopeless misfit in the theater and "why do we put up with the likes of her anyway?" The other group (which is not always

30. Harold Clurman, The New Republic, CXXVI (March 17, 1952), p. 22

composed of the same reviewers with each new play) adopts a more tolerant attitude, as Harold Clurman has done, and say, in effect, "She's hopeless as a playwright, but we love her just the same!"

A number of the critics suggested that Mrs. McThing is a sort of Americanized Peter Pan. Not so, said Harold Clurman, "Mrs. McThing is exactly the contrary of Peter Pan, which celebrates the virtues of the British home whereas Mrs. McThing raises Cain with ours" 31

In Harvey John Mason Brown was able to see the shadow of William Saroyan all over the show. In Mrs. McThing critic Joseph Wood Krutch takes up the cudgel and sees Mrs. Chase indebted to nearly everyone, including Saroyan:

The gangster-chef who prefers an imaginary piano to the frying pan and refuses to serve the customers unless the sound of their names pleases his ear is a Saroyan character if ever I met one ... That the general scheme is taken directly from Peter Pan is almost too obvious to mention, and Miss (sic) Chase's indebtedness remains embarrassingly heavy even though her whole tone is different enough from Barrie's ... the three aging spinsters who call on Mrs. McThing [actually, Mrs. Larue] in real life are straight out of The Madwoman Of Chaillot. 32

Krutch, from these observations, goes on to suggest

31. Ibid.

32. Joseph Wood Krutch, The Nation, CLXXIV (March 15, 1952), p. 258

that Mary Chase's success is "... a triumph of mechanical ingenuity, not of creative imagination." ³³

In Mrs. McThing the origin of the characters seem less significant than how they have been employed. The triumph of mechanical ingenuity over creative imagination, as Krutch puts it, may be correct insofar as it relates to characters. But the relationships of these derivative characters are Mrs. Chase's own, and in so doing is an exercise of the creative imagination.

The question is really an academic one, the point being raised primarily to note, once again, as Clurman points out, that the whole of Mrs. Chase's plays are greater than any of the parts. And in none of them is it more true, perhaps, than in Mrs. McThing, where fancy and semi-fanciful flirt with each other between Larue Towers and the Shantyland Pool Hall Lunchroom.

Comparisons with Harvey, of course, are inevitable, and most especially in the present situation. Very few would take exception to the judgment that Harvey is the superior play. The reason for its superiority might be more subject to controversy but to this writer there appears to be three or four clear and

33. Ibid.

distinct reasons for taking such a position. In the first instance, Harvey focuses the audience's attentions on a single (speaking) character and the sympathy of the audience is quickly gained for him. In Mrs. McThing, however, the center of attention consists of two characters, Mrs. Larue (the star) and Howay (the principal role). Mrs. Larue, with her haughty, imperious manner is not one to quickly win the affection of the audience and Howay, with his comic book poses, is far removed from the adult audience -- the audience that took Elwood P. Dowd immediately to its heart. In this diminution of focus on a principal character Mrs. McThing has been robbed of some of the Harvey charm.

Secondly, even though Harvey was a fantastic figment of the imagination it is possible to believe that an amiable tosspot like Elwood P. Dowd might actually be seeing this character called Harvey. In point of fact, stranger things than Harvey have been seen by many who seek succor in a bottle -- though perhaps few, if any, have managed to maintain an amiable relationship with their delusions over a considerable period of time, as did Dowd.

But Mrs. McThing represents a fantasy of a different color. Very few adults can grasp the mechanics of a fireball changing people into charred

sticks, for example, and come up smiling. The "deus ex machina" is at work again for Mrs. Chase, but without the reality of the innocent babblings of a real, live taxicab driver. In other words, Harvey, though certainly a fantasy, is less a "fantastic" fantasy than Mrs. McThing. The playwright asks us to stretch our imagination just a little further than many of us are prepared to do in Mrs. McThing and, unless we can do so to enter into the spirit of the fun, much of the joy is lost.

We find, further, that those lovely, long, and warmly philosophic lines, so beautifully written and so perfectly delivered, that makes Harvey so distinctive, is missing in Mrs. McThing. In Mrs. McThing the lines are short and strongly individualized, designed to differentiate the distinctly off-beat characters. The lines do not speak to us and tell us something as do those of Elwood P. Dowd. Rather, their purpose is more to individualize the character, as for example:

Eddie : (He stares at them fiercely) How wah yuh, boys? Don't answer. (He puts his right hand inside his coat and we all know what that means with a gangster). The cops are out like flies. I'm hotter than a firecracker but they can't prove a thing. There's ice in this town but it's all behind plate glass. I've cased this burg from end to end and all I bring home

is alibis. What's on the agenda?
(He sits at a chair behind one of
the tables, pounds the table).

... and to advance the story:

Eddie : Call a meeting! Call a meeting!

Stinker : That's what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna
call a meeting.

Eddie : Call it then and don't just stand
there sayin' you're gonna call it
-- call it.

Stinker : I'm not gonna just stand here sayin'
I'm gonna call it -- I'm gonna call
it. (Puts fingers in his mouth and
whistles) I called it.

Many people would find it harder to warm up to
dialogue of this nature than to the gentle and
pixilated philosophical amiableness of Elwood P. Dowd.

A fourth, and final, reason why Harvey was better
received by the theatergoing public than Mrs. McThing
is that Harvey represents that rare triumph of perfect
casting, each role tailored for the actor and actress
that plays it. Few people would quarrel with the
interpretations given by Miss Hayes and Master deWilde
in Mrs. McThing but, however skillful their acting,
they could not give the impression that the roles
were made exactly for them or they for the roles, as
Frank Fay did with Elwood P. Dowd. Miss Hayes and
Master deWilde performed under the particularly heavy
handicap of being handed dual roles, thereby losing
all the advantage Frank Fay had in carrying a single

identification. Miss Chase was extraordinarily successful, however, in the casting of both of these shows. In any event, Mrs. McThing probably turned out more successfully than the author could ever have imagined when she first earmarked it for "just one semi-professional performance" along the Rialto.

When Bernardine opened on October 16 of the same year Mrs. Chase revealed that her seven lean years hadn't been entirely unproductive. Bernardine was clearly the product of a growing-up family and the astute Irish housewife was seen to be profiting from her own domestic experiences. This play, like Mrs. McThing, was written expressly for the younger set but, once again, they were elbowed aside in the rush to the box office. The play had a more limited audience appeal, however, than her two previous major efforts and Bernardine closed just short of six months on the boards.

The "chasm between the generations that parents can't cross" that Mary Chase spoke of in describing her inspiration for writing Bernardine (page 187) appear to have been left uncrossed, since the critics and public alike were baffled in their attempts to understand the playwright's story. One critic held that "... Mary Chase's gifts are properly those of

fancy, not imagination," ³⁴ whereas another says, "... for all her untidiness, she is gifted with genuine imagination." ³⁵ The margin of differentiation between "fancy" and "imagination" is slim, but Funk and Wagnall's dictionary describes it thusly:

'Fancy' and 'imagination' both belong to the productive or, more properly, the constructive faculty. Both recombine and modify mental images; the one great distinction between them is that 'fancy' is superficial, while 'imagination' is deep, essential, spiritual. 'Fantasy' in ordinary usage simply denotes capricious or erratic 'fancy,' as appears in the adjective 'fantastic.'

Critic Hayes, then, by this definition, obviously regards Mrs. Chase's talents as superficial. He continues his analysis of Bernardine by noting:

What Bernardine makes delightfully clear is just how far fancy [i. e. superficiality] can carry you in the theatre; in this case, past commonplace plot, non-existent technique, highly erratic performance and some of the dullest staging currently on view. ³⁶

He appears to make his remarks concerning Mrs. Chase's gifts more as a definition than as a reproach.

Critic Kerr, on the other hand, is equally certain that Mrs. Chase possesses the gift of writing with essentiality and spirituality. He, too, deplores her dramaturgy:

34. Richard Hayes, The Commonweal, LVII (November 7, 1952), p. 119

35. Walter F. Kerr, New York Herald-Tribune, October 17, 1952

36. Richard Hayes, The Commonweal, LVII (November 7, 1952), p. 119

As a dramatist, Mrs. Chase is loaded with faults. It is perfectly possible that she is the sloppiest scenarist now delighting the professional theater. Though Bernardine is a slender domestic comedy, she spreads it all over the map, trailing her characters through a half dozen sets and ten fragmentary scenes. She works the lingo of her world-weary kids well past its first freshness. She makes her adults as fey as her juveniles so that no contrast is possible and the evening suffers from its single insistent note. Sometimes she herself doesn't seem to know where her fantasy leaves off and where her real world begins. 37

With three major samplings now having been on exhibition it seems reasonably safe to say that there is almost unanimous opinion concerning Mary Chase's deficiencies as a dramatic constructionist. Yet in almost as many instances the critics chose to ignore these deficiencies and dwell rather upon the total effect of her plays. Wolcott Gibbs, for example, roguishly observes, "This [Bernardine], in spite of a laxity of construction at least equalling that of a bygone trifle called Season In The Sun, seems to me an extraordinarily funny and enduring piece" 38 And the usually dour George Jean Nathan, currently over his anti-ANTA spleen, remarks with his accustomed verbosity:

Every once in awhile a play comes along that doesn't stand a chance with drama criticism but that nevertheless somehow turns out to be more interesting and entertaining than some others do, which proves anything you want to make of it.

37. Walter F. Kerr, New York Herald-Tribune, October 17, 1952

38. Wolcott Gibbs, The New Yorker, XXVIII (October 25, 1952), p. 74

An example is Mary Chase's Bernardine.³⁹

T. H. Wenning, writing in Newsweek, begins; "The chances are that only the author of Harvey and Mrs. McThing could get away with anything as haphazard and slap-happy as this new comedy."⁴⁰ One reaction to Mrs. Chase's presentations on Broadway seems to stand out above all else: "Mary Chase, you are completely impossible as a playwright, but we love you just the same!"

One of the qualities that trails itself through all of the major plays of Mrs. Chase is the essential nature of the woman herself. It can clearly be seen, time and again, that she was deeply impressed by her mother's caution to "never be unkind or indifferent to a person others say is crazy." Each of her plays appears to be warm and tolerant memorials to the "off-horse." In Harvey her concern was with the tippler his nearest relatives avowed was crazy and should be committed to the hospital. In Mrs. McThing her sympathies were always on the side of the little boy whose mother did not let him grow up as a normal human being, and the little girl who did not fit into her son's artificially-made world. The proof being that she settled the play in their favors.

39. George Jean Nathan, Theatre Arts, XXXVI (December, 1952), pp. 26-28

40. T. H. Wenning, Newsweek, XXXX (October 27, 1952), p. 78

And, in Bernardine, Mrs. Chase again concerns herself with the "crazy" youth (i.e. the one whom parents cannot understand) and again solves in his favor by recognizing that the gang with which a boy associates may sometimes be more understanding of his problems than his presumably wiser and all-knowing parents. Her acute perception of the distance parents are from their children, and vice versa, is noted in these bitter lines from Wormy, and the reply he gets from Beau:

Wormy : She's always half a mile behind me. When I wanted a car, she bought me a tool chest. When I want a girl, she buys me a dog. Drove me out to the country yesterday. 'Buford,' she says, 'pick one out.' I'm dreaming of babes and she's pointing to dachshunds. Well, nuts, he was the last straw. I made up my mind I was sneaking out and getting a date tonight if it kills me. (He walks back and forth, frowning, his hands in his pockets. The boys watch him and listen placidly. Now he stops and pounds the table with his fist.) And top this for humiliation! My old lady has got a date tonight and I can't get one.

Beau : (Seriously) Now, listen Wormy, don't you believe it. I've watched these old characters. They don't have dates. They have seating arrangements. They get into the same car, ride to the same place, and get out. And they do it alphabetically, too. Your old lady probably filled out an application blank that came in the mail. But she hasn't got a date, Wormy, don't let her fool you.

Can it be that a playwright as perceptive as this, at once defining and illustrating the "chasm between the generations" in two short, deft speeches, has no need for any great amounts of dramaturgical talent? Perhaps it is that Mary Chase, speaking to us through the precise contrivances of a "well-made play," could not speak as clearly and as artlessly as she has done here and in other of her plays. Or, perhaps it is in her dramaturgical innocence and artlessness where lies her charm and her appeal. If that be so (as this writer suspects it to be), then join now with the majority of critics who never seem to cease reminding us, whenever a Mary Chase play appears on Broadway; "As a playwright, Mary Chase, you are impossible -- but all the same, we love you!"

While Harvey continued to enchant theatergoers on 48th Street year after year there was arising on the theater horizon a new name that was to challenge all of the playwrights then working in the theater. With Death Of A Salesman Arthur Miller became a writer to be listened to, a writer with a message. This study turns now to consider the man who brought tragedy in the theater to the common man.

CHAPTER V

ARTHUR MILLER'S TRAGEDY OF THE COMMON MAN

On the stage, in motion pictures, in the new literature of television -- this has become the era of the "common man." Whether it be William Inge depositing a bus load of common humanity at a cross-road in Kansas, Robert Anderson populating a homely backyard with a wrangling family, Hollywood filling the screens of the country with adaptations on the "common man" theme from other sources of the drama (East Of Eden, Seven Year Itch, Marty), or Paddy Cheyevsky assembling his shirtsleeved Bronx families in front of the television cameras -- the "common man" is evidently taking over our dramatic literature today. Aside from the recent tendency of the motion picture industry, for reasons of its own no doubt, to glorify the uncommonness of the stars of the entertainment world (The Jolson Story, The Eddie Cantor Story, Love Me Or Leave Me), the principal trend in the drama today appears to be a preoccupation with the persons of no distinguishing talents or mentality.

With the 1945-55 decade so close, from the perspective of history, to see the pattern of the

theater in a clear, dispassionate light would be difficult. As literature does not earn its right to the name merely by topping the best-seller list, neither is dramatic literature to be fairly judged by the line at the boxoffice nor by the quick judgments of newspaper and periodical critics. The dramatic titans of the decade can only be permanently singled out when history has had time to choose at leisure.

But if, for the immediate present, a tentative choice of contemporary giants in the arena of playwriting is permitted there would likely be few dissenters to the position that the honor can only be shared by Tennessee Williams and by Arthur Miller. And so great is the influence of the latter, despite the fact that he has had only four plays produced on Broadway in the ten year period, that if history does recognize the claims of Mr. Miller to theatrical greatness it will also conceivably credit him as well for ushering in the contemporary era of the "common man" in dramatic literature.

The "common man" is, of course, no new subject in the drama. He has been the focus of constant study by countless playwrights for generations past. Most of Ibsen's dramas studied the "common man" in minute and tragic detail. Eugene O'Neill populated

almost all of his plays with the "common man." Clifford Odet's dramas of protest dealt almost exclusively with the "common man." If this period is to become the decade of the "common man" in the drama no one man may claim to be his spokesman, but rather it will be because of the frequency of this type of drama inspired largely by the successes of Mr. Miller.

"Nothing succeeds like success" is the thought expressed in an old adage. Arthur Miller has had many imitators but no equals of his successes. How to account for the uniqueness that is the art of Arthur Miller? In this chapter an attempt will be made to examine some of the factors that well may, as time goes by, make the name of Arthur Miller one to be reckoned with in the literature of the American drama.

Arthur Miller is a child of the city that now nourishes him and his art. He was born on East 112th Street in Manhattan (an area that has since become a part of Harlem) on October 17, 1915. Arthur was one of the three children of a ladies coat manufacturer and shop owner. His older brother, Kermit, is now a salesman and his sister Joan is known professionally as Joan Copeland, an actress who has appeared on Broadway in Detective Story. Their father was

financially comfortable until 1929 when he lost his business and most of his savings. The family moved to the Coney Island area of Brooklyn and there, according to Arthur, the house was always filled with relatives and most of them were salesmen. No random invention of the mind made Arthur Miller chose a salesman to be the central tragic figure in his greatest drama.

Arthur was not a good student in high school. When, after finally graduating from high school, he decided he wanted to enter the University of Michigan, he was quickly refused admittance because of his poor scholarship. Two years later, however, he was accepted. In 1953 the playwright wrote in an article about his college days at Michigan:

My first affection for the University of Michigan was due, simply, to their accepting me. They had already turned me down twice because my academic record (I had flunked algebra three times in my Brooklyn high school) was so low as to be practically invisible, but the Dean reversed himself after two letters in which I wrote that since working for two years -- in a warehouse at \$15 a week -- I had turned into a much more serious fellow. He said he would give me a try, but I had better make some grades. I could not conceive of a Dean at Columbia or Harvard doing that¹

The future playwright entered the University of Michigan in 1934. The four years to graduation were

1. Arthur Miller, "University Of Michigan," Holiday, XIV (December, 1953), p. 68

not easy ones for him. In addition to having some difficulties with his studies he worked his way through the University, partly by taking care of white mice in a University laboratory and partly by washing dishes for his meals. Nevertheless, he took part in campus activities and was swept up in the tide of radical-liberal ideas that stirred the minds of the college generation of the lean thirties. More important for Miller, however, were the campus Avery Hopwood Awards, established by the playwright who had amassed a fortune by writing such bedroom farces as Getting Gertie's Garter. The Awards were for outstanding work by campus playwrights, poets, and story writers. Miller won the student playwright award in his Sophomore and Junior years but the Senior award was refused him. This was a great disappointment to the struggling young playwright since it was a much more remunerative award than the other two he had received. The Sophomore and Junior awards were \$250 apiece, the Senior award \$1250. Undaunted, he took the same play that was refused the award, entered it in The Theatre Guild Bureau of New Plays competition the following year and won, a victory which paid him -- \$1250.

He graduated with a B. A. Degree in 1938, so financially exhausted and jobless he had to hitch

a ride home. While still at the University he met a Michigan insurance salesman's daughter, Mary Slattery. Two years after his graduation -- still without finances -- they were married. They now own a brownstone house in Brooklyn and have a young son and daughter.

During the war Miller wrote numerous radio scripts for bond drives, recruiting services and other patriotic causes. He did not like writing for radio, however, once describing it "... like playing a scene in a dark closet." ² He also did a brief bit in Hollywood, for which he also has a cryptic definition: "Like swimming in a sea of gumdrops" ³

But playwriting was his first love and in 1944 he was able to see his first play on the New York stage. The title was not appropriate. The Man Who Had All The Luck failed miserably and closed after four performances, an inauspicious beginning for the man who was shortly to be hailed for writing the modern American tragic masterpiece.

George Jean Nathan, who oft-times displays an uncanny knack for not being able to recognize promising

2. Time, LIII (February 21, 1949), p. 75

3. Ibid.

talent in the theater, had a word or two to say about The Man Who Had All The Luck and it's author:

The author's theme was the venerable one relating as to whether man's fate is preordained or whether it rests in his own hands. His treatment of it was so diffuse, disorderly and opaque that it was often impossible to decipher just what he was driving at. As is sometimes the eccentricity in such circumstances, this difficulty in understanding clearly what he had in mind however led some people to mistake the fog for the veil of a prophet and the author himself for one very possibly gifted with an enormous esoteric profundity. What he seemed to others, including the present recorder, was simply a very bad tyro playwright with but a single thought in his head, and that the entirely obvious one above noted⁴

By way of direct comparison, Burton Rascoe said in the World-Telegram; "The Man Who Had All The Luck is not only a touching, realistic play, with some especially fine characterizations in it, but ... a play with a challenging new idea in it -- something very rare in the theater"⁵

The play, simply stated, is about a man who had all the luck -- who gets everything he wants in life apparently without having to work for it. And when his brother, who has been working all his life to become a big league baseball pitcher, is turned down by a Detroit Tiger baseball scout, the man who had

4. George Jean Nathan, The Theatre Book Of The Year, 1944-1945 (New York: Knopf, 1945), p. 171

5. Burton Rascoe, New York World-Telegram, November 24, 1944

all the luck begins to worry about being a "jellyfish" whose destiny lies out of his own control. The play is resolved by the playwright by demonstrating that the man who had all the luck did not achieve his success by luck alone but with a combination of initiative and industry.

The playwright was of the opinion that the production was a falsification of the play's intended values. He had written the play as a tragedy. It was produced as a folk comedy. But part of the blame he accepts himself. There was so much scenery in the play that Miller felt his trend of dramatic thought might have got lost among the shifting scenery of rehearsals. "For the first four weeks," he remarks ruefully, "we rehearsed the stage hands. Then it was too late to rehearse the actors." ⁶ Since that unfortunate debut he has written plays requiring a minimum of scenery.

John Chapman, of the Daily News, also presented a point of view sharply at variance with that expressed by Mr. Nathan. Writes Mr. Chapman:

Arthur Miller, the newcomer who wrote the play, has done all his paying up right off the bat. His first offering tries a lot of things -- too many by far -- and most of them flop. And now I

6. Robert Sylvester, "Brooklyn Boy Makes Good," Saturday Evening Post, CCXXII (July 16, 1949), p. 27

hope Mr. Miller will go right back to work writing another piece, for he has a sense of theatre and a real if undeveloped way of making stage characters talk and act human⁷

For critic Howard Barnes The Man Who Had All The Luck was "... incredibly turbid in its writing and stuttering in its execution ... the show writhes through an unpleasant, unexciting and downright mystifying maze"⁸ For Ward Morehouse, "... Arthur Miller's first play ... reveals sincerity of purpose and some inept playwriting. It is an ambling piece, strangely confused at times and rather tiresome for a considerable portion of the evening"⁹ To The Times' critic, "... the author and director -- Arthur Miller and Joseph Fields -- at least have been trying to do something away from the theatre's usual stencils. But ... they have not edited out the confusion of the script nor its somewhat jumbled philosophies, nor have they kept it from running over into the ridiculous now and then"¹⁰

Arthur Miller did not immediately heed the advice of critic Chapman. Neither did he give up after the

7. John Chapman, New York Daily News, November 24, 1944

8. Howard Barnes, New York Herald-Tribune, November 24, 1944

9. Ward Morehouse, New York Sun, November 24, 1944

10. Lewis Nichols, New York Times, November 24, 1944

hope Mr. Miller will go right back to work writing another piece, for he has a sense of theatre and a real if undeveloped way of making stage characters talk and act human

For critic Howard Barnes The New York Times ALL THE Luck was "... incredibly turfed in the writing and stuttering in its execution ... the slow stumbles through an unpleasant, unexciting and downright mystifying maze" ⁷ For Marc Krossman, "... Arthur Miller's first play ... reveals sincerity of purpose and some inept playwriting. It is an odd piece, strangely confused at times and rather tiresome for a considerable portion of the evening ... To The Times' critic, "... the author and director -- Arthur Miller and Joseph Fields -- at least have been trying to do something away from the beaten usual stencils. But ... they have not escaped the confusion of the script nor the several ... philosophies, nor have they kept it from falling into the ridiculous now and then" ⁸

Arthur Miller did not immediately react to the criticism of critic Chapman. Neither did he give any response.

7. John Chapman, New York Daily News

8. Howard Barnes, New York Herald-Examiner

and More

Sun

ev ture,

scathing criticism of Mr. Nathan. In 1944, the same year of the production of The Man Who Had All The Luck, there appeared in the publication The Best One Act Plays Or 1944 a one-act play by Mr. Miller entitled That They May Win, written prior to his first Broadway production. In the same year there was published a repertorial piece by him about Army camps entitled Situation Normal, which was warmly praised by the critics.

In 1945 another short Miller novel entitled Focus, a bitter and angry story about anti-Semitism, was published, received good reviews, and sold 90,000 copies. Focus was a story very close to Mr. Miller since he had grown up in an area where racial antagonisms had occasionally manifested itself in its more unpleasant aspects and he has since made a practise, ever after his literary and dramatic successes, of working at lowly jobs in order to continue to understand the problems of the common man. Focus had even further personal meaning for Miller as he himself was born of Jewish parentage.

Focus, like all of Miller's works, is deeply and personally concerned with the little man -- in this instance the victim of outside pressures that are beyond his ability to control, or even to understand. In a glowing review of the book in The

Saturday Review Of Literature, Harrison Smith writes, in part:

It is a terrifying book because the author is sincere and eloquently dramatic, and because its background is a humble block of identical neat houses and the protagonist is a timid, negative man, frightened of everything, his job, women, his own thoughts, and especially of the racial tensions he is daily aware of everywhere he goes¹¹

In Focus Miller was somewhat overstating his case, a tendency he was to curb, if not eliminate, as he matured as an artist. But crusader he was to continue to be and this novel well illustrated his later habit of drawing his pictures rather heavily in black and white, a trend particularly noticeable in his plays All My Sons and The Crucible.

Novel writing, however, did not satisfy this man of the theater and soon he was at work again on another play. Precarious though a living might be in the theater -- he described it as "a sort of floating crap game"¹² -- it was henceforth to become his principal medium of expression. And the "very bad tyro playwright" was shortly to be heard as a voice to be hearkened to in the American theater.

All My Sons, more directly and more piercingly than any of his other dramatic works up to now, is a

11. Harrison Smith, Saturday Review Of Literature, XXVIII (November 17, 1945), p. 11

12. Time, LIII (February 21, 1949), p. 75

bitter protest against the perverted nature of the individual. The Crucible, while no less bitter and no less concerned with perversion, is a protest of a similar nature against society and hence, no doubt, lacks the personal element that makes identification easier for the member of the audience of All My Sons. On the other hand, The Crucible has a powerful contemporary parallel that is lacking in Miller's first successful drama. War profiteering did come into the news briefly, but the problem seemed more like the echo of the previous world war when controls were less stringent and fortunes more readily made.

In 1953, however, when The Crucible premiered on Broadway, the people were considerably more exercised over such questions as "guilt by denunciation," "guilt by association," etc., springing directly out of the political and social phenomenon known euphemistically as "McCarthyism." The appeal of The Crucible seemed to lay principally in this preoccupation of the public with the 1953 version of the 1692 Salem "witch trials." John Proctor, however, never becomes the focal point of The Crucible in the same way that the father, Joe Keller, dominates All My Sons. One of the lessons that can be derived from these two dramas, both protests, both high drama, and both ending tragically, would appear

to be the gain in audience interest that can be made by the playwright when the drama revolves around an individual rather than parallel situations and social causation, as in The Crucible.

The playwright, however, disavows the intent of drawing parallels in his writing of The Crucible. On one occasion he is quoted as saying:

I am not pressing an historical allegory here, and I have even eliminated certain striking similarities from The Crucible which may have started the audience to drawing such an allegory. For instance, the Salemites believed that the surrounding Indians, who had never been converted to Christianity, were in alliance with the witches, who were acting as a Fifth Column for them within the town. It was even thought that the outbreak of witchcraft was the last attack by the Devil, who was being pressed into the wilderness by the expanding colony. Some might have equated the Indians with Russians and the local witches with Communists. My intent and interest is wider and I think deeper than this. From my first acquaintance with the story I was struck hard by the breathtaking heroism of certain of the victims who displayed an almost frightening personal integrity. It seemed to me that the best part of this country was made of such stuff, and I had a strong desire to celebrate them and to raise them out of historic dust. ¹³

On another occasion he makes an oblique denial to possible impending controversy over the play:

Yes, there may be repercussions on this play. There may be those who will think that it was deliberately written because of the present period through which we are living. But that doesn't matter. Even if there are repercussions I don't

13. Henry Hewes, "Arthur Miller And How He Went To The Devil," Saturday Review Of Literature, XXXVI (January 31, 1953), p. 25

worry. I have had repercussions before. My own attitude is that others have a right to their opinion and I have a right to mine. ¹⁴

But one is not so sure of these denials and half denials when Miller writes, in the printed version of The Crucible: "When one rises above the individual villainy displayed, one can only pity them all, just as we shall be pitied some day. It is still impossible for man to organize his social life without repressions, and the balance has yet to be struck between order and freedom." ¹⁵

Perhaps playwright Miller is a little confused about what he has wrought? And what about the critics? Says one; "Neither Mr. Miller nor his audiences are unaware of certain similarities between the perversions of justice then and today" ¹⁶ Another says; "... those who may have expected Miller, an admitted liberal, to make a political parable of this play -- as he did with Ibsen's An Enemy Of The People -- will have to read into The Crucible their own implications, for the piece is just what it sets out to be" ¹⁷ Again, one of

14. Lewis Funke, "Thoughts On A Train Bound For Wilmington," New York Sunday Times Drama Section, January 18, 1953, p. 3

15. The Crucible (New York: The Viking Press, 1953), p. 7

16. Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, January 23, 1953

17. John Chapman, New York Daily News, January 23, 1953

the reviewer's writes; "Any resemblance between those dark days (1692) and current events is strictly intentional. But Miller, for the most part, allows his audience to call the turn" ¹⁸ As contrasted, perhaps, with this reviewer's opinion; "Some may try to read into it more than we suspect is there. If there are deep implications in the script for modern playgoers, we failed to find them. Just take it as a stirring melodrama acted to the hilt." ¹⁹

Since this is basically a political question there may be noted, simply in passing, that the two positive quotations were from publications that have opposed the movement called "McCarthyism," the two negative quotations from newspapers generally favorable to the McCarthy point of view.

But that, to be sure, is not the point of significance in the discussion. The particular point to be observed is that, in The Crucible, Arthur Miller is dealing more with society and a particular social phenomena and less with the individual (i.e. the "common man") in his social environment, as was true of his three preceding plays. He is still Miller the advocate, the crusader against the injustices

18. T. H. Wenning, Newsweek, XXXXI (February 2, 1953), p. 68

19. Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, January 23, 1953

of the social system -- but Miller with a different point of departure.

To the minds of some critics this change in point of departure made The Crucible a less moving play than All My Sons and Death Of A Salesman. One critic, for example, sees it in the following manner:

In The Crucible, which opened at the Martin Beck Thursday, he seems to me to be taking a step backward into the mechanical parable, into the sort of play which lives not in the warmth of humbly observed human souls but in the idealogical heat of polemic ... 20

Another writes:

Perhaps the trouble is that Mr. Miller has approached his theme more interested in the ideas it contains than in the people it concerns. If, wisely, he does not hammer home the ever obvious parallels, he nonetheless fails to get below the surface of his subject 21

A third critic has still another diagnosis of the play's ills:

... At more ambitious levels, The Crucible falls short, for one thing because it is much more interested in manifestations than motives, more preoccupied of the how of Salem than the why. It is what the story stresses, more than the story itself, that reveals its bifocal nature, its linking of "witch-hunting" past and present, its absorption with parallels -- despite the axiom that parallel lines never meet. Moral indignation rather than insight has combed the facts; and in the end The Crucible not only

20. Walter F. Kerr, New York Herald-Tribune, January 23, 1953

21. John Mason Brown, "Seeing Things," Saturday Review Of Literature, XXXVI (February 14, 1953), p. 42

omits something from its picture of Salem, but takes the life out of its inhabitants ... the material seems there not for the sake of the play, but the play for the sake of the material. 22

This writer, who has witnessed the Broadway production of The Crucible twice, would make a vigorous dissent to the gist of these opinions. Granting that the consummate artistry of Death Of A Salesman has not been equalled in The Crucible, and granting further that the idea of personal identification so completely achieved in Salesman is here lacking, yet this writer cannot agree that a drama of ideas necessarily makes for a less interesting play than a drama of human beings, and certainly not so in this instance. Least of all can this be said when the ideas the play parallels currently generates so much heat and passion and possess so much social significance. To suggest, as Mr. Brown has suggested, that "Perhaps the trouble is that Mr. Miller has approached his theme more interested in the ideas it contains than in the people it concerns ..." is, as it appears to this writer, much the same as suggesting that Ibsen and Shaw wrote less interesting plays because they were more concerned with ideas than with people. Few, to be sure, will accuse Shaw of being disinterested

22. Louis Kronenberger, Time, LXI (February 2, 1953), p. 48

in his characters (moreso, perhaps, than Ibsen). He has drawn some powerful portraits. But few, likewise, will not admit that Shaw is much more concerned with ideas, if the indication of this thought is nothing more than the long prefaces he wrote to his plays. Where Miller's play has, perhaps, differed from those of Shaw's that do deal with ideas is that Miller has brought his forth right in the heat of high passion when tempers are taut and temperatures are torrid, whereas Shaw's plays, like his political philosophy, tend to take the long view of a controversy. As a result the pace of Shaw's plays are more leisurely, the conversations more voluminous and witty, the climaxes not so explosive, and the experience of witnessing the play not so physically exhausting (save sometimes for their extraordinary length). Nonetheless, the practise of condemning a play merely for being a drama of ideas seems a rather specious basis for criticism. To this writer it seems to suggest a subconscious thought on the part of the critics somewhat to the effect that "Mr. Miller was so enormously successful in using the individual approach in his first two plays so why does he have to spoil it now?" Or, possibly equally subconsciously, "This liberal Miller approach, as expressed in The Crucible, just does not correspond with my way of thinking."

There is a problem for even the ostensibly unpolitical drama critic to keep himself aloof from the impact of society, including politics. The continual awareness of the critics to the political parallels in playwright Miller's story has already been noted. A further example might also be noted in the use of the term "an admitted liberal," by John Chapman (page 214) in his criticism of the play. The implication seems to be that the public should be especially wary of a playwright who "admits" he is a "liberal," but whatever the implication may be the point is that there is a general awareness of the political features of our society -- even among drama critics.

The further point being, of course, that Miller is not simply dealing with polemical abstractions when he is concerned with the ills of society. A social point of view, socially oriented, is no less valid and interesting a point of view as material of the theater than an individual one, personally oriented. The weakness of The Crucible, as this writer sees it (if weaknesses they can so be judged) is, first, that it represents a minority view of that part of the public which was aroused by the questions concerned and, second, that it suffers in the constant comparisons that are made with it to

the playwright's earlier Death Of A Salesman. In this writer's opinion The Crucible represents a step forward in Miller's maturation as an artist in that he has advanced from a limited landscape to a more expansive one, that he has not allowed himself to be stereotyped in a single mode of drama (viz. the frustrated "common man") and that in this latter respect alone he has gone one step beyond the one other eminent playwright of his generation, Tennessee Williams.

This capacity of Arthur Miller's to make giant strides in his development as an artist from one drama to the next is the one big factor that establishes him as an artist to be considered seriously. From the "bad tyro playwright" getting off to a very faltering start in The Man Who Had All The Luck to the Drama Critics Award winning All My Sons in three short years was an amazing advance. But when, two years later, Miller came up with Death Of A Salesman, he compelled even the urbane drama critic of the New York Times to admit that "Two season's ago Mr. Miller's All My Sons looked like the work of an honest and able playwright. In comparison with the new drama, that seems like a contrived play" ²³

23. Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, February 11, 1949

There can be general agreement that, as a work of dramatic art, The Crucible is not a step forward. Death Of A Salesman would be difficult to top as an artistic work. But, in this writer's opinion at least, it does represent a big advance for playwright Miller as an artist. He has expanded his horizons and has brought to his works a new and sharply defined awareness of the contemporary world. Out of this latest of Mr. Miller's productions is certain to come drama that would not so naturally derive from his three previous plays. Since The Crucible is a play that represents the playwright in a more mature form and dealing with a more contemporary theme, this discussion has turned first to his latest work on the stage.

Arthur Miller is a complex playwright. His plots are never simple, his themes are never single, his development is never straight to the point but gets there by rather devious means. As a consequence, when we study Miller there is more of an inclination to be concerned with his techniques whereas, as one critic points out in his criticism of The Crucible; "It would be all too easy, script in hand, to point to weak spots. The inadequacy of particular lines, and characters, is of less interest, however, than

the mentality from which they came. It is the mentality of the unreconstructed liberal" ²⁴

The critical reception of All My Sons illustrates better (no doubt because it is less skillfully constructed) the sharp differentiation between Miller's technique, on the one hand, and his mentality on the other hand.

With respect to his technique, one critic finds the following to be wanting:

All My Sons is more involved than it needs to be. Effective as it is when seen, its central theme seems somewhat false and unresolved in retrospect. There are times, too, when Mr. Miller overdresses the phrasing of his dialogue; when, on the lips of those who are supposed to utter them, his sudden literary lines are as out of place as evening clothes on the streets at noon. ²⁵

Critic Brown does not illustrate his remarks but if he were to do so it is likely that he would select such a passage as the following, from the beginning of the third act, as an example of "overdressing the phrasing":

Mother : I always had the feeling that in the back of his head, Chris ... almost knew. I didn't think it would be such a shock.

Jim : You don't know your own son. Chris would never know how to live with a thing like that. It takes a certain talent ... for lying. You have it, and I do. But not him.

24. Eric Bentley, The New Republic, CXXVIII (February 16, 1953), p. 22

25. John Mason Brown, "Seeing Things," Saturday Review Of Literature, XXX (March 1, 1947), p. 23

Mother : What do you mean -- he's not coming back?

Jim : Oh, no, he'll come back. We all come back, Kate. These private little revolutions always die. The compromise is always made. In a peculiar way. Frank is right -- every man does have a star. The star of one's honesty. And you spend your life groping for it, but once its out it never lights again. I don't think he went very far. He probably just wanted to be alone to watch his star go out.

Mother : Just as long as he comes back.

Jim : I wish he wouldn't, Kate. One year I simply took off, went to New Orleans; for two months I lived on bananas and milk, and studied a certain disease. It was beautiful. And then she came, and she cried. And I went back home with her. And now I live in the usual darkness; I can't find myself; it's even hard sometimes to remember the kind of man I wanted to be. I'm a good husband; Chris is a good son -- he'll come back.

Another criticism of Miller's playwriting technique in All My Sons reads:

Mr. Miller's characters are conceived with understanding and sympathy, not only in their own milieu, but in the broader frame indicated by his narrative. His dialogue is pithy and his action has the force and dramatic inevitability of characters forging fulfillment in the fires of conflict in themselves and the situation into which they are forced by specific circumstances. The result is trenchant drama²⁶

Examples of pithy dialogue can be found throughout the whole play. A single quotable example can be found

26. William Beyer, School and Society, LXV (April 5, 1947), p. 250

in a scene half way through the second act when Ann's brother, George, has come to denounce Joe Keller for the jailing of Ann's and his father:

Chris : How about some grape juice? Mother made it especially for you.

George : (With forced appreciation) Good old Kate, remembered my grape juice.

Chris : You drank enough of it in this house. How've you been, George? -- Sit down.

George : (In a breathless way, he never stops moving) It takes a minute. (He looks around) It seems impossible.

Chris : What?

George : I'm back here.

Chris : Say, you've gotten nervous, haven't you?

George : Ya, toward the end of the day. What're you, big executive now?

Chris : Just kind of medium. How's the law?

George : (Laughs in a strained way) I don't know. When I was studying in the hospital it seemed sensible, but outside there doesn't seem to be much of a law. The trees got thick, didn't they? (Points to the stump) What's that?

Chris : Blew down last night. We had it there for Larry. You know.

George : Why, afraid you'll forget him?

Chris : Kind of a remark is that?

Ann : (breaking in) When did you start wearing a hat? (She goes to him with the glass)

George : (Discovers the hat in his hand)
Today. (directly at her, his fury
almost bursting out) From now on
I decided to look like a lawyer
anyway. (Holds it up to her.) Don't
you recognize it?

Ann : Why? Where ...?

George : Your father's. (Tosses it into a
chair) He asked me to wear it.

Ann : (out of duty, but fearfully) ... How
is he?

George : He got smaller. (Laughs with his
lips shut)

Ann : Smaller?

George : Yeah, little. Holds out his hand to
measure) He's a little man. That's
what happens to suckers, you know.
It's good I went to him in time --
another year there'd be nothing left
but his smell.

Chris : (with an edge of combativeness) What's
the matter, George, what's the trouble?

George : (Puts down the glass. A smile comes
onto his face, a sardonic grin) The
trouble. The trouble is when you
make suckers out of people once you
shouldn't try to do it twice.

Chris : What does that mean?

George : (to Ann) You're not married yet, are
you?

Ann : (frightened) George, will you sit down
and stop being ...

George : Are you married yet?

Ann : No, I'm not married yet.

George : You're not going to marry him.

Ann : (bridling) Why aren't I going to
marry him?

George : Because his father destroyed your family.

(Pause, Ann does not move. Chris begins.)

Chris : Now look, George ...

George : Cut it short, Chris. Tell her to come home with me. Let's not argue, you know what I've got to say.

Chris : George, you don't want to be the voice of God, do you?

George : I'm ...

Chris : That's been your trouble all your life, George, you dive into things. What kind of a statement is that to make? You're a big boy, now.

George : (as though -- you're damned right) I'm a big boy now.

Chris : Don't come bulling in here. If you've got something to say, be civilized about it. You haven't even said hello to me.

George : (as though astonished) Don't civilize me!

Chris : Are you going to talk like a grown man or aren't you?

Ann : (quickly, to forestall an outburst from George) Sit down, dear. Don't be angry, what's the matter?

The scene is not alone illustrative for its examples of pithy dialogue -- "Why, afraid you'll forget him?," "Yeah, little. He's a little man. That's what happens to suckers, you know," and "You're not going to marry him," -- but also perfectly illustrative of how Miller has developed a short scene of a tensionless

"How about some grape juice?" at the opening to an explosive "Sit down ... Don't be angry, what's the matter?" The reader has some small advantage over the viewer in this respect by being supplied along the way with verbal signs of these growing tensions (e. g. "laughs in a strained way," "his fury almost bursting out," "out of duty, but fearfully," "with an edge of combativeness,") but these, of course, are made known on the stage by skillful acting.

Another critic, testing Miller's technique and finding it wanting, has this to say; "All My Sons ... has a theatrical force that covers a multitude of sins. Playwright Miller ... tends to overload his plot and overheat his atmosphere. His writing is uneven, some of his main characters are sometimes unreal, and most of his minor characters are at all times unnecessary" 27

But however much the critics deplored Miller's technique (and most of them agreed that there were still many things left to be desired with it) they were almost equally unanimous in the opinion that what he has to say, and the enthusiasm and gusto he says it with, offsets the deficiencies in his technique. For example, the critic quoted above goes on to say:

27. Time, IL (February 10, 1947), p. 68

All My Sons is social criticism, but in moral terms; it clearly insists on individual responsibility. It also attacks the mind wholly by way of the emotions. And with its unblushing penchant for theater -- tense atmosphere, partly timed revelations and whopping climaxes -- it is a compelling rather than an entirely convincing play 28

Another critic speaks for the critical fraternity by observing that:

Arthur Miller ... is someone, so the reviewers agree to a man, who ought to be encouraged in his work. He is as honest, ardent, and middling eloquent playwright. He chooses strong and significant themes, and he is not afraid of emotion ... I subscribe to the notion that Mr. Miller should be given plenty of head room and highballed along the track 29

Arthur Miller was "highballed along the track," but not even critic Lardner could have foreseen the tremendous progress the playwright was to make in such a short period of time. Was it intense application of his talents that brought about this almost perfect contribution to the literature of the drama? Miller says that he wrote Death Of A Salesman in a six-week spurt, but that it had been stirring in his head for nearly ten years. 30 Assuming this to be correct the conclusion must be that this play is an amazing example of the application of genius for it is in the writing, as much as the conception, that the talent of the playwright is evident. The play's terrific impact on the stage is the result of near perfection in the

28. Ibid., p. 70

29. John Lardner, The New Yorker, XXII (February 8, 1947), p. 50

30. Time, LIII (February 21, 1949), p. 75

many facets of production -- a majestically conceived idea, consummate writing, finished acting, perceptive direction, skillful staging. Arthur Miller's play received all of these things from various talented hands and the result, on that memorable evening of February 10, 1949, was a landmark long to be remembered in the American theater. A new giant had arrived on the theater horizon.

The producers of Death Of A Salesman were so enthusiastic about the play after they read it that they were able to find eighty investors without any trouble -- a rare event in the theater world. Many of the investors put up money without even reading the play. A few, however, expressed their disapproval of the word "Death" in the title. One of them, a well-known Broadway producer and theater owner, even offered to have a poll taken before the play's opening to prove his contention that the play was ominously named. Miller and the play's producers stood firm. The play opened with the original Miller title, Death Of A Salesman. The investor's fears proved groundless.

"The title of Arthur Miller's fine play is exact:" writes the critic of The Commonweal, "depicting, as it does, an American tragedy." ³¹ Another says, "The play

31. Kappo Phelan, The Commonweal, IL (March 4, 1949), p. 520

is perfectly titled: Willy is that specific modern product, the salesman who believes that the approach, the personal angle is everything" 32 And a third even more explicitly states; "It's title has the virtue of being not only striking and provocative, but of telling forthrightly what the drama is about" 33 A fourth proclaims; "The title is superbly explicit" 34 Clearly, even some of Broadway's most astute investors missed this one by some considerable distance -- as Broadway producers are not infrequently known to do.

Arthur Miller is quoted as saying, "I am interested in tragedy. I want to discover the ordinary man in the extremes of crisis." 35 In a further extension of this remark the playwright has written a preface for Death Of A Salesman entitled Tragedy And The Common Man from which a few excerpts will help to illuminate a discussion of the play:

I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were. On the face of it this ought to be obvious in the light of modern psychiatry, which bases its analysis upon classic formulations, such as the Oedipus and Orestes complexes, for instances, which were enacted by royal beings, but which apply to everyone in similar emotional situations.

32. Louis Kronenberger, Time, LIII (February 21, 1949), p. 74

33. Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, February 11, 1949

34. Howard Barnes, New York Herald-Tribune, February 11, 1949

35. Quoted in Time, LIII (February 21, 1949), p. 75

More simply, when the question of tragedy in art is not at issue, we never hesitate to attribute to the well placed and the exalted the very same mental processes as the lowly ...

As a general rule, to which there may be exceptions unknown to me, I think the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing -- his sense of personal dignity. From Orestes to Hamlet, Medea to MacBeth, the underlying struggle is that of the individual attempting to gain his "rightful" position in society ... Tragedy, then, is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly ...

... the "tragic flaw" ... is not necessarily a weakness. The flaw, or crack in the character, is really nothing -- and need be nothing, but his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status. Only the passive, only those who accept their lot without active retaliation are "flawless." Most of us are in that category ...

Insistence upon the rank of the tragic hero, or the so-called nobility of his character, is really but a clinging to the outward forms of tragedy. If rank or nobility of character was indispensable, then it would follow that the problems of those with rank were the particular problems of tragedy. But surely the right of one monarch to capture the domain from another no longer raises our passions, nor are our concepts of justice what they were to the mind of an Elizabethan king ...

If it is true that tragedy is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly, his destruction in the attempt posits a wrong or an evil in his environment. And this is precisely the morality of tragedy and its lesson. The discovery of the moral law, which is what the enlightenment of tragedy consists of, is not the discovery of some abstract or metaphysical quantity ...

Tragedy enlightens -- and it must, in that it points the heroic finger at the enemy of man's

freedom. The thrust for freedom is the quality in tragedy which exalts. The revolutionary questioning of the stable environment is what terrifies. In no way is the common man debarred from such thoughts or such actions ...

It is time, I think, that we who are without kings, took up this bright thread of our history and followed it to the only place it can lead in our time -- the heart and spirit of the average man. 36

According to the classical Aristotelian concept of tragedy, the characters portrayed must have their basis in moral goodness of the heroic order and to whom misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty. It is this concept that has led one observer to remark:

Great tragic drama does not arise easily from a democratic society. This is because our democratic heroes are, generally speaking, our equals; there is lacking that godliness or kingliness -- that awesome "magnitude" of character -- that is inherent in the greatest dramatic tragedies of the race. Occasionally, however, democratic society produces something that ranks as tragedy in all but the above respect; and this has recently been achieved by Arthur Miller, whose Death Of A Salesman has electrified Broadway and swept the boxoffice clean for months ahead ... 37

Perhaps, in the light of the preceding definitions of tragedy, it would be well to consider Death Of A Salesman and all successive tragedies of this nature dealing with the "common man" the "New American Tragedy."

36. Arthur Miller, "Tragedy And The Common Man," New York Times, February 27, 1949

37. Prefatory Note to A. Howard Fuller's "A Salesman Is Everybody," Fortune, XXXIX (May, 1949), p. 79

Certainly, as this prefatory note points out, Willy Loman does correspond well to the Greek's definition of tragedy. His misfortune is surely brought about by the need to nurse his ego and his self-delusions. His is not a vice or depravity. The picture of the Modern American Tragic Hero is carefully defined in his wife's words to his wayward sons. Linda Loman says, in prose terms so beautiful and moving:

Linda : ... I don't say he's a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person. You called him crazy --

Biff : I didn't mean --

Linda : No -- a lot of people think he's lost his -- balance. But you don't have to be very smart to know what his trouble is. The man is exhausted.

Happy : Sure!

Linda : A small man can be just as exhausted as a great man. He works for a company thirty-six years this March, opens up unheard-of territories to their trademark, and now in his old age they take his salary away.

Happy : (Indignantly) I didn't know that, Mom.

Linda : You never asked, my dear! Now that you get your spending money some place else you don't trouble your mind with him.

Happy : But I gave you money last ...

Linda : Christmas time, fifty dollars! To fix the hot water heater it cost ninety-seven fifty! For five weeks he's been on straight commission, like a beginner, an unknown.

Biff : Those ungrateful bastards!

Linda : Are they any worse than his sons? When he brought them business, when he was young, they were glad to see him. But now his old friends, the old buyers that loved him so and always found some order to hand him in a pinch -- they're all dead, retired. He used to be able to make six, seven calls a day in Boston. Now he takes his valises out of the car and puts them back and takes them out again and he's exhausted. Instead of walking he talks now. He drives seven hundred miles, and when he gets there no one knows him any more, no one welcomes him. And what goes through a man's mind, driving seven hundred miles from home without having earned a cent? Why shouldn't he talk to himself? Why? When he has to go to Charley and borrow fifty dollars a week and pretend to me that it's his pay? How long can that go on? How long? You see what I'm sitting here and waiting for? And you tell me he has no character? The man who never worked a day but for your benefit? When does he get the medal for that? Is this his reward -- to turn around at the age of sixty-three and find his sons, who he loved better than his life, one a philandering bum --

Happy : Mom!

Linda : That's all you are, my baby! (To Biff) And you! What happened to the love you had for him? You were such pals. How you used to talk to him on the phone every night! How lonely he was till he could come home to you! ...

The Modern American Tragedy; what are its marks

of identification? "Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper." The modern democratic hero is, generally speaking, our equal; "He's not the finest character that ever lived." Lacking godliness or kingliness -- that awesome magnitude of character; "A small man can be just as exhausted as a great man." Casting the tragic hero of old in the contemporary mold; "Are they any worse than his sons?" Character is that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids; "The man who never worked a day in his life but for your benefit? When does he get the medal for that?"

To scale down the size and stature of Arthur Miller's Modern American Tragedy because it does not correspond in all ways with the classical tradition seems to this writer a little too pedantic and confining. The question of comparison with great tragedies of other eras is not here relevant, but the question of it being appropriate material for tragedy is, since Arthur Miller is, in the judgment of most critics, the leader of the contemporary school of tragic writers.

To one critic Death Of A Salesman represents not alone the tragedy of a man lost in the mythology of his self-delusions and crushed by the monstrosity of the modern materialistic society, but is also the

tragedy of Linda Loman. Robert Garland writes:

Isn't it true that the Willy Lomans of this world are their own worst tragedy? At the Morosco, only Linda Loman can foresee the end. And she, as wife and mother, is powerless to prevent it. This, to me, is the play's most tragic tragedy. She, too, is the play's most poignant figure. Not soon shall I forget her. 38

The playwright has definitely abetted this concept of the tragic heroine with masterful design by putting these thoughts in Linda's grief-stricken heart in the final shattering moment of the play, as she kneels beside Willy's grave:

Linda : Forgive me, dear, I can't cry. I don't know what it is, but I can't cry. I don't understand it. Why did you ever do that? Help me, Willy, I can't cry. It seems to me that you're just on another trip. I keep expecting you. Willy, dear, I can't cry. Why did you do it? I search and search and I search, and I can't understand it, Willy. I made the last payment on the house today. Today, dear. And there'll be nobody home. (A sob rises in her throat) We're free and clear. (Sobbing more fully, released) We're free. (Biff comes slowly toward her) We're free ... We're free ... (Biff lifts her to her feet and moves out up right with her in his arms. Linda sobs quietly)

Purgation of the emotions through pity ("Help me, Willy, I can't cry"), and through fear ("And there'll be nobody home.") . Linda Loman, obviously, feels no less the tragic "katharsis" than the individual in

38. Robert Garland, New York Journal-American, February 11, 1949

the audience who, as generally pointed out by the critics, is usually able to identify himself with some aspect of the play. This self-identification would seem to explain much of the success of the play -- at the box office, at least.

One member of the audience -- not a professional critic -- can see the play in this manner:

Mr. Miller's use of the expression Everyman (in his definition of Willy) would seem to offer a real clue to the widespread popularity that this modern tragedy has enjoyed since its first presentation. Nearly everyone who sees it can discover some quality displayed by Willy and his sons that exists in himself and in his friends and in his relatives. It is this close identity between the audience and the characters that lends such poignancy to the tragedy. It cannot be duplicated by a modern audience when viewing the classical tragedies of the Greeks and the Elizabethans. 39

Put in the words of a professional drama critic, the same idea is read in this manner:

Mr. Miller's play is a tragedy modern and personal, not classic and heroic. Its central figure is a little man sentenced to discover his smallness, rather than a big man undone by his greatness. Although he happens to be a salesman tested and found wanting by his own very special crises, all of us sitting out front are bound to be shaken, long before the evening is over, by finding something of ourselves in him. 40

Two further sentences in the review just quoted illustrates another aspect of Miller's art in the writing of Death Of A Salesman. He writes; "Although

39. A. Howard Fuller, "A Salesman Is Everybody," Fortune, XXXIX (May, 1949), p. 80

40. John Mason Brown, "Seeing Things," Saturday Review Of Literature, XXXII (February 26, 1949), p. 31

Death Of A Salesman is set in the present, it also finds time and space to include the past. It plays the agonies of the moment of collapse against the pleasures and sorrows of recollected episodes." 41 This aspect of Miller's play, with the "scenes out of the scene" and the peripetetic symbol of Uncle Ben, clearly reveals the playwright's competent grasp of play craftsmanship, his ability to know when he can step from reality into illusion to heighten the effectiveness of his reality. The tempo of these illusions seem to increase as the noose is drawn tighter and tighter around Willy, and illusion and reality merge into a single stage image in that dramatic scene that occurs just before Willy rushes off to destroy himself:

Willy : (Moving just outside the kitchen door)
Loves me. (Wonderingly) Always loved
me. Isn't that a remarkable thing?
Ben, he'll worship me for it!

Ben : (with promise) It's dark there, but
full of diamonds.

Willy : Can you imagine that magnificence with
twenty thousand dollars in his pocket?

Linda : (calling from her room) Willy! Come up!

Willy : (calling into the kitchen) Yes! Yes.
Coming! It's very smart, you realize
that, don't you, sweetheart? Even
Ben sees it. I gotta go, baby. 'By!
'By! (Going over to Ben, almost dancing)

41. Ibid., p. 32

Imagine? When the mail comes he'll be ahead of Bernard again!

Ben : A perfect proposition all around.

Willy : Did you see how he cried to me? Oh, if I could kiss him, Ben!

Ben : Time, William, time!

Willy : Oh, Ben, I always knew one way or another we were gonna make it, Biff and I!

Ben : (looking at his watch) The boat. We'll be late. (He moves slowly off into the darkness.)

Willy : (elegiacally, turning to the house) Now when you kick off, boy, I want a seventy-yard boot, and get right down the field under the ball and when you hit, hit low and hit hard, because it's important, boy. (He swings around and faces the audience) There's all kinds of important people in the stands, and the first thing you know ... (Suddenly realizing he is alone) Ben! Ben, where do I ...? (He makes a sudden movement of search) Ben, how do I ...?

Linda : (calling) Willy, you coming up?

Willy : (uttering a gasp of fear, whirling about as if to quiet her) Sh! (He turns around as if to find his way; sounds, faces, voices, seem to be swarming in upon him and he flicks at them, crying) Sh! Sh! (Suddenly music, faint and high, stops him. It rises in intensity, almost to an unbearable scream. He goes up and down on his toes, and rushes off around the house.) Shhh!

Linda : Willy?

(There is no answer. Linda waits. Biff gets up off his bed. He is still in his clothes. Happy sits up. Biff stands listening.)

Linda : (with real fear) Willy, answer me!
Willy!

(There is the sound of a car starting
and moving away at full speed.)

Linda : No!

Bif : (Rushing down the stairs) Pop!

What is the tragedy in Death Of A Salesman? Is it the tragedy of a lonely man defeating himself with his illusions? Is it the tragedy of worthless sons tearing a family out by its roots? Is it the tragedy of a materialistic society ruthlessly discarding its aged? Or the tragedy of a weak man subjecting his son to a lifelong bitter disillusionment? It is, to be sure, the tragedy of all of these things plus the tragedy of a wife and mother misunderstood for, as previously observed, Arthur Miller is a complex stage craftsman as well as being emotionally powerful and intensely perceptive. This is tragedy in every sense of the word and, with a reasonable degree of certainty, will be so regarded for many generations to come.

There are those who speak with reservations regarding Death Of A Salesman. These are not minor carping critics and they should be heard. The perceptive criticisms of Joseph Wood Krutch are held in great respect and when he writes in the following vein he particularly commands the attention:

That it is powerful, veracious, and theatrically effective can hardly be denied [but] ... To me there is about the whole something prosy and pedestrian; a notable absence of new insight, fresh imagination, or individual sensibility. The dialogue serves its purpose as well as the dialogue of a Dreiser novel, but it is almost as undistinguished, as unpoetic, as unmemorable, and as unquotable ... Almost hysterical though A Streetcar Named Desire may sometimes seem, it offers moments of new insight, and it reveals, as Salesman does not, a unique sensibility as well as a gift for language, sometimes misused and precious, but increasingly effective as it is increasingly purified ... 42

Louis Kronenberger, while admitting that he liked the play a great deal, adds this qualification:

What materially shrinks the play itself is the actual writing, the inadequate artistry ... the idea of the play is everywhere more moving than the play itself. Death Of A Salesman too often circles round and round when it should soar, or swoop; it contains more illustrative scenes than a true artist would need, more explicit statements than he would countenance. Most crucially of all, Death Of A Salesman -- whose distinction it is to be less an indictment than an elegy -- is written as solid, sometimes stolid prose. To its credit, it has almost no fake poetry, but it has no real poetry, either ... 43

John Gassner, one of the most eminent of the American theater critics, says:

Undoubtedly, Death Of A Salesman is one of the triumphs of the mundane American stage. It moves its audience tremendously, it comes close to their experience or observation, it awakens their consciousness, and it may even rouse them to self-criticism. As a text it is, in many respects, the latest version of Babbitt ... 44

42. Joseph Wood Krutch, The Nation, CLXVIII (March 5, 1949), pp. 283-84

43. Louis Kronenberger, Time, LIII (February 21, 1949), pp. 74-75

44. John Gassner, Forum, III (April, 1949), p. 221

This may be interpreted only as a sort of backhanded compliment. Gassner speaks less condescendingly and more frankly, perhaps, when he writes:

Whether it is actually the great play that many people believe it to be is another matter. I can only register a general doubt here. For all my enthusiasm, I would not place the play in the same class with, say, A Streetcar Named Desire, The Glass Menagerie, Desire Under The Elms, or even The Iceman Cometh. It is deficient in the poetry, in the nuances, the wonder, and the unexpected insight of truly distinguished dramatic literature. Mr. Miller's insights are all the expected ones; they are observations rather than discoveries.

In the last analysis, Death Of A Salesman is still "drame bourgeoise" rather than high tragedy. Mr. Miller's story still possesses more qualities of demonstration by a sociologist than of transfiguration by a poet. The contrast of characters is rather schematic, and the moral obtrudes upon life instead of emerging suggestiveness from the contradictions of human nature. Mr. Miller's depths are actually shallows, even if he navigates them superbly ... ⁴⁵

Let the critics have their say and he who wishes may believe them. Let it here be simply recorded that a preponderant majority of the critical fraternity were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the play. The Broadway run continued for 742 performances. The play was made into a motion picture and was translated and produced in many languages. Although the concept of the American salesman was often completely alien

45. Ibid.

to many of the audiences in other lands, the play was, without exception, a resounding success. Even in Northern Norway, far removed from the huckster's influence, the people swarmed to the show. The story is reported in Holiday Magazine:

It was in Norway last year that Death Of A Salesman had what was perhaps its greatest triumph. A touring company put on the play way up in the north country, where the audience was made up mostly of a tribe of Lapps, reindeer-herding nomads. Salesman knocked them absolutely dead, and the same Lapps came back for every performance for a solid week. 'I don't get it,' Miller said to us the other day. 'Obviously none of them knew what a traveling salesman was. Maybe there was something about the father's relationship with his sons. In any case, they all seemed to make some sort of a rite out of it. I wish I knew just why.' 46

In December, 1950, Arthur Miller turned up in the Broadway theater in a different guise. He had made an extremely literal adaptation of one of the plays of his dramatic master, Henrik Ibsen, and the Miller version of An Enemy Of The People was uncovered at the Broadhurst Theater on December 28, 1950.

In the preface to the printed version of the adaptation of An Enemy Of The People playwright Miller explains why he undertook an adaptation of a giant of the drama:

I decided to work on An Enemy Of The People because I had a private wish to demonstrate that

46. "Who And Where," Holiday, XIV (December, 1953), p. 41

Ibsen is really pertinent today, that he is not 'old fashioned', and, implicitly, that those who condemn him are themselves misleading our theater and our playwrights into a blind alley of senseless sensibility, triviality, and the inevitable waste of our dramatic talents ... 47

Here, of course, is the key to Miller's "Theater of Ideas." For he goes on to say:

... I believed this play could be alive for us because its central theme is, in my opinion, the central theme of our social life today. Simply, it is the question of whether the democratic guarantees protecting political minorities ought to be set aside in time of crisis. More personally, it is the question of whether one's vision of the truth ought to be a source of guilt at a time when the mass of men condemn it as a dangerous and devilish lie. It is an enduring theme -- in fact, possibly the most enduring of all Ibsen's themes -- because there never was, nor will there ever be, an organized society able to countenance calmly the individual who insists that he is right while the vast majority is absolutely wrong. 48

In this statement, playwright Arthur Miller is laid open for all to see; the free individual pitted against the conforming force of society. Here are the echoes of All My Sons and Death Of A Salesman, the presaging of The Crucible and other works yet unwritten. This is the playwright of the modern theater of ideas.

There was a strange air of flippancy, however, in this Miller adaptation of Ibsen -- almost a straining to make Ibsen too contemporary, too much "one of the boys." Throughout the reader runs across

47. Arthur Miller's Preface to the adaptation of Ibsen's An Enemy Of The People (New York: Viking Press, 1951), p. 8

48. Ibid., pp. 8-9

such odd, un-Ibsenesque phrases as "Here you are, lying around like lizards while I'm out slaving," and "I don't know how we're going to do any shopping with everybody ready to bite my head off." Or a sentence that reads, according to Ibsen, "Well, what do you say, Doctor? Don't you think it is high time that we stir a little life into the slackness and sloppiness of halfheartedness and cowardliness?" is adapted by Miller to read, "Well, what do you say to a little hypodermic for those fence-sitting deadheads?" This not only does not sound like Ibsen -- it doesn't sound like Miller!

The experiment was not a success, but at least Miller had his day in court. The play ran for only 36 performances. The New York drama critics were luke-warm to the idea. For some, like Brooks Atkinson, the experiment was a genuine success; "Papa Ibsen was discharging thunderbolts in all directions," writes Atkinson. "Mr. Miller has abetted him ably." ⁴⁹ But Robert Coleman, finding it "a stilted problem play [turned] into a rip-roaring, muddle-mooded melodrama," concluded, "We trust that Miller wont apply this technique to Oedipus Rex at some future date." ⁵⁰ And one critic,

49. Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, December 29, 1950

50. Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, December 29, 1950

amazingly contridicting the whole theme of the show in his review, writes, "An Enemy Of The People ... is magnificently written and performed, but I happen to be personally prejudiced against a show which slyly makes a bum of our accepted way of life, especially at a time like this." ⁵¹ Obviously, Mr. Miller's freely adapted sermon was completely lost on this particular critic!

Approximately two years later the public was to witness the all-new Miller version of An Enemy Of The People under the title of The Crucible. This time it was to be John Proctor, instead of Dr. Stockman, braving the fury of the mob and of unpopular opinion. This time, instead of reaching back into history 68 years the playwright chose to go back 261 years. This time, instead of dealing with a fictional hysteria the playwright chose an historical example of mob hysteria. And this time, instead of adapting the works of another playwright Miller chose to write his own searing tirade against social injustices, against the submersion of the individual by the majority.

But the parallels are there, no less evident than the parallels between The Crucible of 1692 and

51. John McClain, New York Journal-American, December 29, 1950

The Crucible of the contemporary scene. The play has been discussed in detail in an earlier part of this chapter. The Crucible shows that playwright Miller is a thinking writer -- an "under-the-surface" writer, a rare and precious commodity in the contemporary theater. Whereas Tennessee Williams -- no less an "under-the-surface" writer -- probes deeply and unmercifully under the surface of his characters, Arthur Miller does likewise with his ideas. Each of them have an exciting capacity to make their subjects -- character and theme -- tremendously theatrical, and each, by their special gifts, have made the contemporary theater a more vital institution. The tragedy of the contemporary American theater is, quite simply, that there are not today more Arthur Millers and Tennessee Williams writing for it.

With Williams and Miller setting the pattern for the contemporary school of playwriting there followed on Broadway a number of imitators. But in 1950 there came from the Middle West that was once the home of Tennessee Williams a new playwright who was to take up the common man and reveal new facets of his character for the pleasure of the theater audiences. This study next undertakes to examine the Middle West of William Inge.

CHAPTER VI
THE MIDDLE WEST OF WILLIAM INGE

There is a truism, perhaps only partially applicable, that New Yorkers seldom know what goes on beyond the Hudson River. Only partially applicable, that is, because the playgoers now and then at least get a real and moving glimpse of the world outside the Big City through the perceptive and sympathetic eyes of the modern playwright. Tennessee Williams has assembled some fragments of the Southlands -- albeit through somewhat jaundiced eyes -- and has succeeded, through the magic of the theater, in creating a new awareness of the South and its people for those who have seen A Streetcar Named Desire, The Rose Tattoo, The Glass Menagerie, Cat On A Hot Tin Roof, and 27 Wagons Full Of Cotton.

But the one who most nearly captures the true spirit of the area about which he writes is the playwright from the Middle West, William Motter Inge. The Kansas-born playwright mirrors the land and people of his birth, a land of grain elevators and front porch gossips. He is not a writer who seems to strain to achieve his characters. Brooks Atkinson remarks of Inge's portrayal of the characters in the play Picnic:

Mr. Inge knows his characters so well that you cannot distinguish them from the drama. Everything seems to progress under its own momentum once the characters are defined and the situation created. For Mr. Inge seems to have no personal point of view, but only a knowledge of people and an instinct for the truth of the world they live in. Given a wayward brute who has a certain sincerity of his own, and a flimsy world of lazy illusions is blown apart. The women who are first amused and then titillated look around them in astonishment and terror at the end¹

Neither is he a capturer of eccentricities, frustrations, or of mental aberrations, a trait so often discernable in Tennessee William's work. Rather, he chooses to take a gathering of common folk around a breakfast table, a backyard, or a crossroad's lunch room and find the drama inherent in the situation. William Inge is no originator of profound plots, like Arthur Miller. Neither is he a creator of complicated characters, like Tennessee Williams. No do his plays sparkle with wit and humor, as those of John Patrick. Fantasy never has been his forte, as it is with Mary Chase.

Of all the younger playwrights under consideration in this study, Inge may be said to most nearly resemble Robert Anderson (or, more correctly, Robert Anderson resembles William Inge), particularly Anderson's second drama, All Summer Long. But, whereas Anderson

1. Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, February 20, 1953

has thus far succeeded only in breathing life into the common family wrapped up in its own troubles, Inge creates with his dramas an atmosphere and an environment that becomes the stamp of his theater. This writer cannot remember, after seeing that charming vignette of backyard life entitled All Summer Long, just what the locale was of that particular story. But Picnic, with its grain elevators, railway stations, newspaper boys, front porch sitters, "doo-gooder" neighbors, and picnic baskets, needs no program note to reveal its locale. And the mere sight of a bus stopping at an informal eatery presided over by an uninhibited country girl, with a motley group of passengers spilling out of the bus and into the scene, and the snow piling up outside the window -- no need for occasional references to Kansas City and Topeka to set the scene of this drama.

This evocation of a specific locale is William Inge's greatest gift, without which he would lose much of his charm as a dramatist. For it puts a stamp of individuality upon him, setting him apart from all other playwrights who write of the common people in reasonably ordinary situations. It is in his two most recent plays, Picnic and Bus Stop, that Inge puts this most unusual ability of his to the test. Come Back, Little Sheba, with its interior setting

could not be especially distinguished from an apartment in mid-town Manhattan (save for the occasional appearances of the postman at the front door and other minor touches) if it were not for the program note indicating the scene to be "An old house in a rundown neighborhood of a midwestern city," -- a note which no doubt led John Chapman to refer to Come Back, Little Sheba as "a Missouri Cherry Orchard" ²

The evocation of a particular locale is, however, a special gift touch that Inge brings to his dramas. Essentially, he is a writer of plays in which the characters are predominate, for atmosphere is almost always subordinate to the plot and the characters in a play (except, perhaps, in some of the more extreme experiments by Maeterlinck and Andrejev). His ability to make the very ordinary characters meaningful in terms of his drama is rivaled only by this talent for the evocation of atmosphere and locale.

William Inge writes like a man who has had a happy childhood in this area he now places so lovingly on the stage -- unlike Tennessee Williams, who can recall parts of his youth only with great bitterness. This is true, at least, if the plays a man writes are

2. John Chapman, New York Daily News, February 16, 1950

any reflection of his personality and his background.

Inge has said of himself:

I am one of those writers who must write out of their own lives, about the people who were close to me when I was a child. These are the persons who make the strongest impressions on us, who help us form the standards by which we judge other people after we grow up. ³

On another occasion, in a philosophical analysis of a playwright's emotions, Inge wrote:

... if we want to write plays we must sift through our own lives and personalities for our realization of dramatic values. I do not mean that all good plays should be autobiographical; few very good plays are. But a play must come out of an author's life, not as a diary of the events therein, but as the sum total of his feeling and thinking. We do wrong to sift through external events, ideas, and sayings, trying to synthesize something for a too self-conscious effect in the theatre. The result too often is awkward, misshapen and false, like something that has come to birth unnaturally ⁴

The life out of which came the dramas called Picnic, Bus Stop, and Come Back, Little Sheba began in 1913 in the small Kansas town of Independence. Inge grew up in the traditions of the theater, although not of a theatrical family. His father was a traveling salesman and William was the youngest of the five children born in the family.

At the early age of seven he was already "in the

3. Milton Bracker, "The Boy Actor To Broadway Author," New York Times, March 22, 1953

4. William Inge, "Was Short Story," Boston Post, January 28, 1950

theater," delighting his home town audiences with dialect recitations and juvenile monologues. In high school he was known as quite a capable actor and performed regularly in his high school plays. He continued his devotion to the theater through his four years at the University of Kansas, and after graduation joined a traveling tent show. The tent show featured what was then called a Toby show, featuring (as all Toby shows did) a rustic comedian with red bangs and freckles, the forerunner of the present Howdy-Doody and Mortimer Snerds on television.

Inge did dramatic work in other traveling stock shows and on radio and managed, in the interval between shows, to secure an M. A. Degree from Peabody College in Nashville, Tennessee. Then he taught high school in Columbus, Kansas, moving on shortly to accept a teaching position in the Drama Department at Stephens College in Missouri, where he was associated with Maude Adams.

He was given the opportunity to be the drama, movie, and music critic for the St. Louis Star-Times while the regular critic was on leave, and while working on this job he wrote his first play. The critic-turned-playwright claims that he was inspired to write plays himself after seeing and being deeply moved by the performance of The Glass Menagerie in

Chicago. He interviewed Tennessee Williams for his newspaper and they became fast friends. Later, Williams was to assist him in getting his first play produced at Margo Jones' Theatre '47.

This play was named Farther Off From Heaven and was concerned with a shoe salesman, his ambitious wife, and two maladjusted children. Before the play was produced in Dallas Inge sent it to Williams' agent in New York, Audrey Wood, for whom he, like Williams, has subsequently come to hold in great respect. He relates:

I sent my first play, Farther Off From Heaven, to Audrey and she wrote back that she didn't think it would have much appeal for Broadway, but that she liked the play and thought she could get a good experimental group interested. As I said, it was my first play and I felt impossibly proud. I wrote back to the effect that my play and I could do without her. Margo Jones eventually did the play in Dallas and it came off very nicely, but I realize now that the play had none of the action or plot interest that are minimum essentials in any Broadway production. 5

So the play was produced in the Dallas Theatre '47, where the drama received a very favorable response from the Texas audiences. During the same season in Dallas Miss Jones produced Tennessee Williams' Summer And Smoke, the same production that ultimately reached Broadway.

Inge was so delighted by his Dallas success that

5. Richard Gehman, "Guardian Agent," Theatre Arts, XXXIV (July, 1950), p. 21

he decided to turn his full efforts to writing. In 1949 he moved to New York City where he continued, however, to write about his Middle West environment. The same year The Theatre Guild became interested in his most recently completed play, Come Back, Little Sheba. The genesis of this drama in the playwright's mind is interesting. He writes, in part:

Little Sheba was first conceived as a short story about five or six years ago [1944-45] when I was reading a great deal about dream analysis ... I felt that although it was a very fragmentary piece it was about the best I had ever written. Later I turned it, very easily, into a one-act and liked it even better in dramatic form. So I turned to this one-act in September of 1948 with the intention of developing it. By Thanksgiving I had a pretty satisfying first draft completed ... By the first of the year I had it completed and ready to send it to my agent.

The theme of the play, loss of youth, has long interested me. When I moved to St. Louis in 1943 to take over a newspaper job I brought a little black Scottie with me, a pet I had raised from a pup and kept many years ... I [finally] found an apartment that was willing to take me without my dog. I sold him, felt the usual pang of regret, and later found the little fellow turning up in my dreams⁶

The Theatre Guild presented Come Back, Little Sheba in a summer tryout at the Westport Country Playhouse with Shirley Booth and Sidney Blackmer in the principal roles. The summer audience was most enthusiastic over the drama and the acting. Both Miss

6. William Inge, "Was Short Story," Boston Post, January 28, 1950

Booth and Mr. Blackmer, however, had previous commitments for shows in the Autumn and The Guild was reluctant to bring Sheba to Broadway without Miss Booth in the original role of Lola and Blackmer as Doc. But Mr. Blackmer's show, People Like Us, folded on the road before reaching New York after a two week run in October and Miss Booth's play, Love Me Long, closed after 16 performances on Broadway. Thus, fortunately for The Theatre Guild, playwright Inge -- and Shirley Booth and Sidney Blackmer, Come Back, Little Sheba premiered at the Booth Theater (appropriately enough) on the evening of February 15, 1950. It turned out to be personal triumphs for both Shirley Booth and Sidney Blackmer, but William Inge was to have to wait three more years before he would have the drama critics recognize his talents.

At first glance, Come Back, Little Sheba is a play apart from Inge's later successes. Bus Stop and Picnic are both concerned with groups of people only casually in association with each other, whereas Sheba is a play primarily about two people who are something more than casually associated. It is in the two later plays, too, that Inge displays his talent for creating the atmosphere of a certain locale.

One quality that Come Back, Little Sheba does share with the two later plays is a mood of quiet brooding, a feeling that however calm and peaceful the surface may seem there is an explosion impending. An odd feature of William Inge's maturing as a playwright has been that, although he has retained this brooding mood in all his plays, the element of explosion has become less violent and less explosive. In Come Back, Little Sheba, the violence of the scene in which Doc attacks Lola with an axe is in pronounced contrast to the mood of the rest of the play, which is essentially gossip and breakfast table chatter. Some critics resented this device and questioned its application. Said one:

... the first act of the play, in fact, all of it up to the drunken scene between Lola and Doc, which is powerful and has immense dramatic impact, is commonplace, lacks organic cohesion, and is uninventive dramatically. It is all obviously blocked out, underwritten, and undeveloped with no integration of the various facets used to present Doc and Lola in their special milieu. The additional characterizations are commonplace and dull, and are dully treated, and the play seems to be forever starting over again. Consequently, it is pretty heavy going until the climactic drunk scene which has vitality as well as validity. What makes the play absorbing to a degree in the earlier scenes and doubly compelling in its climax is the excellent acting of Shirley Booth, as Lola, and Sidney Blackmer, as Doc⁷

Another, finding virtue in the climactic scene,

7. William Henry Beyer, School and Society, LXXI (June 3, 1950), p. 345

enjoyed the explosion but disagreed on the buildup:

Mr. Inge's play is unnecessarily bare in view of the lives he is tampering with. The first act is hardly more than an outline. There must be more to the nightmare of Doc and his wife than Mr. Inge has reported. But when he is ready to plunge into the anguish in the second act, he writes with a kind of relentless frankness and compassion that are deeply affecting. Miss Booth and Mr. Blackmer know what he means and say it with extraordinary resourcefulness and veracity.⁸

By the standards of classical definition, Inge cannot be regarded as reaching the highest form of his art since character is said to be subordinate to plot -- a condition that cannot be said to prevail in any of Inge's dramas. But, to a greater or lesser degree, the contemporary playwrights (with the notable exception of Arthur Miller) are generally more inclined to concern themselves with character than they are with plots and, perhaps, none more than playwrights Williams and Inge.

Inge is, however, much more of a surface writer than Williams. This may be due in part to the fact that Inge writes more with a sense of humor and less with a sense of tragedy than Williams. Humor is a surface manifestation; tragedy derives from the soul.

That Inge himself represents his writings as essentially that of a surface writer is indicated by a discussion of the violent climactic scene in Come

8. Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, February 16, 1950

Back, Little Sheba, certainly the most probing into human motives of all of his plays. Inge writes:

Some reviewers felt, and I can see why they did, that Doc's unexpected outburst of drunken violence revealed a deeper inner conflict than the rest of the play in its presentation of him had prepared for, that if Doc actually were going to kill Lola, his wife, there must be a homicidal streak in his make-up which demands separate explanation and dramatic treatment. My answer here is that many innocent alcoholics, totally devoid of homicidal instincts or possessing no more of same than law-abiding citizens, have awakened in the morning and found themselves under arrest for murder. Doc might have killed Lola, but doing so would have been a sordid accident. The violence of the alcoholic usually misses, by subconscious intent, its destructive end. The alcoholic loves the display of violence. His violence is a childish protest against his own feelings of weakness. Still, there are homicidal men who are also alcoholic, men not necessarily alcoholic who murder when they are drunk. I feel the rest of the play establishes that Doc is none of these ... 9

Inge appears to be saying that alcoholics are apt to do almost anything just by the nature of being an alcoholic. Hence, there is no need to probe into his character in the course of the play to discover why he threatened his wife with an axe. Tennessee Williams would not let his character off as cheaply. But of course, as Inge goes on to explain:

Sheba is not a tragedy and I think the play misses its mark if it is regarded as such. One reviewer called it "a pathetic comedy" and I feel this is a happy classification. I felt that I was

9. William Inge, "The Schizophrenic Wonder," Theatre Arts, XXXIV (May, 1950), pp. 22-23

writing a comedy, hoping others would find it a rather lyrical play full of pathos, humor, melancholy, warmth, affection, and absurdity, with one painful step or insight into a man's regret. I reit the play might have something in common, in character, with the terrifying but still humorous comedies of O'Casey, maybe with those of Chekhov ... ¹⁰

The criticism under which Inge most chafed was apparently that from Time Magazine's critic, who wrote:

But Come Back, Little Sheba is not a very good, or even a very interesting, play. It makes plain enough what it wants to do, but never actually does it, never communicates the awful internal bleeding of mismatched lives, the blundering wastefulness of life itself. Possibly Loia is too shallow to allow of much probing. But the more complicated, frustrated Doc does need to be probed. For one thing, is he the tragic victim of a single mistake, or a weak man almost bound to fail? Playwright Inge tends to substitute mere sympathy for insight, and to employ those little touches that, though meant to be telling, are just the worn small change of domestic drama. Too often, with a dull pen, he writes on tracing paper. ¹¹

Harold Clurman seems to come closer to capturing the playwright's intent, as he describes it above, than any of the other critics. He wrote:

... [Sheba is] a good play [meaning] ... one that embodies a true experience of life in an honest and absorbing manner. Sometimes the author's main contribution is the honesty, while the "absorbing manner" is provided by the players, the director, and the other craftsmen who have made the production ...

10. Ibid., p. 23

11. Louis Kronenberger, Time, LV (February 27, 1950), p. 81

It is true Americana of a kind that has become rather rare on the stage for the past ten years or more ...

The play is a picture of little, repressed people living, with all their inhibitions, moral confusions, awry ideals and profound isolation, in a kind of Middletown Heartbreak House. The drab spiritual desert that forms the atmosphere for these people would justify calling Come Back, Little Sheba a form of suicide literature were it not for an element of tenderness that sweetens it. The author manages to introduce this softer touch into his unyielding portrait not through any process of poetic ennoblement or social interpretation, but by a human sympathy, which is sounder than tolerance ... 12

The audience and critics alike can be forgiven for misinterpreting Inge's first play, since there was room for confusion when the placid garrulousness erupted into sudden violence. No critic can be forgiven, however, when he writes in this manner about the first play:

... Unfortunately, the drama, despite its modest integrity, seems the outline of a play or perhaps a few scenes from it rather than the finished work itself. It begins with all the apparent materials of a complete evening in the theatre and then becomes so sparse in its writing and development that, for all the touching simplicity of its final episode, it ends by appearing curiously thin in its treatment ... 13

... and follows it up with a critical review of

Picnic beginning:

When William Inge wrote Come Back, Little Sheba, he demonstrated that he was a new playwright

12. Harold Clurman, The New Republic, CXXII (March 13, 1950), pp. 22-23

13. Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, February 16, 1950

of exceptional talent and extraordinary potentiality. Now, with Picnic ... Mr. Inge proves conclusively that his admirers were not overestimating him ... his new work revealed the power, insight, compassion, observation and gift for looking into the human heart that we had all expected in him, and I'll be astonished if it isn't a dramatic hit of vast proportions ... ¹⁴

The juxtaposition of these two criticisms poses the question, in the vernacular, "Who is kidding whom?"

The success of Come Back, Little Sheba was sufficient to finance adequately Inge's next venture into playwrighting. He tucked himself and his typewriter into a small one-room apartment overlooking Central Park and set to work. When Picnic, his quiet pastorate of a Kansas backyard, gave its premiere performance at the Music Box on the evening of the 19th of February, 1953, there was hardly one present who could not admit that Inge had profitably matured in his playwriting technique, though some of the drama critics did not care for the play and even more spoke disparagingly of the play's direction by Joshua Logan. But Inge's triumph was complete when the New York Drama Critics' Circle, assembling late in March, voted their best play of the year award to Picnic. Shortly after that Inge scored a double triumph when the Pulitzer Prize was also presented

14. Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, February 20, 1953

to the writer of Picnic. The play continued for a Broadway run of 477 performances.

In his second Broadway success, Inge has muted the violence of the climactic scene -- in fact, making it into a series of climactic scenes of Madge's growing passion for Hal and carrying into a sort of subdued pursuit of Hal by police authorities. What playwright Inge has obviously done is to place somewhat less emphasis on situation in Picnic than he did in Sheba (though Sheba could hardly be regarded as a "situation play") and more emphasis on character (having, as he has, more characters with which to be concerned). The playwright's design appears to be that the more the audience becomes interested in his characters the less concerned they will be about the excitement of the story. Hence Richard Hayes, in dissecting Picnic for his readers in The Commonweal, dwells upon the characters and their effect upon the story rather than describing a plot populated by characters. He writes:

At the center of Picnic is a sexual situation, common and gross, but orchestrated by the playwright with a subtlety of detail and a breadth of reference dazzling in their sensibility; the form, then, is that of a theme with variations. Into a community of women -- widowed, single, adolescent, virgin -- comes an aggressively virile young man. What the play studies, in all its disturbing ramifications, is exclusively his sexual impact on them: the initial movements of distaste and scorn, then a

kind of musky stirring of memory and desire, followed by passion and willful hatred, subsiding in quiescence and resignation. It is a graph of emotion most beautifully and skillfully described, issuing in the simple wisdom of Mr. Inge's old spectator who, after this savage eruption of 'life,' can still see that 'he was a man, and I was a woman, and it was good...' 15

Another critic was equally intrigued by the characters in Inge's play but not so completely that he was unable to observe the thinness of the playwright's story:

William Inge, the author, now has two plays to his credit, and shows palpable growth as a craftsman. Apparently he did not put his best effort into the portrayal of the pivotal character, who appears so oafish it is difficult to believe he has ever been admitted to a college even on a football scholarship. Mr. Inge is more successful, however, with other characters who are sharply etched and persuasively human, and he has convincingly reproduced the barrenness of a spiritual backwash of life. It is regrettable that he has not yet learned to direct his maturing creative powers toward a more edifying end than backyard bacchanalia 16

The critics were generally in agreement on the virtues of the playwright's Picnic but there was considerable disagreement as to the virtues of Joshua Logan's Picnic. Some commented favorably, as with Wolcott Gibbs "The cast [was] brilliantly directed by Joshua Logan" 17 The Newsweek critic, T. H. Wenning, wrote; "The players, without exception, give

15. Richard Hayes, The Commonweal, LVII (March 20, 1953), p. 603

16. Theophilus Lewis, America, LXXXVIII (March 7, 1953), p. 632

17. Wolcott Gibbs, The New Yorker, XXIX (February 28, 1953), p. 65

admirable performances and Joshua Logan's staging is a large factor in both their success and the author's" 18

But others were not so sure. George Jean Nathan led the anti-Logan forces with his own inimitable brand of derision:

... What the play was like in its original form I do not know; but judging things from Inge's antecedent, highly meritorious Come Back, Little Sheba, it is a good guess that it was a much simpler, much less strained and altogether much more honest piece of work than what now meets the eye in the production presided over by Joshua Logan.

That production, operating with a vengeance in behalf of the popular box office, is a tip-top one by Broadway standards, but is so overelaborated one has a suspicion that what was very probably as relatively simple and affecting as something like Home, Sweet Home has been orchestrated Hollywood-wise for the Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra reinforced by a Sousa band, the Seventh Regiment Fife and Drum Corps, and the Andrews Sisters. While there periodically emerges from it clear evidence of Inge's faithful observance of life, sharp appreciation of character and gift for beautifully accurate dialogue, there are many more times when the playwright seems to be shoved into the background by way of allowing the director to make a name for himself. It is possible, of course, that the play as Inge wrote it was not what I imagined it to have been and that it was necessary for Logan to have worked his will upon it as he has done. But everything points to the fact that it had a quality that was in great part edged out of it in the campaign to Broadwayize it into financial success ... What we have got is a big Broadway show at the expense of a small but doubtless considerably superior play. 19

18. T. H. Wenning, Newsweek, XXXXI (March 2, 1953), p. 84

19. George Jean Nathan, Theatre Arts, XXXVII (May, 1953), pp. 66-67

There were others who felt as Nathan did. Louis Kronenberger found that:

... about much of it there seems something straggling and merely approximate; it lacks form, it needs more expressive detail, more evocative language. And it is coarsened by Joshua Logan's direction, which often pedal-thumps the sex and placards the humor and pathos²⁰

And from another director's standpoint -- one who has been frequently called upon in this study -- Harold Clurman remarks:

... I happen to have read the playscript before it was put into rehearsal and I saw in it a laconic delineation of a milieu seen with humor and an intelligent sympathy that was not far from compassion. What is on the stage now is rather coarse boy-and-girl story with a leeringly sentimental emphasis on naked limbs and 'well-stacked' females ...

In this vein the play is extremely well done. It is certainly effective. Joshua Logan, who is a crackerjack craftsman, has done a meticulous, shrewd, thoroughly knowledgeable job of staging. He has made sharply explicit everything which the audience already understands and is sure to enjoy in the "sexy" plot, and has fobbed off everything less obvious to which the audience ought to be made sensitive ...

Here at any rate is a solid success. But I am not sure whether the author should get down on his knees to thank the director for having made it one or punch him in the nose for having altered the play's values. It is a question of taste.²¹

The picture may be clarified somewhat by the playwright. He says that Picnic started out as a

20. Louis Kronenberger, Time, LXI (March 2, 1953), p. 72

21. Harold Clurman, The Nation, CLXXVI (March 7, 1953), p. 213

sort of mood piece:

I remember the feeling of a summer evening, the women sitting on their front porches, the feeling of peace, their delight in their small talk ... characters in a kind of little fortress. Something had to happen to disturb them, to raise a variety of female reactions. I hit upon introducing the young man almost by instinct. 22

The writer of the Inge story continues:

'I guess in that form,' he confesses, 'it was nothing more than a good-sized fragment.' He feels very indebted to Joshua Logan who was interested in the play and optioned it before it was fully realized.

It was while the play was actually in production that the main characters -- Madge, the prettiest girl in town, and Hal, the brash young intruder -- were developed and the story line jelled. The young man who had been introduced only to momentarily disturb the fortress now inspired the heroine to follow him, awoke the latent femininity in her tomboyish sister and drove the lonely schoolteacher to propose to her reluctant swain. 23

From Wolcott Gibbs, who was 100% for the Logan direction, comes this illuminating observation; "I haven't any very clear idea of what Mr. Inge means by all this, except perhaps that there is no catalytic agent quite like sex." 24

Of the playwright who wrote the play -- sometimes a forgotten factor in theatrical production -- the

22. Naomi Barko, "William Inge Talks About Picnic," Theatre Arts, XXXVII (July, 1953), p. 66

23. Ibid., p. 67

24. Wolcott Gibbs, The New Yorker, XXIX (February 28, 1953), p. 65

most thoughtful analysis comes from the critic of The Commonweal. Richard Hayes writes:

It is the supreme distinction of Mr. William Inge's world to exist solidly, as an imaginative fact, with more energy and vitality than that of any American dramatist of his generation. Neither deliquescent, as is that of Tennessee Williams, nor shaped by Arthur Miller's blunt polemic rage, it is a world existing solely by virtue of its perceived manners -- a perception which, as Mr. Lionel Trilling observed on another occasion, is really only a function of love. The poetry, in Mr. Inge's plays, is all in pity; he gives us the hard naturalistic surface, but with a kind of interior incandescence. What Elizabeth Bowen said of Lawrence defines Mr. Inge also: in his art, every bush burns. ²⁵

When the playwright's most recent drama, Bus Stop, moved into town on March 2, 1955, the anticipation of seeing a play by a former Drama Critics' Circle and Pulitzer Prize winner brought a tingle of excitement to the New York theatergoers. The out-of-town notices were only just so-so. One Philadelphia critic decided it was a play unworthy of Mr. Inge's talent. But New Yorkers are notorious for ignoring out-of-town notices, particularly where favorite playwrights are involved. The New York premiere was a fashionable gathering and the high spot of the production was a young lady who had a not-too-attractive role in Inge's previous play. Bus Stop did for Kim Stanley what Come Back, Little Sheba

25. Richard Hayes, The Commonweal, LVII (March 20, 1953), p. 603

did for Shirley Booth. Walter Kerr, of the Herald-Tribune, devoted his entire review to paens of praise for the talents of Miss Stanley and at the end of his review, almost as an afterthought, appended a line; "Bus Stop is certainly the best play we've had all season." ²⁶ Brooks Atkinson, of The Times, fairly glowed with praise; "Having written a wonderful play two years ago," he proclaimed, "William Inge has now written a better [one]" ²⁷ William Hawkins was moved to write in the World-Telegram; "Bus Stop has just the same irresistible glow about it that makes a fire magnetic to people coming in out of the cold." ²⁸

History was not to repeat itself, however, for William Inge. The playwright's old friend, Tennessee Williams, came up with an even more striking piece of dramatic art 23 days later, and Cat On A Hot Tin Roof was awarded the year's top prizes.

Inge reduced the story and increased the size of his characters even more completely in Bus Stop -- a play that hinged on nothing more substantial than an irascible cowboy trying forcibly to win the

26. Walter F. Kerr, New York Herald-Tribune, March 3, 1955

27. Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, March 3, 1955

28. William Hawkins, New York World-Telegram, March 3, 1955

affections of a slangy night club entertainer. For this situation the presence of the restaurant owner, her young assistant, the inebriated college professor, the bus driver, and even, perhaps, the cowboy's friend, were completely unnecessary. To further the story line all the play really needed was the cowboy, the nightclub singer, and the sheriff -- the latter being the element of strength and opposition on the girl's side. The thinness of the story has led critic John Chapman to complain; "It is well written, so far as dialogue and a feeling for character go, and it is very well acted; but it is a scenario and not a play" ²⁹ Chapman explains what he means by terming *Bus Stop* a "scenario":

Every so often an intelligent dramatist turns out a scenario instead of a play. When this happens, the scenario is usually a cross-section job -- a situation in which various kinds of people are thrown together by some kind of emergency, and in which they must stay together until the dramatist and the audience get through examining. Such a scenario is William Inge's Bus Stop ³⁰

Perhaps the term "character study" would be more appropriate in this instance. It is clear that this is what the playwright had in mind when he set out to write Bus Stop. Inge's play, to be sure, does not have the plotting and action that most other dramas

29. John Chapman, New York Daily News, March 3, 1955

30. Ibid.

have and Chapman would appear to be quite justified in noticing this deficiency. But what has made Bus Stop an unusual drama is that the writer has made a fascinating theater piece out of what is almost entirely a character sketch. If one is in search of a play Bus Stop may fall short of the seeking. But if the search is for theater, the seeker need go no further than to Inge's drama of a Kansas crossroad.

George Jean Nathan sums up the case for the opposition (to Mr. Chapman):

... this is no Truckline Cafe. After he has mechanically assembled his travelers, Inge devotes himself with his customary exceptional skill to drawing characters who breathe truth and life and it is his ability in this direction that, despite the thinnest of reverse taming-of-the-shrew plotlines, manages even in the face of a monotony implicit in his dramatic scheme to tease if not always hold the interested attention of his audience. What he has written is perhaps less what Broadway regards as a play than a series of separate Ruth Draper character sketches loosely bound together by the plotline mentioned and by the isolating heavy fall of flakes of white paper. But since the prime essence of drama is character and since character is Inge's aim, purpose and accomplishment, the exhibit further assisted by moments of honest humor and equally honest pathos, surpasses itself, if you'll excuse the dubious phrase ... ³¹

Critic Robert Coleman states the case even more succinctly:

William Inge has penned an endearing, though deceptively simple, comedy. Nothing of importance seems to be happening for most of the three acts.

31. George Jean Nathan, "Theatre Week," New York Journal-American, March 26, 1955

Yet, as the final curtain falls, you realize that lives have been changed, some rather shabby people have been regenerated, at least for the nonce. And it's all done with magical warmth and humor. There's nothing arty or pretentious about it. It's just human and amusing.

... As Inge points out, it's all like Chaucer's Canterbury Tales in a modern setting. It's like Boccaccio's Decameron, too. It's told in salty and tender present-day speech. And it's ever so delightful 32

Aside from the loosening up of the plot lines and the individualization of the characters, the most noticeable feature about Bus Stop, as compared with the playwright's two previous plays, is the development of more and lustier humor in the dialogue. Not by some considerable distance has he caught the sparkling wit of John Patrick nor the suave, charming wit of Mary Chase in Harvey. But behind him now is the "pathetic comedy" of Come Back, Little Sheba, the gossipy homespun comedy of Picnic. In Bus Stop Inge has gone one step further and has supplied a comic humor that defines the character. Since it is so closely a part of the character that is seen (i.e. the production value of the play) as well as heard, an out-of-context quote is not the most effective means of illustrating this point of view. But one of the scenes that best establishes this idea of

32. Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, March 3, 1955

"character-defining" humor is one in which Cherie, the night-club singer, is talking with Elma, the high school girl assistant, at the lunch counter:

Cherie : Mebbe I'm a sap.

Elma : Why do you say that?

Cherie : I dunno why I don't go off to Montana and marry him. I might be a lot better off'n I am now.

Elma : He says he loves you.

Cherie : He dunno what love is.

Elma : What makes you say that?

Cherie : All he wants is a girl to throw his arms around and hug and kiss, that's all. The resta the time, he don't even know that I exist.

Elma : What made you decide to marry him in the first place?

Cherie : (Giving Elma a wise look) Ya ain't very experienced, are ya?

Elma : I guess not.

Cherie : I never did decide to marry him. Everything was goin' fine till he brought up that subjeck. Bo come in one night when I was singin' That Old Black Magic. It's one a my best numbers. And he liked it so much, he jumped up on a chair and yelled like a Indian, and put his fingers in his mouth and whistled like a steam engine. Natur'ly, it made me feel good. Most a the customers at the Blue Dragon was too drunk to pay any attention to my songs.

Elma : And you liked him?

Cherie : Well ... I thought he was awful cute.
(She shows a mischievous smile.)

Elma : I think he looks a little like Burt Lancaster, don't you?

Cherie : Mebbe. Anyway ... I'd never seen a cowboy before. Oh, I'd seen 'em in movies, a course, but never in the flesh ... Anyway, he's so darn healthy lookin', I don't mind admittin', I was attracted, right from the start.

Elma : You were?

Cherie : But it was only what ya might call a sexual attraction.

Elma : Oh!

Cherie : The very next mornin', he wakes up and hollers, 'Yippee! We're gettin' married.' I honestly thought he was crazy. But when I tried to reason with him, he wouldn't listen to a word. He stayed by my side all day long, like a shadow. At night, a course, he had to go back to the rodeo, but he was back to the Blue Dragon as soon as the rodeo was over, in time fer the midnight show. If any other fella claimed t'have a date with me, Bo'd beat him up.

Elma : And you never told him you'd marry him?

Cherie : No! He kep tellin' me all week, he and Virge'd be by the night the rodeo ended, and they'd pick me up and we'd all start back to Montana t'gether. I knew that if I was around the Blue Dragon that night, that's what'd happen. So I decided to beat it. One a the other girls at the Blue Dragon lived on a farm 'cross the river in Kansas. She said I could stay with her. So I went to the Blue Dragon last night and just sang fer the first show. Then I told 'em I was quittin' ... I'd been wantin' to find another job anyway ... and I picked up my share of the kitty ... but darn it, I had to go and tell

'em I was takin' the midnight bus. They had to go and tell Bo, a course, when he come in a li'l after eleven. He paid 'em five dollars to find out. So I went down to the bus station and hadn't even got my ticket, when here come Bo and Virge. He jest steps up to the ticket window and says, 'Three tickets to Montana!' I din know what to say. Then he dragged me onto the bus and I been on it ever since. And somewhere deep down inside me, I gotta funny feelin' I'm gonna end up in Montana.

(She sits now in troubled contemplation as Elma resumes her work.)

The last line of this quotation must have been one of those that inspired Brooks Atkinson to observe; "Mr. Inge has taken a long look into the hearts of his people. Being completely human, they are the salt of the earth." 33

A glimpse into the soul of the writer was sought by many of the critics of Bus Stop -- which would seem to suggest that it is that type of a play that begs a glimpse of its author. From the review quoted immediately above Mr. Atkinson suggests that:

... Mr. Inge has more than an evening's entertainment in mind. He has ideas and principles. While his comedy is roaring around the stage, he says a number of simple truths that give height and depth to his writing, and that bring into his play an artistic and intellectual maturity that was less conspicuous in Picnic or Come Back, Little Sheba. 34

33. Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, March 3, 1955

34. Ibid.

Richard Watts, Jr., sees in its author much of the sweetness of Bus Stop:

Even though he is not here concerned with probing deeply into the recesses of the tortured human soul, Mr. Inge's compassion, his appreciation of the loneliness and the inner decency of seemingly commonplace mankind, and his ability to invest the most ordinary people with a sort of unostentatious fineness of spirit are present to give his play a quality of modest gallantry. There is rich humor in it and a true theatrical sense that makes Bus Stop enormously entertaining without cheapness. And it reveals its author's gift for true but vivid dialogue admirably ... 35

Bus Stop is a warm and ambling and sentimental play, with no profound observations on life, no sage words of wisdom. One of the critics wraps up both its virtues and its shortcomings by admitting:

As one who admired and enjoyed Bus Stop continuously, I'll concede a few things about it immediately. It doesn't attempt to go as deeply into character as its author has done in either of his previous plays. It frankly lacks the poignant dramatic sturdiness and the tragic implications that were present in Come Back, Little Sheba and Picnic. It is unashamedly sentimental in its viewpoint. And I suppose it was written chiefly for entertainment, if you regard that as bad. But it is likewise set down with all of Mr. Inge's skill and warmth ...

... Bus Stop is a moving and delightful play. 36

This is very possibly the secret of William Inge's success. He is neither a prober nor a preacher, a polemicist nor a prophet. He writes simply for

35. Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, March 3, 1955

36. Ibid.

entertainment. As Arthur Miller writes the tragedies of the common man, so William Inge writes the comedies of the common man. Reduced in size as it has been, the theater, fortunately, is still broad enough to accomodate the tragic and the comic side by side and still long enough to make both of them successes, financially and artistically, to have plenty of room for both of them. As long as this condition continues the theater is far from being dead.

The newest of the talented contemporary playwrights to be included in this study is Robert Anderson. Two years ago (1953) Mr. Anderson's first play, Tea And Sympathy, appeared on Broadway and was greeted with enthusiastic acclaim by the critics and public alike and went on for a successful run just completed (June 26, 1955). Mr. Anderson, as the "Freshman" playwright in the present study, is the last of the playwrights to be included in this paper.

CHAPTER VII

ROBERT ANDERSON; THE FRESHMAN COMES OF AGE

Robert Anderson, with one tenuous claim to fame, is the freshman member of the current crop of playwrights. Yet one gesture of faith has been granted him that has seldom, if ever, been granted before by veteran playwrights to a "promising" writer. In 1953, before Tea And Sympathy had its Broadway premiere, The Playwrights' Company, counting among its members the distinguished playwrights Maxwell Anderson, Robert Sherwood, and Elmer Rice, elected the freshman playwright to become one of them. It was entirely an act of faith done with the intent, of course, of bringing new blood into the organization. But The Playwrights -- a company that had produced 32 plays in its 15 year history, including two Pulitzer Prize winners, two Drama Critics' Circle Award winners, and one Antoinette Perry Award winner -- might have gambled less with their own future had they chosen Tennessee Williams, John Patrick, or Arthur Miller to become one of them. But The Playwrights' Company is not basically a commercial organization. Rather, it is one that is more concerned with asserting the artistry of the theater, as perhaps can best be attested by their current productions on Broadway -- Cat On A Hot

Tin Roof, Bus Stop, and The Bad Seed. Even their most commercially directed member, millionaire Roger L. Stevens, is a man who has demonstrated time and again that his prime interest is in theater artistry.

When Robert Anderson was chosen a member of this distinguished company of playwrights it was almost as if its members were exercising a clairvoyance that is denied even to playwrights. For, shortly after his selection, Robert Anderson's quiet drama, Tea And Sympathy, directed by Elia Kazan and starring Deborah Kerr, was to justify, in some considerable measure, the faith the elder playwrights had placed in the new freshman amongst them.

For Robert Anderson it was an opportunity almost never accorded a young and unknown playwright. His only previous appearance in the Broadway area was in 1946 when a play with a post-war setting that he had written, entitled Come Marching Home, had been staged by the Catholic Blackfriar's Guild in their small theater on West 57th Street. Come Marching Home also had productions at the Pasadena Playhouse and at the University of Iowa Workshop in the previous year. Two other three act plays by Anderson had out-of-town productions prior to the opening of Tea And Sympathy on Broadway in September, 1953. In

the summer of 1951 his play, Love Revisited, had a run at the Westport, Connecticut Summer Theater and in the Spring of 1953 the Washington, D. C. Arena Theater presented All Summer Long, which was -- as a result of this staging -- to become his second Broadway production. Beyond these productions the young playwright was virtually unknown.

The future playwright received his "basic training" at Harvard University, from which he received his B. A. Degree in 1939. The following year he earned an M.A. Degree from the same institution. While at Harvard Anderson pursued his artistic impulses with enthusiasm. He was Class Poet of the Class of '39. He wrote about 20 one-act plays, was the drama critic for the Harvard Advocate, wrote music, lyrics, and books for numerous musical productions, directed, acted and sang in a number of productions, taught school, and polished off a gloomy three act tragedy of the theater called The Sisters. In spite of all this activity he succeeded in getting a magna cum laude citation with his B. A. Degree when he graduated at the age of twenty.

After completing his Degrees at Harvard, Anderson taught in the Boston schools and was an assistant in the English Department at Harvard at the same time. In his spare moments he wrote words and music for musical plays and did dramatic criticism for the academic

community. During the war he became an Ensign in the Navy and served aboard the cruiser Alaska and the battleship Texas, and later with CINCPAC on Guam. While serving on the Alaska he wrote Come Marching Home, which he entered in the National Theater Conference contest. It won for him \$100 as the best play written by an overseas serviceman. When the play was produced at the University of Iowa, Hallie Flannagan saw it and recommended him for a \$2000 National Theater Conference Fellowship, which was granted him and enabled him to live in New York after the war and work on more plays.

In the period between 1945, when he was discharged from the Navy, and 1953, when Tea And Sympathy was produced, Anderson sustained himself by writing radio adaptations for The Theater Guild Of The Air, including adaptations of The Glass Menagerie and John Steinbeck's Of Mice And Men. In one year he wrote 25 adaptations. During this period, too, he established a playwriting course at The American Theater Wing and taught as many as 50 students at one time in his classes.

When Come Marching Home premiered at the Blackfriar's Guild Theater most of the critics stayed away. But one of the more intrepid reviewers did show up and had some pleasant things to say about the future member of The Playwrights' Company and his drama. The Commonwealth's

critic reported:

The Blackfriars' last of the season is extremely neat stuff. Robert Anderson's political picture of a small Eastern city, U.S.A., 1946, successfully resolves its theme and characters and, by so doing, deserves more prizes, I should say, than those already received. This story of a young naval officer, returned home to live; logically forced into political doings; logically smeared; and, moreover, logically concluded; is more plainly a novelty than the big street has been able to boast for seasons. I liked it very much. Mr. Anderson's power and facility can now, I think, support a little experimentation and abandon the several stock devices of type and situation which he employs in this first business. Although indeed the physical requirements of his script have successfully tapped the Guild's ability to experiment in design, direction, and playing. Their one-set contrivance for a tiny stage, in which innumerable people and events occur, seemed to me fine; and the players under the guidance of Dennis Gurney, securely at home: Clark Howat, Inge Adams, Thomas G. Monahan, especially. A good evening. ¹

When Tea And Sympathy opened at the Barrymore Theater in New York on the evening of September 30, 1953, there was no dearth of critics. This was a Playwrights' Company production with a Hollywood star in the leading role, the stage's Number One Director lending his hand, and this time a big Broadway theater to see it in. It was quite an extraordinary buildup for a new playwright. Anderson explains how it came about:

When I finished the play in the late summer of 1952, I followed a practise of some years' standing and sent copies to the Kazans and to Jo Mielziner, old friends and staunch supporters. My agent, Audrey Wood, sent a copy to The Playwrights' Company.

1. Kappo Phelan, The Commonweal, XXXXIV (May 31, 1946), p. 166

Molly Kazan read it and said she'd like to take a copy to Gadge (Kazan) who was filming Man On A Tightrope in Munich.

First, Jo called to convey his enthusiasm. A little later Roger Stevens of The Playwrights' invited me to lunch. Molly Kazan has always said 'When they invite you to lunch, they're not going to produce your play.' But this lunch was different. Stevens and Robert E. Sherwood had read the play and wanted to produce it. A few weeks later Gadge arrived back in this country, and, to complete the triple play, said he'd like to direct the show. A few days and phone calls later and it was 'The Playwrights' Company presents the Elia Kazan production of ... with settings and lighting by Jo Mielziner.' When it was all set, Gadge turned to me and said, 'Are you happy? You ought to be.' 2

When Kazan first read the play in Europe, he said; "When I read the last act I decided I wanted to do it regardless of the difficulties of subject matter." 3 The Playwrights' Company sold a half interest in the play to producer Mary K. Frank, and the production was on the way. After tryouts in New Haven and Washington, D. C., the new play moved into New York at the end of the first month of the 1953-54 theater season. The critics and public alike were enthusiastic about the new playwright, as well as his drama. In his column in The Post the following morning Richard Watts, Jr. averred; "There is no doubt that [Robert Anderson] is a welcome addition to the theater." 4 John McClain

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2. John S. Wilson, "New Blood ... New Life ... New Season," Theatre Arts, XXXVII (September, 1953), p. 19
 3. Roderick MacArthur, "The Long Road To Broadway," Theatre Arts, XXXVII (November, 1953), p. 63
 4. Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, October 1, 1953

hailed Anderson as "... a brilliant new dramatist." ⁵ John Chapman wrote; "He has written like a veteran and like a poet" ⁶ To Robert Coleman, Anderson was "... a dramatist of promise," ⁷ and Brooks Atkinson saw the playwright as "... a sensitive writer ... fortunate [to have] some sensitive actors ... playing his drama." ⁸

More than the writer and the actors, to be sure, could be termed "sensitive." No less so was the subject which the play treated. Some of the reviewers were offended. Wrote one, all in a trembling rage:

This is the third play in as many weeks which features adolescence (End As A Man and Take A Giant Step). Written with considerably more maturity and restraint it becomes the most offensive of the three in the choice of a subject which I personally feel has no place on the stage ... As a clinical case history Tea And Sympathy might have value for teachers but when the slow martyrdom of a schoolboy, permitted by the faculty to be the victim of unproved suspicions, draws bursts of guffaws from the audience it puts the whole play on the level of the Kinsey Report, exploited as a best seller

The sympathy shown by the house master's wife for the lonely boy and his devotion has overtones of Young Woodley but at the end sympathy turns from tea to adultery and as the young matron's sin is supposed to save the boy from suicide it is presented as an act ennobling and touching.

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5. John McClain, New York Journal-American, October 1, 1953
 6. John Chapman, New York Daily News, October 1, 1953
 7. Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, October 1, 1953
 8. Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, October 1, 1953

I have rarely spent a more uncomfortable evening in the theater except at A Streetcar Named Desire which, by the way, was also directed by Elia Kazan 9

Another reviewer, also from a religious publication, likewise deplored the subject matter, if not quite so vehemently:

Miss Kerr's presence in the cast ... is the best reason why the play was produced, or why it was ever written. The story is a variation, one might even say a rehash, of The Children's Hour theme in reverse, without that play's plausibility

Tea And Sympathy is beyond doubt a good-looking show. The chance is nil, however, that my neighbor who covers the motion picture field would recommend the play for family entertainment. There are moral ways to straighten out a mixed-up boy. 10

Anderson, however, is at great pains to point out that his play is not about homosexuality:

The accusation made against this boy, who did not quite fit in with the crowd, could have applied to any number of other things. The characters could have been different. The story could have been placed somewhere else than in a prep school. 11

There are, however, two basic things that the play is about, according to the playwright:

One is exemplified by the way the woman gives her love to the boy in trouble. You must give more than tea and sympathy to someone you discover is in need. You have to involve yourself and risk that you will be hurt in order to help.

9. Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt, Catholic World, CLXXVIII (November, 1953), pp. 148-49

10. Theophilus Lewis, America, XC (October 24, 1953), pp. 107-09

11. Harry Gilroy, "Fame Taps A Playwright," New York Times Drama Section, November 8, 1953, p. 3

The other is that a guy has to be allowed to lead his own life, to part his hair on the right side or the left, whichever he wants to. There has to be room in the world for the off-horse. 12

To at least one of the newspaper critics, however, that wasn't what it was about at all. According to Robert Coleman, you ... "Take a couple of jiggers of Young Woodley, add one of Candida, season with a dash of sexual aberration, and you will have a pretty good idea of what Tea And Sympathy is about." 13 With that understanding of the play, Coleman admitted that ... "We anticipated more from Tea And Sympathy than we got. Frankly, it proved a disappointment." 14

Harold Clurman's approach to the play was more rational and clinical:

Tea And Sympathy is a totally successful play because it deals with a theme which has a strong appeal to our audiences and because it is extremely well produced

... the main theme ... is the defense of the special person in a society which tends to look askance at the 'odd' individual, even the unpremeditated non-conformist. If the play has a message, it is to the effect that a boy like its protagonist may be more truly a man than those falsely rugged folk who oppose him.

The play also cautions us against prejudice, slander, and false accusation -- in a word, is a plea for tolerance ... Yet in this regard I cannot help thinking that we have arrived today at a

12. Ibid.

13. Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, October 1, 1953

14. Ibid.

peculiar brand of tolerance. We tolerate the innocent!

Though now easily acceptable (forthright speaking a la Eugene O'Neill), a play like Tea And Sympathy is probably still regarded by many as adventurous and advanced, though it is actually primitive in its theme, characterization, and story development. It is, in fact, a very young play.

This is no adverse comment on it. It is the work of a young playwright, Robert Anderson, whose approach is honorably craftsmanlike and humane Mr. Kazan has rendered his author and actors a true service. 15

Tea And Sympathy, aside from the hint of its subject matter, does have a sort of soap-operish hue to it. John Mason Brown's admonition, already stated (page 162), against the tendency of the younger playwrights to lean on the actors proves Anderson to be guilty in this respect. The talented Deborah Kerr saved the play, in some considerable measure, from the maudlin suggestion implied in the title. In the preceding season an equally talented actress was unable to save another play from a similar attack on the living room heart strings, since it was not as cleverly written as Tea And Sympathy. The play was the Margaret Sullavan starring vehicle, The Deep Blue Sea by Terrance Rattigan. Credit Robert Anderson with being a craftsman, and Tea And Sympathy a competently written show. As Walter Kerr observes:

15. Harold Clurman, The Nation, CLXXVII (October 17, 1953), pp. 317-18

What Mr. Anderson has done is to erect a craftsmanlike play upon a difficult, emotionally limited, theme. There is a certain dramatic inhibition about the materials, and Tea And Sympathy is inevitably the sort of play in which more is thought than ever is spoken. The language, as a result, is low in key, the psychology is sometimes too patly calculated. But director and actors have enriched it everywhere. 16

Tea And Sympathy, as a first play, is surely entitled to some errors that the author will correct as he improves his craft. Fortunate in the many respects that he is, not the least of the playwright's good fortunes are some truly searching and helpful criticisms his first offering to the Broadway theater public has inspired. One particularly acute and apt criticism comes from The Commonweal's critic, Richard Hayes. He writes, in part:

The explicit outlines of Tea And Sympathy, so morally outrageous, do not in point of fact permit the charge. Mr. Anderson has confined himself to recording the weather of a human situation, and here the criterion must always be the quality of feeling. What disturbs, rather, is the strangely adjustable nature of the playwright's moral imagination. He approaches the public, or social, aspects of his theme with restraint and a fine, civilized intelligence, but his manipulation of personal relationships is far less fastidious. When Lillian Hellman wrote The Childrens Hour, a play of similar preoccupation and consequence, she somewhat inverted the pattern: make a melodrama of morality. Mr. Anderson has succumbed to the melodrama of sentiment.

Mr. Anderson would appear to be the more humane; he nourishes the current mode of sentimentalism.

16. Walter F. Kerr, New York Herald-Tribune, October 1, 1953

But sensitivity has again extracted its toll; the evidence is plain in the pallid language of Tea And Sympathy, in its inability to bear the moral traffic, and the drama's neat, faintly vulgar psychology (is a single sexual act, for example, so therapeutic? will it unravel so tangled and branching a history of inferiority?) What the play lacks is any dimension of power or moral vivacity 17

Eric Bentley also asks some very pertinent questions that the playwright might well ask himself:

... Tea And Sympathy is a highly superior specimen of the theatre of 'realist' escape. Superior in craftsmanship, superior in its isolation, combination, and manipulation of its relevant impulses and motifs. Its organization of the folklore of current fashion is so skillful, it brings us to the frontier where this sort of theatre ends. But not beyond it. So that one does not ask the questions one would ask of a wholly serious play. Here, in the cuckoo land of Broadway folklore, one doesn't ask how the heroine knows the hero is innocent ... how her husband could be so unloving and yet have got her to love him ... just how the heroine's motives are mixed -- to what extent her favors are kindness, to what extent self-indulgence -- for in this realm, the author enjoys the privilege of a dreamer, neurotic, and politician to appeal to whatever motive is most attractive at the moment

Technically, the production is perfection and therefore breathtaking. The stage at all times presents a dramatic picture. Progression from moment to moment is precisely gauged; every instant has its special value 18

Wolcott Gibbs, likewise, has certain specific misgivings about Tea And Sympathy:

17. Richard Hayes, The Commonweal, LIX (October 30, 1953), p. 90

18. Eric Bentley, The New Republic, CXXIX (October 19, 1953), pp. 20-21

I have, I'm afraid, several objections to all this. The first is that the central characters -- the withdrawn, suffering, artistic boy and the wise, tender, and magnificently self-sacrificing woman -- seem to me, in spite of some perception and restraint in the drawing, essentially the same old stencils that have been visited upon us so many times in the past ... My second complaint is that Mr. Anderson's plot, though dealing with an unruly theme, is as tidily and trickily organized as a dance by the Rockettes, especially in that precisely rounded off climactic scene, which struck me as something of a triumph of hollow and conceivably hollow dexterity. My third is that the author's prose, while accurate and funny in the two or three comedy scenes he permits himself, seldom rises above cliches and vacant rhetoric when some distinction of thought is demanded. My fourth is that ... I found myself almost wholly incredulous of most of the doings reported on the stage 19

Henry Hewes, writing in The Saturday Review Of Literature, expresses neatly a failing of the play that disturbed a number of the critics -- the tendency of the playwright and the director to paint their characters in bold black and white. Writes critic Hewes:

While Tea And Sympathy is perfectly carpentered, there is a certain lack of either strongly expressed emotion or the kind of ever-expanding image that are often found in less perfect but more stimulating plays. The housemaster is represented as an out-and-out villain, and his wife and Lee as completely good people. Perhaps Mr. Anderson has his characters and plot in too tight a rein. They and the play do exactly what he wants them to do, no more, no less, and the end of the play, beautiful and erotic as it is, is the end of a chapter in a book that could continue as long as its author had strength in his typewriting fingers.

19. Wolcott Gibbs, The New Yorker, XXIX (October 10, 1953), pp. 71-72

... Tea And Sympathy is the kind of first rate theatre collaboration that an author is lucky to get in his tenth Broadway play. Mr. Anderson has had it in his first. He has taken the calculated risk of being a Broadway playwright and won. 20

Nonetheless, no one can say that Tea And Sympathy did not deserve its long and profitable run, which ended on Broadway on June 26, 1955, since Mr. Anderson had created a pertinent drama with something really important to say, Mr. Kazan had directed it with authority, Jo Mielziner had provided it with an attractively functional setting, and Deborah Kerr had created a convincing dispenser of tea and sympathy. Mr. Anderson owes much of his success to his star for, unlike so many Hollywood stars who quickly withdraw from a play after the reviews are out, Miss Kerr remained with the play for a whole season on Broadway and continued with an extended run on the road during the subsequent season. Undoubtedly much of the drawing power of the show was due to the presence of Miss Kerr in the cast.

Prior to writing Tea And Sympathy Robert Anderson had discovered a novel by Donald Wetzel entitled A Wreath And A Curse that intrigued him because the story contained things he could relate to his own youth and was written in a compact style. He decided

20. Henry Hewes, The Saturday Review Of Literature, XXXVI (October 17, 1953), pp. 35-36

to adapt it to the dramatic form. He wrote one version of it before writing Tea And Sympathy, wrote a second version of it simultaneously with Tea And Sympathy, and a final version after that play had been successfully launched. It was the second adapted version of the novel that was produced at the Washington, D. C. Arena Stage in the Spring of 1953 under the title All Summer Long. Washingtonians, critics and public alike, were enthusiastic, which helped to whet the appetites of New York theatergoers when the final, revised version of All Summer Long moved into the Coronet Theater on the evening of September 23, 1954, almost a year after the premiere of the still successful Tea And Sympathy.

Robert Anderson's second drama proved somewhat of a disappointment. Although Atkinson, in the Times, labeled it "... a poignant and beautiful play," ²¹ Richard Watts, Jr., in the Post review, found "... it has moments of sensitive power but somehow fails to add up into a properly moving drama." ²² For Walter Kerr, Anderson had written "... a skeleton play," ²³ while Robert Coleman saw it as "... a stimulating drama, a drama of feeling and impact ... for those

21. Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, September 24, 1954

22. Richard Watts, Jr., New York Post, September 24, 1954

23. Walter F. Kerr, New York Herald-Tribune, September 24, 1954

who would consider the eternal verities for a couple of hours." ²⁴ To critic William Hawkins, All Summer Long "... has a basic affinity to Death Of A Salesman [though] It lacks that drama's violence, but it is sweeter and has things to say in a more universal way." ²⁵ But to John McClain, "... the bright young author of Tea And Sympathy [has] allowed himself to settle for a series of gentle mood pieces, many of them charming, but which in aggregate added up to less than a stimulating evening." ²⁶

The public did not take to this new Anderson show dealing with a young boy trying to save his quarreling family's home from destruction by river erosion. The play expired after its 60th performance. Whether it was for the lack of a star the stature of Miss Kerr, the so-so reviews, or public indifference at that moment to the particular type of play is rather impossible to determine but this writer, who did see one of the 60 performances, finds himself in accord with the minority who were much impressed by the Freshman's second Broadway effort. All Summer Long is an exceptionally warm and human drama, sketched this

24. Robert Coleman, New York Daily Mirror, September 24, 1954

25. William Hawkins, New York World-Telegram, September 24, 1954

26. John McClain, New York Journal-American, September 24, 1954

time in shades of gray as well as black and white, and impeccably acted. It is, as Brooks Atkinson has assured his readers, "... good to be reminded so quietly that the people of the theatre can do such shining work." 27

But the writer and Mr. Atkinson were holding minority opinions. Harold Clurman flatly stated:

[All Summer Long] ... is less proficient as craftsmanship [than Tea And Sympathy] but more credible as a story. The least one can say of All Summer Long is that it is an honest play. It is difficult to say much more

What is missing in All Summer Long is original perception in terms of humor, poetry, or incisive observation. The result is a certain flatness. The production under Alan Schneider's direction attempts to add a dimension of romance to the sorry proceedings of the tale through music and the like 28

Louis Kronenberger finds an unhappy comparison with the playwright's first Broadway success:

The play might almost be called Tea And Apathy. For, what with its sensitive boy -- stupidly misunderstood, innocently misunderstanding -- and with its unhappy brother in the same ministering-angel role as the housemaster's unhappy wife, there are decided inner correspondences with Tea And Sympathy. But where, in Tea And Sympathy, a bewildered boy was caught up violently in action, it is of inaction that he is the victim here. And deprived of melodrama, Playwright Anderson is driven into sentimentality.

27. Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, September 24, 1954

28. Harold Clurman, The Nation, CLXXIX (October 9, 1954), p. 314

... the play, however honestly intended or now and then effectively written, drifts to no end like its people, and holds together little better than its wall. It tries hard to pierce to something rooted, but its author gives an impression of living beyond his insight. 29

Henry Hewes, of The Saturday Review Of Literature, sees a slight ray of hope:

... All Summer Long sacrifices impact for being as lifeless as life itself. Little that happens urgently commands our minds or our attention. Maybe that is its point. Maybe it challenges us to ignore it as Willie's parents did him. It is poetry without 'poetry,' acting without 'acting,' and drama without 'drama.' Certainly, for a play so short on vitality, All Summer Long is too long. But it is impossible to see it without gaining an increased respect for everyone responsible for its making. 30

In a review more compatible to the views of this writer, Wolcott Gibbs says:

Robert Anderson, whose Tea And Sympathy established him as one of our foremost authorities on the sensitive young man in the hostile world, has practically sewed up this title with his new play, called All Summer Long ... Inevitably, there have been some changes in plot and personnel ... The play, however, remains substantially the same in mood and message. The young Mr. Anderson continues to insist, suffer with an intensity that is far beyond the average comprehension, and our society, generally speaking, is ruthlessly organized against them. Since it is without the automatic shock and the calculated denouement of its predecessor, All Summer Long seems to me a better and more reputable play

In justice to Mr. Anderson, it should be stated that All Summer Long contains a good many

29. Louis Kronenberger, Time, LXIV (October 4, 1954), p. 56

30. Henry Hewes, The Saturday Review Of Literature, XXXVII (October 9, 1954), p. 26

quite funny and touching things. The complaints against it here are, first, that there are not nearly enough of them; second, that the drawing of character in terms of almost absolute black and white has a rather naive air on the modern stage; and, third, that having said just about the same thing once, the author might have been well advised to refrain from saying it again ... 31

The most glowing review of all, however, appeared in Brooks Atkinson's Sunday column when, in the afterthought of his reminiscences of the play, the Dean of the New York newspaper critics ran through his file of adjectives:

All Summer Long is to Tea And Sympathy as a tone poem is to a symphony.

... as a Chekhovian portrait of some American people, superbly staged and acted, it is a tender and beautiful work of art, perceptive toward the characters, disinterested in the fate they invoke on themselves, marvelously free from the corrosions of showmanship. Here are the homely truths of a dissonant Middle Western family that has no appetite for life.

Performances like this one make the theatre worth all the work and high hopes that go into serious productions. 32

All Summer Long is possibly not that good. But what it has shown the theater-going public -- at least that part of the public that was quick enough to perceive -- is that Robert Anderson is a playwright whose progress should be closely charted. Unlike

31. Wolcott Gibbs, The New Yorker, XXX (October 2, 1954), pp. 63-64

32. Brooks Atkinson, New York Times Sunday Drama Section, October 3, 1954, p. 1

the other playwrights who have appeared in this study and who have so securely found their place in the American theater that an occasional failure will do little to harm their reputation -- unlike these, Robert Anderson has a reputation that still lies in the future. That he has made a promising start no one will deny. That he is a playwright with a promising future most will agree. But for the moment "promising" is the word for Robert Anderson. The Theater is expecting big things of him.

CHAPTER VIII
THE PLAYWRIGHTS, THE CRITICS, AND THE CONTEMPORARY
THEATER

Ten years is a short period of time to attempt to measure any human institution. The act of measurement is somewhat like measuring a piece of clothing before it has been subjected to the process of shrinkage. Time is the agent that shrinks a decade in the theater and the related arts just as water is the agent that causes clothing to shrink. With the theater decade in this study just ending, time has not yet had the opportunity to fit it into its proper perspective in the total theater picture, so the only conclusions that can be reached at this moment are tentative ones.

Ten years ago, on January 1, 1945, all except one of the six playwrights discussed in this study were virtual unknowns. Mary Chase's Harvey had opened just two months prior to this date and the "dumb Denver housewife,"¹ to quote Frank Fay's affectionate appellation for Mrs. Chase, was currently "the toast of New York." Four days after this date John Patrick, a playwright who already had had two abortive starts in the theater, was to slip into the magic circle with

1. (Author Unknown), "Mary Chase; Success Almost Ruined Her," Cosmopolitan, CXXXVI (February, 1954), p. 101

The Hasty Heart. And a little later, toward the end of the 1944-45 theater season, while the war in Europe was just coiling up for its final big push, Chicago presented a gift to the New York Theater in the package of Tennessee Williams' first Broadway production, The Glass Menagerie.

Clearly, each of these three plays had been born in the throes of war, yet each reflected almost nothing of the bitter conflict that had been raging across the face of the earth for nearly six years. Mary Chase has frankly admitted that Harvey was conceived as a piece of "escapist" drama, oddly inspired out of her neighbor's grief over the loss of her son (page 167). Feminine intuition arose to serve Mary Chase well, for the instinct that nourished her desire to cheer her saddened neighbor was the same spark that cheered the hundreds of thousands of Harvey-goers who likewise had been bearing the burden of a long and wearying war upon their shoulders, if less poignantly than Mrs. Chase's neighbor. That Harvey should have been inspired by a remote incident of the war and so enthusiastically accepted by a war-weary public, yet be so completely removed from the connotations of war in its content, is one of the numerous unexplainable mysteries that help to make the theater such an interesting and exciting profession.

The Hasty Heart at least had a war setting. But, as Joseph Wood Krutch observed, "... it is only by the accident of time and place a play about the war." ² The Hasty Heart is the only play in the 25 plays included in this study that has grown directly out of the playwright's war experience. Yet it is less a play about the war that it is about a collection of interesting characters in a hospital ward. The play could just as easily have been set in a ward in Bellview Hospital in New York City and the product would have been substantially the same. The charm of The Hasty Heart lies not so much in its setting (which could be most depressing in less skillful hands) but in its contrasting characters and in its sparkling wit and humor -- a delightful characteristic that manifests itself in all of John Patrick's subsequent plays, with the single exception of The Story Of Mary Surratt. In this respect Patrick's play, like Mary Chase's Harvey, was escapist drama to be taken happily to its collective hearts by the theaters' war-weary public. But, whereas Harvey was an occasional escape from reality into the realm of fantasy, The Hasty Heart was entirely an adventure in reality. In both instances, however, the success can largely be

2. Joseph Wood Krutch, The Nation, CLX (January 20, 1945), p. 81

attributed to the opportunities they offered for escape for a couple of hours into laughter, a rare commodity in war times.

No such rational explanation would serve as well to explain the success of Tennessee Williams' The Glass Menagerie, however, for such humor as it possessed was, as Burton Rascoe put it, "... laughs growing out of a situation." He says, "They are not Broadway wisecracks. When you laugh the characters would be, in real life, surprised that what they said struck you as funny." ³ Neither is The Glass Menagerie a war play, nor is there any mention of a war in it. There is nothing unusual, to be sure, about writers eschewing dramas of the war while the war is still continuing for, aside from being dubious box office fare (the public being generally in a mood of wanting to escape thoughts of war), the drama of the war itself far overshadows anything that could be placed on the stage. But a number of shows had been produced during the war that at least took their cue from the conflict then raging -- The Doughgirls, This Is The Army, and Winged Victory, to name but three.

Nevertheless, Williams has explained that The Glass Menagerie was written on a beach in California

3. Burton Rascoe, New York World-Telegram, April 2, 1945

while he was collecting movie pay so it could not in any event have come out of a military background. Williams claims the play was somewhat autobiographical. This does not explain, however, why The Glass Menagerie was such a tremendous hit almost at the very moment when the biggest drama in history was unfolding on the battlefields of Europe. The answers might be many and none of them necessarily correct. This writer would suggest a few. In the first instance it was a well written, almost poetical drama -- a commodity which in itself had not been seen with much frequency on the Broadway stages during the war years. In the second instance, The Glass Menagerie is a sort of dreamy memory play with a vein of nostalgia that becomes a war-weary people. In the third instance, it had a big pre-premiere buildup with rave notices being forwarded regularly from Chicago where the show had an extended pre-Broadway run. Finally, and not the least factor, The Glass Menagerie starred one of Broadway's favorite actresses in a long deferred comeback role. Broadway theatergoers of past years turned out in droves to see the magic of Laurette Taylor's acting once again. All of which is not to take away from Tennessee Williams the credit for writing a very fine and moving play, but Broadway success can often be attributed to something more than the playwright's effort alone.

The next year on Broadway was one that found the younger playwrights rummaging through their trunks, so to speak. Success apparently had caught them unprepared for Mary Chase came up with a play written prior to Harvey, Tennessee Williams brought forth a collaborative effort he had written prior to The Glass Menagerie, and, in the following year, John Patrick resurrected for public approval a play he had begun prior to The Hasty Heart. Hence, all three of these plays -- The Next Half Hour, You Touched Me!, and The Story Of Mary Surratt -- were the products of minds presumably preoccupied with war. But again only Patrick is remotely concerned with war and his is a historical, rather than a contemporary, treatment of national conflict.

In this observation that the younger playwrights seemed to be eschewing war themes the suggestion is not that they have failed to bring the war to the stage in all of its panoplied goryness but rather that they seem to have failed to pick up their cue from an event that was at that time overwhelmingly dominant in their lives. They seemed to be living in a sealed room while the war raged uncomprehended outside. Thus, Tennessee Williams was writing the innocuous story of a shy English girl being challenged to assert herself by a forthright suitor at almost the very moment his

country's Pacific possessions were rapidly falling before the blows of the Japanese Navy and the war was being brought to his own doorstep in New York City with the sinking of American tankers and freighters in the Atlantic by German submarines. And Mary Chase, isolated as she was under the shadow of the Rocky Mountains, was writing a moody psychological drama about tangled family relations.

In the case of John Patrick, The Story Of Mary Surratt began to take shape prior to his military experience. The Hasty Heart, a play that came out of his immediate military experience, indicates that at least he was not completely insulated from the impact of the war. And, insofar as The Story Of Mary Surratt can be interpreted as an indictment of human injustice and cruelty in the contemporary world (and there seemed to be a divided judgment as to whether it could be so interpreted) the play could be presumed to have a contemporary significance. But by removing his play so completely from the immediate scene of action and by obscuring his theme of social justice (if that was his theme) by a passionate appraisal of the martyrdom of Mary Surratt, Patrick almost completely lost the contemporary parallels that only a few were alert enough to perceive. John Patrick is a writer who brides himself upon being able to write

out of his own experiences (page 160) but in a time when tremendous experiences were taking place all around him Patrick chose to reach back into a period of history completely foreign to his own personal experience. The insulating effects of the war have wrought miracles upon these younger playwrights!

In the same theater season that John Patrick brought The Story Of Mary Surratt to the Broadway stage Arthur Miller produced the first echo of the recent war in the theater with his Drama Critics' Award winning play, All My Sons. Although Mr. Miller's play gave this writer, at least, the impression that he was rather flailing a dead horse, All My Sons at least had the virtue of revealing that one new writer for the theater was somewhat aware of the implications of his times. And All My Sons was even more than that; it was a theater piece with searing scenes and a powerful and moving climax. But Arthur Miller seemed to be doing what military men are often accused of doing -- fighting a war with the previous war's weapons. For war profiteering was not an issue of the times out of which this play grew that it was in the period following the first World War. There were some shrewd guesses that Miller was using the theme as his own personal protest against the practises of a capitalistic society rather than developing it out of a contemporary situation, but whatever the playwright's motives it

was gratifying to observe that someone at long last had taken note of a situation that was crying out to be recorded.

When Tennessee Williams returned for his third round in December, 1947, he turned a cold shoulder once again on the world picture -- as Tennessee Williams is wont to do, with the possible exception of Camino Real. Williams is a writer who gives the impression of almost always writing in a vacuum, although he is constantly drawing upon his own experiences for his work. His writing appears to combine two streams of thought -- the Southern charm and gentility that was the joy of his earlier life and the bitterness of tenement living that derived from his childhood experiences in St. Louis. And when he writes there seems to be in each play a thread of compassion and an atmosphere of bitterness, the latter almost always predominating (except, possibly, in The Glass Menagerie and Summer And Smoke), perhaps because it was the later experience in his life. In his 1947 play, A Streetcar Named Desire, these lines are particularly noticeable for it is clear that the playwright bears Blanche no feeling of hatred. Otherwise he would not have justified her decline in gentility by an unfortunate and shocking marriage. But he reserves all of his contempt in his description of the environment

that brought Blanche to such a shocking state of decay, just as if he were venting his wrath upon the miserable environment that brought him so much unhappiness in his life in St. Louis. Insofar as Williams is commenting upon the decaying state of society as he sees it he is relating himself to the contemporary situation. But insofar as the period in which he was writing was one of increasing international tensions and cold war politics, Williams' dramas were completely removed from the reality of the existing situation. The only relationship that can be perceived between the two is that the frustrations of one were mirrored in the frustrations of the other, a valid relationship that can be carried only so far and no farther.

The next play of "the representative six" to make its appearance on Broadway was another from the prolific pen of Tennessee Williams, Summer And Smoke. Written almost simultaneously with A Streetcar Named Desire, it has an even greater detachment from everyday existence than the earlier produced play. In A Streetcar Named Desire there could at least be discerned a social system that was in the process of evolution. But in Summer And Smoke there was nothing more than an abortive love affair between two people. Nothing that went on outside Glorious Hill, Mississippi, and little that

went on within it, was of concern to the story. Tennessee Williams appears to have drawn almost completely within himself in the construction of this play. And yet, almost everything that Williams writes is of some considerable significance in the theater. His style, which is romantic and poetical and imaginative, rather than his themes, which are often commonplace and disagreeable, will win Williams a permanent place in the theater.

To Arthur Miller, however, the theme is the principal factor and when Death Of A Salesman appeared in the same season as Summer And Smoke the other extreme in dramatic composition had been probed. For Death Of A Salesman is as much of a social document as Summer And Smoke avoids social documentation. The salesman is as much a victim of social pressures as Blanche is of the pressure of maintaining her gentility in A Streetcar Named Desire. But Willy Loman's pressures are here and now, of the present age, whereas Blanche's were of a dimly perceived past. The conclusion may be reached at this point, if it has not been perceived earlier, that Arthur Miller is a much more contemporaneous writer than is Tennessee Williams. Whether that factor, ipso facto, makes him a superior dramatist is a subject for argumentation that will not be gone into here. At the present moment the enormous success of Death Of A

Salesman has largely been attributed to the identification factor in the play -- a contemporaneous factor in its own right, since people can identify themselves with the salesman of their own day very readily, if only through contact with the door-to-door salesman, but with figures of the past, like kings and queens and dukes of other days, the personal identification factor is much less significant. Hence, Salesman, by the very nature of its contemporaneousness, has enjoyed a success apart from its other elements of excellence. Again the parallels between the frustrations of personal existence and that of national existence may be drawn, but the seeker after symbolism is probably more enchanted by these parallels than the average playgoer. Sufficient it is to observe that Miller draws his strength from the current scene in a manner that few other of the younger playwrights -- and most especially Tennessee Williams -- do.

William Inge was the next of the representative playwrights to appear upon the Broadway theater scene with Come Back, Little Sheba. Again there was a marked indifference to the current scene where a cold war was warming up for a hot one in the Far East and politics as usual prevailed in the nation's capital. The new playwright selected "loss of youth" as his theme and told his story in terms of a man and wife relationship.

A theatrically effective story came out of it but it seemed somewhat pallid beside the greater issues of the day. A "theatrical show" is a manifestation of the theater's preoccupation with itself. Come Back, Little Sheba is of the genre of plays that has caused John Gassner to remark:

There is surely a marked absence of fervor in serious drama such as sparked O'Neill and Odets, or of zest in comedy such as effervesced, when last present, in Born Yesterday. Nor has much fervor or exuberance been present in our stage productions since such early post-war presentations as Call Me Mister and Mister Roberts ... it is the torpor of our plays and performances and not their "crudity" that is likely to be disastrous to the contemporary professional stage. ⁴

Surely the initial scenes of Come Back, Little Sheba are about as "torporous" as can be and the reference to theatricalism is posited largely upon the climactic scene when Doc attacks Lola with an axe. But Sheba was nevertheless an auspicious beginning for a dramatist of promise.

When John Patrick brought his Curious Savage to Broadway at the beginning of the 1950-51 theater season he appeared to have beaten his way out of one jungle only to get lost in another. He had shaken off his serious manner and substituted his natural flair for wit, but he initially stumbled upon an ill-advised subject on which to practise. However, he would have

4. John Gassner, The Theatre In Our Times (New York: Crown, 1954), p. 439

been equally ill-advised if he had turned to the contemporary scene where a cold war had just turned into a hot war and a new national emergency was just around the corner. An exception should be made in the case of wits in the application of their polished talents to items of contemporary significance, but if an occasional Of Thee I Sing or a Teahouse Of The August Moon does come along -- well, so much the better. Usually the theatergoing public asks no more of its dramatic pundits than a Blithe Spirit or a Mister Roberts, expressing only a measure of petulance at the infrequency of their appearance. In brief, John Patrick is a playwright apart from the other breed by virtue of being a humorist. There is no obligation upon humorists to make fun of society. That he did so effectively in The Teahouse Of The August Moon is an added filip to the cocktail.

Tennessee Williams returned to the Broadway stage for another round in February, 1951, with The Rose Tattoo. A stay abroad in Italy prior to the production had not served to widen the playwright's social horizon at all except for the fact that the new play encompassed a whole host of characters instead of a few, as previously done. Practically speaking, Williams is restricted in his scope in choice of subject matter since he has arbitrarily limited himself to

writing plays of character -- a not unreasonable limitation considering his enormous skill in character delineation. A character study, focusing as it does its specific attention upon the development of a character, not unnaturally tends to ignore the larger issues. Even in A Streetcar Named Desire, where the issue of a decaying social order is implicit, the principal concern of the story (and rightly so) is the decline of a single character, Blanche du Bois. Were Tennessee Williams to examine, for example, the Korean War it could be assumed the social implications of the war would figure about as large in his play as the decaying social order in A Streetcar Named Desire -- in which event he would be just as far ahead by forgetting the war and concern himself entirely with his off-beat characters.

To suggest, on the other hand, that Williams should become more socially conscious and less character conscious has about as little validity as to suggest that Arthur Miller should become less social conscious and more character conscious. This would be sheer nonsense. For each has a particular skill and the wisdom to exploit that skill and an arbitrary insistence to "spread their shot" will do nothing to improve the nature of their drama. What Williams could and should do, however -- and which he has not yet

done -- is to show both faces of his characters and dispel the impression that all in the world of Tennessee Williams is frustrated and futile. Williams' deficiency is less in his failure to give the whole picture -- the world has grown too wide for any playwright to do that today -- than it is in giving the true picture of the world he has chosen to depict.

In The Rose Tattoo Williams came closer to depicting the happy mortal than he has done before or since. But Serafina Dell Rose is, for the greater part of the play, a bundle of frustrations before her happiness is ever achieved. That it is achieved is a curiosity that is not easily explained.

Patrick returned in December of 1951 with the second of his witty trilogy, Lo And Behold!, but it failed to catch fire for reasons that are seemingly separate from the social significance it did not have.

No one expected a political or social allegory when Mary Chase returned to the theater in 1952 with Mrs. McThing. No one got it, either. Specialist in escapist literature that she is, Mary Chase's newest adventure was completely fantastic and, literally, out-of-this-world. But the Denver dramatist, like John Patrick, has her own special genre, and so rare is the good fantasy on Broadway that the tendency is to just let her ride whichever way her fancy leads her.

Arthur Miller, however, is not to be regarded in the same light. Of all the 25 dramas included in this study The Crucible was a commentary upon the contemporary scene, despite the fact that it went back over 250 years in history for a parallel. Arthur Miller appears to be the only one of the six playwrights who regularly reads the daily newspapers. The parallel between the current conditions of McCarthyism and the witch hunts of the Salem of the 1690's was one that a mind of Arthur Miller could not ignore. The Crucible is probably the finest example of the contemporaneous theater concerned with a social theme.

Camino Real was Tennessee Williams foray into the unknown. A bitter commentary upon the contemporary scene it might have been. As has been noted, the interpretations vary from critic to critic, but one reported that "... to one theatergoer it seems to be the mirror of Mr. Williams' concept of life -- a dark mirror, full of black and appalling images ..." ⁵ and another observed that "Camino Real ... presumably represents its author's reflections on the human race" ⁶ If Camino Real is a social commentary, as these critics seem to imply, it is the best reason

5. Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, March 20, 1953

6. Wolcott Gibbs, The New Yorker, XXIX (March 28, 1953), p. 69

why Tennessee Williams should not be compelled to expand his horizons to encompass more than simply probing into characters. For this was the least successful of Williams' plays at the box office.

Bernardine saw Mary Chase attempt to get herself out of the delightful rut of fantasy and into the somewhat contemporary problem of the juvenile delinquent. But Mary Chase cannot make a problem out of something she loves and her juvenile delinquents turned out to be not very delinquent at all but just adolescent boys growing naturally into young manhood. The lesson is not nearly as profound as in The Crucible and the experience is a somewhat restricted one -- but at least Mary Chase has temporarily gotten out of the delightful rut of fantasy.

In William Inge's second Broadway play, Picnic, the playwright seems to be following his inspirators example in eschewing all social significance and having his characters predominate. Were there no newspapers to be read and no atom bomb shelters to be built, Picnic could still have become a play. If Dwight D. Eisenhower had just not been installed as the 33rd President of the United States and Joseph McCarthy had not just been elected U. S. Senator from Wisconsin, Picnic would still have become a play. Insofar as dormant females constitute a menace to the established

social order Ficnic is a satisfactory commentary upon that particular aspect of the social existence. In short, Ficnic, like most of Williams' dramas, is a character study and as such is a charming, if superficial, piece of theater.

Robert Anderson, the youngest of the playwrights, had one eye on the social aspect of life when he sketched out the story for Tea And Sympathy. Although the larger issues of Joseph Stalin's death and Joseph McCarthy's domestic activities escaped his pen, a problem of no small social significance did concern him. If his theme of social conformity was handled on a slight scale it was no less a problem than it was in Hitler's Germany when non-conformity meant extinction. True, Robert Anderson was only scratching the surface of his subject material in Tea And Sympathy and so many became enamoured or repelled by the subject material that it became difficult to separate the forest from the trees. The chances are that in this particular drama the subject became bigger than the theme, but in Tea And Sympathy Robert Anderson gave more promise of being a carbon copy of Arthur Miller's than of Tennessee Williams' school of playwrighting.

No so, however, when his second play, All Summer Long, reached the boards. The shift was noticeable. No longer was the "off-horse" theme in evidence, and

the whole play turned on the characters. For the present the Williams' school seems to have conquered the young playwright, but since he is still "promising" the judgment will be suspended.

Almost everyone was pleased when John Patrick turned up with a resounding triumph in his adaptation of Vern Sneider's The Teahouse Of The August Moon, not simply because he had labored so long on Broadway without success but also because his infectious wit has made him a likeable person and the best always goes with those who are instinctively liked. The idea that Patrick deliberately reached out into the contemporary world of reality and plucked this juicy morsel off the vine is to be rejected, since it has been demonstrated already (page 150) that the initial moves were made by Maurice Evans and that Patrick was invited to participate in the making of the show. The Teahouse Of The August Moon was one of those rare moments when a contemporary wit has applied his talents to a contemporary theme, much as when Of Thee I Sing and The State Of The Union came into the theater. This new turn in John Patrick's talents will make him an interesting man to watch in the future.

William Inge continued to follow Williams' pattern in 1955 when Bus Stop premiered on Broadway. He had,

however, a charm, humor, and humanness that Williams has never possessed. If Inge were to probe as deeply into the minds and hearts of his characters as Williams had done -- as in Cat On A Hot Tin Roof, for example -- the results might be considerably different. The cowboy and the nightclub singer in Bus Stop may appear as "the salt of the earth," as they did to one critic, but the same characters under Williams' dissecting pen might turn up as somewhat less palatable salt. Or, conversely, Maggie the Cat and Brick might be reasonably pleasant characters in the company of William Inge. To describe Inge as travelling the Williams route is only to suggest that they are both predominately interested in character, though Inge's interest is largely in their surface manifestations, whereas Williams is a subsurface writer.

From the external aspect of the theater it is significant to observe that at one time or another each of these six writers have been the toast of the drama critics and, on other occasions, each have been roasted by them. As far as is known to this writer, the playwright has not yet arrived who has not at one time or another garnered some adverse reviews. Among the present group of playwrights Tennessee Williams appears to be the favorite among the so-called "supreme arbiters of the theater" (second only to the

audiences). But Williams has received a number of severe rebuffs at the hands of the critics, too. The reviews of Camino Real, in particular, were most unflattering. You Touched Me! pleased almost none of the critics, and Summer And Smoke got tepid reviews.

Arthur Miller got off to a bad start with his play, The Man Who Had All The Luck, but from then on he got a good press, save for a few dissents for The Crucible. John Patrick has been the most unfortunate victim of a bad press of the six playwrights but, as pointed out in the chapter in this study about Patrick, there was always someone present at each failure to wish him success on the next venture. The charm that Patrick reveals in his plays no doubt inspires this behind-the-scenes rooting that Patrick has been receiving.

Almost all of the critics agree that Mary Chase is not a very competent craftsman in the theater, but none will admit they can, or wish, to get along without her. Like Patrick, she transmits a part of her infectious personality to everything she sets her hand to and the result is an amazing contradiction in critical appraisals.

William Inge got off to a troubled start with the critics with Come Back, Little Sheba, but with each subsequent play the praises have grown louder

and the giant steps he has taken in improving his craft is comparable only to that progress made by Arthur Miller. Robert Anderson reversed the order of criticism received by Miller and Inge, receiving almost universal praise for his first drama and a strong rejection of his second play. There may be some time and considerable difficulties before Anderson is able to overcome the onus of having a smash hit the first time on the boards.

The playwrights of this most recent decade appear, on the whole, to have shied away from the dramas of social protest, unlike Odets in the thirties and Ibsen at the turn of the century. The temper of the times was such, however, that protest was a most unpopular pastime and only the strongest would subject themselves to the ordeal of being in the vocal minority.

There still remains to be explained, however, the void in the stage picture of the documentation of the times between 1939 and 1945, the era of the greatest upheaval and the time of the most terrible trouble. When Arthur Miller records the tribulations of a gnawing ego or Tennessee Williams delineates the decline of Southern gentility, it would seem like they are only chewing at the edges of the greatest of all the evils that continues to cast a pall over

present day existence. Perhaps the horrors of war are still too much with us to make it a dramatic picture on the stage. Possibly the picture of war has become so big that dramatists hesitate to attempt it. In any event, there does remain the void in the current theater picture that begs to be filled just as these six playwrights have sketched, in various ways, the several aspects of the current social scene.

The American Theater will never die -- however much its physical aspects may decrease -- so long as it is able to offer to a theatergoing public playwrights with the talents, the insights, and the energies of the six playwrights examined in this study. Arthur Miller cries in anguish over the small area encompassed by "The American Theater;" Brooks Atkinson deplores the diminishing number of productions and higher costs of staging plays; and others bewail the inroads made by television and motion pictures. But the one great plus factor in the picture is that the playwrights still are writing vital plays, and each evening the Morosco, the Music Box, and the Martin Beck hang out SRO signs for dramas that people want to see. When the public surrenders completely to the physical comforts of television only then, perhaps, will come the time to close up the theater shop. This writer would maintain

that this is an extremely unlikely event as long as the theater is fed by writers like Tennessee Williams, John Patrick, Mary Chase, Arthur Miller, William Inge, and freshmen always coming of age in the theater like Robert Anderson.

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ABOUT THE WRITER

The writer was born in Traverse City, Michigan on May 29, 1920. He received his primary and secondary education in the Traverse City Public Schools, graduating from high school in 1938.

He entered Michigan State College in 1939 and, after four years of military service during World War II, graduated with a B. A. Degree in History and Political Science in 1947. In 1949 he received an M. A. Degree from Michigan State College in History and Political Science.

He has been residing in New York City since the summer of 1952. During that period of time the writer has attended approximately 150 Broadway theatrical productions and approximately 25 off-Broadway productions in New York City. From this theatergoing experience the writer has gathered background for much of the material contained in this study.

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