

CRITERIA OF CRITICAL STANDARDS FOR
REVIEWING AMATEUR PLAYS

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CHAPTER I

THE PLACE OF CRITICISM IN AMATEUR DRAMATICS

Man is a social being. He develops creatively through awareness of things about him. He enjoys life by participating with his fellow man--either actively or vicariously--in the realms of music, art, the dance, and the theatre. The drama affords him more than the average enjoyment, for it employs the use of many arts. On the amateur level, the participation brings a genuine satisfaction. Yet this field of enjoyment more than any other has failed to receive its maximum credit in the criticisms which have been attempted. Man is uncritical in the truest sense. He likes too readily, an amiable fault; he dislikes too readily, which is misfortune. He distrusts the new and different, often the best because he does not seek answers to questions. More intelligent observation, and stronger, finer emotional development are man's great needs. He can find them by asking why people and things are the way they are.

The one who sets himself the task of being a critic of amateur plays, or anyone who finds himself with the task thrust upon him, would do well to begin asking questions and seeking the answers. The former will have had some experience with critical writing and be more likely to apply professional standards, while the latter will be learning a new

art. Any critical reviewing is an art. "Dramatic criticism begins where play reviewing leaves off."¹ To give constructive, interesting criticism of amateur plays involves not only a knowledge of general journalistic practices but more than that a background reading in drama of the past, literature of the theatre, and as much firsthand information on the technical side of production as possible. All this material need not be studied from the viewpoint of a scholar, but in order to be on bowing terms with all phases of the art which is being criticized. Stephenson Smith and Martin Turnell are two writers who believe that the critic of the arts has definite responsibilities. They say the duties begin with self-examination and questioning which is good background for evaluation. Smith says:

Reviewers can get along with flat surfaces. Not the critic. He can have nothing half so valuable as keen senses and tough, alert wit to enable him to see what is before him and interpret and analyze it aright.²

Martin Turnell goes even further when he says:

The critic possesses a dual personality. He is at once an "artist" and a "thinker," the "man of feeling" and "the intellectual." He has a speculative mind and is interested in ideas. It is not enough to see and feel, he wants to know why he sees and feels as he does, why certain forms of seeing and feeling are more important than others. He is an artist, but a special kind of artist.³

¹S. Stephenson Smith, The Craft of the Critic (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1931), p. 377.

²Ibid., p. 387.

³Martin Turnell, "An Essay on Criticism," "Dublin Review," p. 444 (Last Quarter 1948), back of half-title page, The Critics Notebook, edited by Robert Wooster Stallman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1950).

Thus both the experienced and the novice critic might begin by asking what criticism is and what its functions are in regard to the amateur play.

The editors of Criticism--The Foundation of Modern Literary Judgment say the questions are in this order:

"Critics ask where art comes from, how it becomes what it is, and what it does; their questions are about the Source, Form, and End of Art."¹ The first question emphasizes background and experience and would include the playwright's purpose, the type of play, and the theme. The second would involve the structural elements that make the work a whole. This means the director's problems of staging, the actor's interpretation, and the unity of the arts involved. The final question would examine the response of the audience, the final result or test of whether the production fulfilled its purpose. Thus the critic acquaints himself with "imitation" or "interpretation" of the work in physical ways through the directors and actors, then gauges the "communication" their work accomplishes with its presentation to an audience.

In the light of this observation on criticism of any work of art, the critic of the amateur play needs to realize that the production is entirely successful only when it "communicates" well what the playwright intended to say. In fact, the critical review should be written with that fact as its starting point. I. A. Richards in his discussion of

¹Criticism--The Foundation of Modern Literary Judgment, edited by Mark Schorer, Josephine Miles, and Gordon McKensie (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1948), Introduction, p. vi.

general criticism which can serve the critic in a particular field emphasizes this same principal. He writes:

What it communicates and how it does so and the worth of what is communicated form the subject matter of criticism. That the one and only goal of all critical endeavor, of all interpretation, appreciation, exhortation, praise or abuse is improvement in communication may seem an exaggeration. But in practice it is so. The whole apparatus of critical rules and principles is a means to the attainment of finer, more precise, more discriminating communication.¹

H. L. Mencken reveals in his essay "Criticism of Criticism of Criticism"² that the critic has more than a job of reporting. The critic in the field of amateur dramatics should be aware of the added responsibilities, since his realm is one which profits greatly from helpful criticism. It is the amateur theatre which is eager for improvement and feels free to experiment. Swinburne defined criticism as the "noble pleasure of pleasing." Edmund Wilson and Norman Foerster give the critic the functions which call for the preparation Mr. Mencken implied when they classify the three roles of the critic as "an individual responsible to the work of art, as interpreter to an audience, and finally as judge."³

When trying to fulfill his duties, the critic too often interprets criticism in the adverse manner, that is as

¹I. A. Richards, Practical Criticism (London: Kegan Paul, French, Trubner and Co., Ltd., Broadway House, 68-74, Carter Lane E. C., 1929), Introduction, p. 11.

²Contemporary American Criticism, selected and arranged by James Cloyd Bowman (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1946), p. 64.

³Edmund Wilson et al, The Intent of the Critic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 7.

"fault-finding." Goethe acknowledged:

There is a destructive and constructive criticism. The first measures and tests according to mechanical standards, the second answers fundamental questions. What has the writer (actor, playwright, director) proposed himself to do and how far has he succeeded?¹

A foremost critic defines criticism in a broad sense when he says, "In its soundest usage it means to judge, that is to say, appraise; and this meaning includes appreciation."² In agreeing with this same author who states, "What standards a critic has, it cannot be repeated too often, should be useful guides, not rigid finalities,"³ the criteria we shall attempt to set up will be practicable and will follow the trend suggested by the authorities quoted on the preceding pages and below. The trend it can be observed is "to sharpen appreciation and hearing to distinguish what is significantly told and what is not,"⁴ since the drama is a creative form of communication.

In order to write constructive criticism and the kind which would prove beneficial to amateur dramatics, the critic should become aware of his special duties. He needs such characteristics as a sharp appreciation for the unity of all arts in dramatics, an acknowledgment of differences

¹Contemporary American Criticism, op. cit., p. 49.

²Henry Hazlitt, The Anatomy of Criticism (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1933), pp. 9-10.

³Ibid.

⁴Harley Granville-Barker, The Use of the Drama (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945), p. 46.

in methods, and the ability to distinguish what affects an audience. These attributes form excellent background for writing sympathetically about amateur play production. The following rule should be noted:

The dramatic artist is to be judged by no other standard than that applied to any other creative artist: What has he tried to express and how well has he expressed it?¹

Many writers and critics have attempted to present the two aspects of criticism in their works. Appreciation for the work as a whole in the attempt to express an art is the keynote for a truthful critic. Ludwig Lewisohn admits being called a "high-brow critic," but claims it is always "When I say things that seem obvious and plain and incontrovertible to me."² In writing on creative criticism Lewisohn traces the critic's characteristics which have changed in course of time, from the expert on rules to judge, through the scientific approach, to the reverse, the subjective impressionists. He then discusses the modern critic who sees an art as an integral part of the life process, and in seeing some beauty in all things, admits of differences in methods of growth, of intensity of expression. Thus he fulfills the need for full appreciation before judgment. Samuel Johnson believed "the first duty of criticism is

¹Contemporary American Criticism, op. cit., p. 57.

²Ludwig Lewisohn, The Creative Life (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924), p. 14.

neither to depreciate nor dignify by partial representation"¹ and William Hazlitt the great English critic said, "A genuine criticism should, as I take it, reflect the colours, the light and shade, the soul and body of a work."²

The conclusions as to the meaning of criticism and its function in the light of this discussion of the amateur play may be briefly these:

First, criticism is more than reviewing facts. It is chiefly concerned with giving all phases of a production equal consideration and appreciation, then judging or provoking the reader to form a judgment. To give this kind of critical review requires theoretical and technical knowledge on the part of the writer. Only when he possesses this does he fulfill Carlyle's definition of a true critic.

A critic's first duty is to make plain to himself what the aim of the artist really and truly was, how the task he had to do stood before his eyes, and how far, with such materials as were afforded him, he has fulfilled it.³

And second, we need constructive criticism in the amateur arts, for it can be useful and inspirational. As Hazlitt says,

Mutual criticism, far from being an evil, is the greatest single force in the world, for maintenance of order,

¹Samuel Johnson, "The Responsibilities of the Critic," Local Critics, ed. by G. E. Saintsbury (Boston, London: Ginn and Co., 1903), p. 240.

²William Hazlitt, "Criticism [In General]," ibid., p. 369.

³Contemporary American Criticism, op. cit., p. 49.

decorum, and decency, for preventing careless work, for spurring us to higher efforts.¹

At the same time that the critic develops the above insight into the dramatics field, and begins to use it in his profession, he will find he is participating in an art which brings full satisfaction. He will find he is developing a keener observation of life itself.

Much has been written on the universal appeal of the drama. Its birth was the result of man's desire to express himself in a creative manner, and it has never lost this purpose. Instead it has made allies of all the arts, so that play production in our day involves a combination of many creative talents. Lowell Lees, Speech Department, University of Utah, prefaces his study of Play Production and Direction with a discussion of the "Art of the Theatre." He says:

The universal appeal of the theatre seems to lie, in part at least, in the great variety of interests it affords. These interests are life interests that spring from a desire to see, understand, and enjoy the life we are living. They are communal interests as deep as our desire to join service organizations and to contribute money for war refugees or for Red Cross, Community Chest, T. B. Drives. This universal desire to discover, express and communicate concepts and values found in life is a fundamental basis for most art. There are many ways of expressing these values. The musician uses notes and chords; the playwright, dialogue and pantomime.²

This emphasizes again the idea expressed in the opening paragraphs of this thesis in which the place of drama in everyday

¹Henry Hazlitt, op. cit., pp. 9-10.

²C. Lowell Lees, Play Production and Direction (New York: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1948), p. vii.

life is shown. The art of play production has had a turbulent history, surviving economic depressions, persecution and war. For some 100 years it lay apparently dead, then was reborn in the realm where it had suffered, the Church. "Apparently it fulfills some universal human need, too great to go long unsatisfied."¹

Play production on the amateur level has had more struggles perhaps than the professional. This is because it is so closely tied up with peoples' lives. One writer expressed it this way:

The amateur, we are accustomed to say, works for love and not for money. He cultivates an art or a sport, a study or an employment, because of his taste for it; he is attached to it, not because it gives him a living, but because it ministers to his life.²

Because of the universal appeal of drama and because its production is a combination of many arts, the play critic is concerned with a field which is vital and growing. As Barnard Hewitt states:

Today in the U. S. the moving pictures and high costs of road shows have driven professional play production to the shelter of a few large cities, but this does not mean that the art is dead, or even that it is dying. On the contrary, it flourishes in amateur theatres throughout the length and breadth of the land. School theatres, church theatres, community theatres, and college and university theatres produce thousands of plays every year. In them the art of play production is very much alive.³

¹Barnard Hewitt, The Art and Craft of Play Production (Chicago, New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1940), p. 3.

²Bliss Perry, The Amateur Spirit (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1915), p. 4.

³Hewitt, op. cit., p. 3.

The critic of amateur dramatics must keep in mind, then, that this activity does have a place in the life of his community and that he can influence its growth. By recognizing what may or may not be expected from amateur play production, he can write of its performances with more understanding. To point out a few of the outstanding features of amateur plays we quote opinions of Bernard Hewitt of Brooklyn College and Emanuel Shonberger of the University of North Dakota.

The professional theatre workers may ask "what have amateurs to do with the art of play production?" True if one judges play production in the amateur theatre by any absolute standard, one must call much of it bad. As a matter of fact, the amateur sometimes brings freshness and simplicity to the art, virtues which are rare in the professional theatre. On the other hand it is undeniable that he is almost always weak in the technique of the art, particularly in the technique of acting. Some amateur faults are due to lack of time and energy and so for the most part must be tolerated, but many are due to lack of understanding of the nature of the art. An understanding of the nature and fundamental problems of play production is not at all surprising in the amateur,¹ for play production is the most complicated of the arts.¹

Having no profit motive, it concerns itself with the purely artistic and cultural and being more or less subsidized, it can afford to be experimental. It touches intimately our young people, some of whom develop into playwrights, designers, directors, actors. Best of all, as our professional theatre folk like to believe, these youngsters constitute an educated audience for the legitimate theatre of the future.

Today amateur performances are not dull. A well-directed amateur play is inspiring to the performers and to the audience. The apprentice actors bring to the stage a simplicity, spontaneity, and a naive zest that are far more pleasant than the studied efforts of some professional actors.

¹Ibid., p. 4.

Best of all, the amateur theatre gives the community a focus of attention, which it can contemplate and approve and in which a common interest and price are shared.¹

In the foregoing discussion we have attempted to establish that consideration of background, appreciation for work as a whole, and evaluation of fulfillment of purpose are the primary constituents of criticism in amateur dramatics. We have pointed out that the critic of this field should be both judge and appraiser of what is significantly told. And since drama is so closely associated with man's full enjoyment of life, the critic benefits from his study of dramatic techniques. In turn he can help the reader to develop appreciation and encourage acting groups to do better work.

To begin any learning process one needs books to read and examples to follow. A glance at the present situation will reveal an almost total lack of helpful information for the reporter who attempts to write a critical review of the amateur play. The first source one naturally turns to is the printed text. In our examination of about sixty books in the field of Journalism, Literary Criticism and Drama, only three² were found which devoted a chapter or section to the subject of judging a play. In The Craft of the Critic, Stephenson Smith writes this dedication for his book:

¹Emanuel D. Schonberger, Play Production for Amateurs (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1938), p. xi.

²S. Stephenson Smith, The Craft of the Critic (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1931), Milton Marx, The Enjoyment of Drama (New York: T. S. Crafts and Co., 1940), and Helen Randle Fish, Drama and Dramatics (New York: MacMillan Co., 1931).

To show how the working reviewer may acquire a command of his craft, and the background knowledge which he needs for book and play reviewing.¹

Part II of this book is devoted to Play Reviewing, but most of the content is written with the professional production in mind. However, several helpful suggestions for use in this study were gleaned from these chapters and will be included later. The Enjoyment of Drama is recommended for its complete coverage of what constitutes a play, what problems are involved in producing a play and finally, what to look for in judging one. All of its 232 pages are useful to the inexperienced reporter as a guide book, and to the experienced as a refresher course. Many helpful suggestions which are included in the following chapter came from or were inferred in Milton Marx's book. The third book is divided into two aspects of the study and enjoyment of plays as suggested by its title, Drama and Dramatics. As the author states,

By drama we mean the study of plays as we read them and see them. By dramatics we mean the study of plays through acting them.²

This book is a discussion of the vicarious and active enjoyment of the drama mentioned in the opening paragraph of this paper. Specifically, chapters ten and eleven are devoted to the questions and answers a critic, especially the beginner, might ask about play production. Some of these will be incorporated into the proposed criteria in the next chapter.

¹Smith, op. cit., Preface, p. vii.

²Fish, op. cit., p. 3.

The other obvious material and examples on style and subject matter of criticisms would be found in reading newspaper and magazine reviews. There, too, the field is barren for the inexperienced reporter. Reviewers on the metropolitan papers are seasoned reporters with much experience. The smaller community reporter usually has little theatrical knowledge and has the job of reviewing the local talent productions thrust upon him along with social affairs, editorials, or even sports writing. Hence the first group is steeped in background knowledge and too often, consciously or unconsciously, applies professional standards to its reviews of non-professional plays. As an example, the reviewers in the Amusements Section of the Dallas Morning News have excellent opportunities to view both professional and amateur plays. To begin with, they have years behind them filled with stellar performances, good plays, and background reading on the theatre. It is difficult for them to refrain from applying the epitome of standards to any production. As one of these writers, Mr. Askew, once said, "I have to keep telling myself all the time the purposes are different; it is even true between amateur and semi-professional groups." Similar situations exist in places such as Houston, Texas; Denver, Colorado; Los Angeles, California; and Miami, Florida. Each of these cities has active professional groups and at the same time High School, College, and Little Theatre groups. Keeping a perspective on the purposes and problems of each group in

writing the critical reviews is necessary, but rarely is it done. In many instances the professional critic has been accused of "killing" an amateur acting group by expecting too much. While the inexperienced critic performs no real service except as a reporter of an event. The reviews in small town papers or college publications are seldom more than announcement type write-ups. The lack of knowledge in the field of critical reviewing and play production is doubtless the prime reason.

In both situations just described there is little value to the organization, the director and staff, or the reader. There is usually no preparation for the reader as to what to expect from a production classed as the amateur play with the result that the criticism frequently seems too harsh. When the writer expresses belief that the actors did not "keep-up-the drawing-room comedy-pace," for example, and "let the play die," the reader should have been prepared for a certain type play and tempo. There are few points brought out which might assist cast and director in growth as a producing group. There are certain attitudes toward amateurs attempting plays which seem too ambitious for their limited experience, preparation time and financial status. Such an attitude was expressed by an English professor who refused to attend a local college production of Christopher Fry's The Lady's Not for Burning with the statement that he "hated to see the beautiful poetry so inadequately handled." Another

example is a lady who refused to see a high school group attempt The Importance of Being Earnest because she "had had a course which taught her to love the English style of acting." Both condemned, without trial, groups which had had a little more experience than the average student in their category and which sincerely desired to attempt something a bit "off the beaten path." Over a period of time critical reviewers can modify, if not change, such attitudes by constructive criticism:

A critic is an expert in the ways of pleasures in special regions of experience. He may do negative criticism with the purpose of helping the performer or warning the public. But his greatest service is constructive, in helping the public get into pleasurable relation with objects of high capacity of enjoyment, showing them which to look for and encourage them to become discriminating themselves.¹

The need for more valuable criticism for amateur plays has been shown to exist. Since there are so few reliable sources for help, we feel that a few sign posts could be set up to prepare the way for more effective methods in developing the power to understand and use discrimination in what is seen and heard in the amateur play. Before further discussion it would be well to review the definition of a play and its status when considered on the amateur level:

Clayton Hamilton defines a play clearly and simply thus: A play is a story devised to be presented by actors on a stage before an audience. The italicized words indicate the vital elements in play production. Story suggests the nature of the content. In substance it is an account of experiences of a group of imagined people. Devised

¹Stephen C. Pepper, The Basis of Criticism in the Arts (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1945), p. 15.

implies special technique that sets drama apart from other literary forms. Presented means a play is not really a play until performed. Stage defines the place of production. By actors are indicated the skilled human agents through whose speech and behavior on the stage the story is told. Before an audience points out the sole aim of a play.

This definition covers every detail of the composite art of the theatre. It excludes all controversy as to what constitutes a play, and applies to the drama of every age and nation. It puts no restrictions upon the playwright or producer, but amply allows for any new effect either is clever enough to invent.¹

When this play is presented by actors with limited experience, for pleasure and without remuneration, it is termed amateur. In the case of high schools and colleges, the director is often one with professional experience but the plays are part of his assignment as an instructor. In community or Little Theatre organization, tickets or memberships may be sold, an operating fund may be available, but the organization as a whole is not operated on a money making basis.

The high school, college, and community drama is all on the amateur level, but each group has different purposes and problems to be considered. These we shall endeavor to point out for it is the differences which form the bases for the questions and answers which a critic might use as a guide. In using the questions and answering them he develops the vital needs mentioned in the beginning--more intelligent observation and finer emotional approach. Helpful, impartial criticisms will doubtlessly result, and, in time, encourage

¹Lees, op. cit., p. 3.

amateur dramatics and stimulate the reading audience as well. In this way the publication and the organization may be of greater service in promoting a realm of enjoyment vital to man.

CHAPTER II

CRITERIA FOR CRITICS

Part I: Background Material

There is no substitute for an intimate knowledge of whatever field of art under criticism. Though a critic can give reliable criticism only with reliable criteria of judgment, a knowledge of reliable aesthetic criteria does not guarantee good criticism. A man must also be well acquainted with the field criticized. He must first perceive what he is judging before he can judge responsibly.

A thoroughly competent critic is one who has both intimate experience with the art he is judging and possession of reliable criteria of criticism. He may or may not be conscious of the grounds of which the criteria are supported, just as a man who uses a tool may not know how it is manufactured. With tools of criticism, it seems best for the men who use them to know how they are made and be able to judge if they are well made.

If a critic has plenty of intimate experience with his art and is conscious of the nature and action of those aesthetic criteria which are most adequately supported, his judgment cannot go far wrong and his influence on the public and eventually on the artists is bound to be beneficial.¹

With the foregoing quotation always in mind, the critic in the field of amateur dramatics would need to learn as much as possible about high school, college, and community productions. Textbooks and manuals will furnish him with background material, but attendance at numerous performances of many types of plays will provide the "intimate experience with the art" he is judging. Sitting in on rehearsals,

¹Pepper, op. cit., p. 15.

observing backstage work at a performance, participating in a show now and then, even attempting to write a play will add much to the experience. Part I of this chapter, therefore, is devoted to a discussion of phases of play production in the amateur field with which the critic should familiarize himself early in his career. Most of the principles, it can be observed, are applicable to amateur play production in general. On the other hand, the three acting groups considered on the amateur level (high school, college, and community) have problems and aims peculiar to each realm. These are also pointed out where necessary. This discussion is presented as a preparation for a use of Part II which attempts to arrange a "reliable criteria of criticism." Many great critics have viewed criticism as an art with craft elements. Thus the critic must develop his technique through assembling a fund of organized knowledge, then using it in active practice. Walter Prichard Eaton, writing in a recent issue of World Theatre on "Courses in Playwriting in the U. S.," implied that most teachers of any form of composition in America do not rely greatly on textbooks but rather on practice and personal criticism. He told this to illustrate the point:

My class once asked Maxwell Anderson what he did to keep in trim when not working on a play of his own. "I read the best plays by the best dramatists," he replied.¹

¹Walter Prichard Eaton, "Courses on Playwriting in the U. S.," World Theatre, Vol. I, No. 111.

As Richard Burton emphasizes to the play-goer and critic, "There is a technique to be acquired and practice therein and reflection upon it makes perfect."¹

In the study of play production for use as a basis for critical writing with a depth of understanding, acquaintance with a play would come first. Francis Fergusson says,

Because drama is written to be played it both offers and requires a peculiarly immediate understanding. The process of becoming acquainted with a play is like that of becoming acquainted with a person. It is an empirical and inductive process; it starts with the observable facts; but it instinctively aims at a grasp of the very life machine which is both deeper, and oddly enough, more immediate than the surface appearances offer. We seek to grasp the quality of Man's life, by an imaginative effort, through his appearances, his words and his deeds.²

All directors of plays classed as amateur productions must be acquainted with the elements of a play, the characteristics of a good play, and the purpose of the playwright. Helen Randel Fish gives a full discussion of the elements of a play in Chapter 15 of her book, Drama and Dramatics. She defines a play as a story capable of being acted, and specifies that an actable story must contain the essence of drama, action and emotion. It will also have conflict--actual, mental, or emotional. It must have plot, character, and dialogue worth spending time on, and the theme must be a worthy one. She identifies the theme as the idea the playwright wants put across, and it is sometimes subordinate to

¹Richard Burton, How to See a Play (New York: Macmillan Co., 1914), viii and ix.

²Francis Fergusson, The Idea of a Theatre (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), pp. 10-11.

the story and sometimes develops the problem of the play. Miss Fish gives the divisions of a play as the exposition, an exciting crisis which starts the action; development of the plot and climax, the supreme clash of opposing forces; denouement, unravelling of circumstances; and the ending. According to her belief, a good play will have vivid, consistent characters and dialogue which performs the functions of advancing the plot, developing character, and lending atmosphere.

Jay Hubbell and John Beaty, authors of An Introduction to Drama concur with the above discussion when they say,

The audience wants to be told a good story; it wants to be shown interesting people doing interesting things. A play is a deliberate imitation of life, no other art form comes so near being an actual representation of life.¹

They relate how many critics have tried to find a formula for the essence of drama and advance the most widely known theory as that of the French critic, Brunetiere. His belief was that the essence of drama consisted in a conflict, between persons, conventions, or impulses which formed characters. Hubbell and Beaty bring out two other interesting observations on what makes a play a good one. They say, "Great plays like great novels, are great more by virtue of fine characterization than any other one thing."² And a

¹Jay B. Hubbell and John O. Beaty, An Introduction to Drama (New York: Macmillan Co., 1927), p. 3.

²Ibid., p. 10.

well written play will contain "good stage dialogue rather than conversation,"¹ since the latter rarely makes interesting talk for the stage.

Barrett H. Clark has this to say:

A play, like every work of art, is intended to give pleasure as a reflection of life and character; a presentment of man in conflict with the problems of life.²

In pointing out to the play-goer the things which give him the most for his money, Richard Burton in How to See a Play suggests that a play is more than just a story acted out. He amplifies by saying,

The play's a form of story-telling--a manipulation of human happenings as to give a sense of unity and growth to a definite end. A story implies a connection of characters and events so as to suggest a rounding out and completion, which, looked back upon, shall satisfy man's desire to discover some meaning and significance in what is called life.³

Again, Milton Marx concurs with these authorities on what forms the nucleus of a play worth choosing for production when he states,

Conflict is the essence of drama, and if a play is to take rank among the important plays it must have conflict worthy of consideration in both name and plot.⁴

In conclusion, we can deduce, as Burton does, that:

A test of a good play may be found in the readiness with which it lends itself to a simple three-fold statement of its story; the proposition, as it is called by technicians. And one of the sure tests of a good play may

¹Ibid., p. 12.

²Barrett H. Clark, A Study of Modern Drama (New York: D. Appleton Co., 1925), p. x.

³Burton, op. cit., p. 1.

be found here; if it is not a workable drama, either it will not readily reduce to a proposition or else cannot be stated propositionally at all. Further, a play that is a real play in substance and not a hopelessly undramatic piece of writing arbitrarily cut up into scenes or acts, and expressed in dialogue, can be stated clearly and simply in a brief paragraph.¹

Since selection of material for amateur production is usually a major consideration, it becomes necessary that directors keep in mind that plays must be actable, yet, at the same time, well written. Elizabeth Drew suggests they remember this fundamental fact:

. . . . there are certain principles in dramatic writing which are eternal. Each kind of theatre, Greek, Elizabethan, contemporary, demands certain modifications of technique, and provide certain limitations and certain liberties of its own; but the central dramatic demands of movement, suspense, and variety are constant.²

Katharine Anne Ommanney gives this as her guide to the selection of a play:

If a drama deals with fundamental human reactions, presents a definite phase of a universal theme, and is produced in an adequate manner, it is certain to hold the interest of the better type of play goer.³

The beginning critic would need to learn these fundamentals and the experienced one would need to recall them again and again. For the amateur field affords an excellent opportunity to present the good plays rather than the sensational or trite since it is relatively free of the "box office curse."

¹Burton, op. cit., pp. 157-8.

²Elizabeth Drew, Discovering Drama (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1937), p. 39.

³K. Anne Ommanney, The Stage and School (New York: Harper and Bros., 1932), p. 100.

Emerson Taylor gives the substance of these quoted authorities in a statement from his book Practical Stage Directing for Amateurs:

One principle which should color and shape all work in selecting the right play for amateurs. Select a play worth the trouble and time spent on it. More specifically, plays of direct and strong general appeal, whether serious or comic, are the ones best adapted for amateur use.¹

In school dramatics and community theatre the play selection presents different problems. The community drama is not as bound by the educational angle as the high schools and colleges. There is likely to be more experienced talent to produce the community play, hence sophisticated and unusual plays can be used. Emerson Taylor has some advice to both groups in these statements:

Let us urge that there is much to be said in favor of amateurs trying their wings, whenever possible, in some plays of other times and other schools of drama. It is not only infinitely more worthwhile, but it is a lot more fun, to produce an Elizabethan play, a medieval mystery, or something from Moliere than perhaps most of the modern material available for amateurs. If your company is experienced and pretty well versed from many appearances, in something more than the rudiments of stage technique, you need not hesitate to select a play which brings you into direct competition with a professional tradition. This, because the freshness and spirit, the conscientiousness and the intelligence of the actors furnish a secure enough basis to build on. But if your company is made up of beginners, however keen, tread softly.²

It is possible that the school play productions may have a number of different objectives. Three are suggested

¹Emerson Taylor, Practical Stage Directing for Amateurs (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1916), p. 8.

²Ibid., pp. 17-22.

by Allen Crafton in The Complete Acted Play.¹ He suggests that some schools give plays just because it is a custom or a regular part of the year's schedule. This, of course, is a poor objective and creates no growth. Some have the benefit of the student studying acting and stage craft in mind. It is then the plays serve as laboratories for developing better speech, poise, bodily control, co-operation, and imagination. The audience in turn pays for this laboratory experiment so this brings forth the question of which is more important in the production: to give something to the audience or do something for the actors? A third objective might be solely to entertain the public. The students and public deserve to see some of the best plays given in the best possible manner. But whatever the objective, and there should be one, the director's choice of a play should always be influenced by his objective. The critic should know what the objective is and acquaint the readers with it in pre-performance write-ups.

Barnard Hewitt and Gertrude Johnson are two authorities who believe in using plays of literary value in school production. Hewitt says, "One of the important functions of the amateur theatre, particularly of the school and college theatre, is to revive the great plays of the past."²

Miss Johnson has this to say:

¹Allen Crafton and Jessica Royer, The Complete Acted Play (New York: F. S. Crafts and Co., 1943), pp. 9-12.

²Hewitt, op. cit., p. vii.

I certainly condemn the spending of time and energy on cheap plays and trashy lines. I do know that the work our pupils have done in producing the works of Shakespeare and other dramatists of high order more than fully repays the time spent in their production. So I think that a drama department that gives attention to the best things in literature is one of the strongest possibilities for good in the school.¹

The author of The Actor's Art and Job has a theory as to just how valuable the use of classics are to the school groups:

It seems to us that to produce a play from a past age so far removed from our contemporary life as to be largely unintelligible, on the theory the production of any classic is educationally valuable, is a debatable procedure. In planning a program, a happy medium should be sought: too much attention must not be placed on masterpiece of by-gone days; nor on the other hand, must we choose the material for the education of the youthful from that which is within the range of his previously existent comprehension and interest.²

It is readily seen that for the critic to become acquainted with the objectives of an acting group and the influences on the play selection is part of his preparation for constructive criticism.

However, selection of the play is only to begin the job. As Milton Smith says:

The director having chosen what he thinks is the best script, he begins to worry about how to make it into the best play. He knows a play has two elements. The first is in the author's concept which is described on paper and the second is the embodiment of that concept in actors on a stage for the purpose of making an effect

¹Gertrude Johnson, Choosing a Play (New York: The Century Co., 1920), p. 56.

²Harry Irvine, The Actor's Art and Job (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1942), p. 76.

on an audience. The second element is in the production, and the problem is how to make this production embody the virtues of the script. Only a good script plus a good production will make a good play.¹

This quotation proves there is more to a good play than the printed form. It takes all the skill of the director and his staff to bring the printed word to life. For no matter how valuable classroom instruction has been or how enjoyable the reading, it is the living production of plays which gives them real significance.

Most authorities place all responsibility for success or failure, especially in the amateur field, on the director. This is expressed by Bernard Hewitt when he writes:

The director in the amateur theatre is necessarily the source of unity. He selects the play and imagines the production of it before an audience in terms of acting, setting, lighting, costumes, make-up and sound effect. He plans the use of all these materials. He selects and directs the actors, trains the technicians in other fields, supervises their contribution to the production. On his understanding of the play and his control of the materials will depend success or failure of the production.²

The attitude of many critics might be likened to that of Carlton Miles, Dramatic Editor of the Minneapolis Journal when he first attended some high school plays. He sounds the keynote of the high school director's function in relating this instance:

One evening several years ago I went to a high school to witness a student presentation of "The Yellow Jacket."

¹Milton Smith, Play Production for Little Theatres, Schools, and Colleges (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1946), p. 31.

²Hewitt, op. cit., p. 4.

My attitude was that of the professional reviewer to whom attendance at an amateur dramatic performance is not from choice but is a necessity of his vocation. This attitude changed almost at once. Within an hour it was evident that the direction of the play had been undertaken by someone who understood amateur production. In tempo, ensemble, setting, and individual characterization it excelled any similar performance of remembrance. Since then choice, not necessity, has taken me time after time to watch plays at South High School under the direction of Miss Helen Fish. Without exception the same standards have been obtained in such diverse offerings as "The Taming of the Shrew," "The Beggar on Horseback," "Peer Gynt," and "Romeo and Juliet."¹

Evidently Miss Fish represents a number of directors who have fulfilled the qualifications mentioned by Roy Mitchell in his book The School Theatre which has for its subtitle A Handbook of Theory and Practice. He stipulates "The first essential to success in the school theatre is a clear idea of the manner in which the work is to be carried on."² Mr. Mitchell says that the work should cause the director to ask certain questions before he begins. His first questions should be: "What is the form of the group making the play? In what manner is it to proceed and in what relation to what audience?"³ These are basic questions which directors and critics must ask to preface any rewarding work.

Another example of a high school director who understands and enjoys her job is Marion June Mitchell who wrote in the April 1952 issue of Dramatics an open letter to a

¹Fish, op. cit., Preface, p. 1.

²Roy Mitchell, The School Theatre (New York: Bretano's, 1925), p. 13.

³Ibid.

student who had aspirations for the professional theatre.

She said:

For myself, I believe high school play directing holds many more personal satisfactions than the average job. You are working in your chosen field, the theatre. High school students are a rewarding group to work with. As a director of non-professionals, I have had experience with every age group from grade school children to adults and I am quite honest to say I prefer directing the high school student. He is old enough to have intelligence and maturity and young enough to accept directions with enthusiasm.¹

Samuel Hume and Lois M. Foster define the school theatre's purposes, principles, and ideals when they say:

At its best the school theatre presents an exceptionally pure type of dramatic medium undefiled by corruptive elements so common in the commercial theatre. Even Little Theatres have to placate social leaders or cater to cliques. But the school theatre is not engaged in either the business of making money or exploiting individuals. Its business is to produce carefully selected, significant, and, at the same time, entertaining plays for the purpose of educating the youthful enthusiasts entrusted to its care.

Now the theatre in the school, properly conceived and directed, offers to the student through his participation in the play, whether as actor, stage manager, or mechanic, an experience which becomes of exceptional importance in his development. We believe that such experience should stimulate the imagination, arouse curiosity, formulate taste, and increase appreciation, and in general should develop the emotional life to the enrichment of the whole personality. If this approach is fundamentally sound, it follows that the educational theatre is not to be judged by what it produces in the way of plays, actors, or productions, but rather by measure and value of its contribution to the intellectual and emotional life of the students engaged in its various activities.²

¹Marion June Mitchell, "Dear Joan," Dramatics, April, 1952, p. 8.

²Samuel Hume and Lois M. Foster, Theatre and School (New York: Samuel French, 1932), pp. 7-9.

On the other hand, the community theatre is not ruled by the same policies and principles as the school theatre. "The community theatre is a house of play in which events offer to every member of a body politic active participation in a common interest."¹

Carl Glick, director and author, has been a champion of the Little Theatre movement for many years, and in 1933 through 1935 wrote articles and books about its development. Some of its purposes are to be found in these paragraphs from the Theatre Handbook edited by Bernard Sobel:

Let a group of stage-struck Americans get together be they bankers, lawyers, stenographers, teachers, society matrons, factory workers, and someone is bound to say, "Let's put on a play." And another community theatre is born.

This community Theatre Movement is one of the most exciting adventures in the theatre that has taken place in our generation. It is one of the most unusual, too, for it means that Mr. and Mrs. Busy-During-the-Day America, at night steps into the theatre and engages in active play production as producer, actor, scene shifter, electrician, prop boy, scene designer, box office manager. Not because he wishes to make money and commercialize the stage, but because he loves the theatre and has found a new outlet for his leisure time activities. It may be rightly said to be the Theatre of Democracy, for it is the theatre of the people, by the people and for the people.²

Bruce Carpenter of New York University says,
Little Theatre has two purposes: the first is to introduce drama into colleges and local communities

¹Louise Burleigh, The Community Theatre in Theory and Practice (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1917), p. xxxii.

²Theatre Handbook, ed. by Bernard Sobel (New York: Crown Publishers, 1940), p. 169.

Where there is no other way of getting productions.¹ The second is to introduce new things into the theatre.¹

In this statement he places school and community theatre on the same plane and yet the latter, we realize, would have more freedom in fulfilling the second purpose.

F. F. Mackay cites the underlying motive of the community drama when he says:

The immensely valuable work which is being done by the Little Theatre to keep alive the love of drama and acting in a mechanical age can scarcely be over-estimated. The theatre will always owe them a great debt. That many of them have been working under a disadvantage, particularly as regards acting, is all the more to their credit. In any theatre renaissance, an interest in plays must come first; and the impetus of the Little Theatre Movement has been essentially a hunger for good drama.²

It can be seen how easily the purposes and principles of the school and community drama might be looked upon as being strictly the same. The critic should be wise to recognize, just as the director should, that there are parallel aims, yet at the same time small differences in fulfillment. Both have love for and interest in the drama or some phase of its production which is apart from remuneration, and the results in both are personal development and satisfaction of accomplishment. But there are limitations, over-all purposes, and results in each realm of the school and community theatre. The competent critic should become familiar with the ones in his area of work.

¹Bruce Carpenter, The Way of the Drama (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1929), p. 209.

²F. F. Mackay, Elementary Principles of Acting (New York: Samuel French, 1934), p. ix.

Although the responsibility for the success of a production is in the hands of the director, there is a necessity for an understanding on his part of the principles involved in acting at the amateur level. It is even more important that those who participate in amateur dramatics as actors realize the limitations and qualifications. Naturally, the critic would need to be familiar with the rudiments of acting to assist in his evaluations, and in order to give helpful hints which would help in succeeding performances.

Mackay says:

Acting is the most popular of all the arts, enjoyed, participated in and discussed by the largest number of people; and yet, we may safely say, it is also the art least understood by the public.¹

Raymond Massey when asked to give his ideas on acting replied, "Good actors, like good plays, are made of flesh and blood, not bundles of tricks."²

Harry Irvine in his book, The Actor's Art and Job, says:

The player's first task is to interpret to an audience; through their ears and their eyes, the meaning, and all the meanings, of the dramatist's pattern--the play which the author has written. Impress upon the beginner that acting is something which must be learned.³

Stephenson Smith believes the actor's job begins just as the director's. "It involves purpose and method. First he decides what he intends to do and then how he is

¹Ibid., p. 1.

²Theatre Handbook, op. cit., p. 26.

³Irvine, op. cit., p. 22.

going to do it."¹ Mr. Smith presents the opposing theories of acting for consideration. One theory has as its main purpose the creating of an illusion. Thus the player acts by imitation. The other has as its purpose the showing of reality behind a surface likeness. This involves interpretation of the character and the comment on it. He summarizes by saying, "Realism is the end in both theories. The question becomes, who obtained the best realism, the one who tried to imitate or the one who interpreted?"² The critic would profit by familiarizing himself with the characteristics of these two theories.

The authors of Theatre and School have some advice for the school director on the "interpretation theory" for young actors:

To produce a simple and direct reading of lines, without the grace notes and colorature embellishments of elocution, or the high ecstatic non-sense of the melodramatic stage, should be the goal recommended to school instructors. On the other hand, the school director should guard against the over-realism of too-casual interpretation, lest he sacrifice the beauty of drama to some ephemeral conception of representational fidelity. The school should find an intermediate style compounded of free, simple, sincere reading, and at the same time retaining the finer qualities of the play and preserved beauties of English speech.

The production of a play on a school stage may be considered as play-reading on a projected scale. The business of the director should not be to inspire a full realization of projected characters or emotions in the

¹S. Stephenson Smith, op. cit., p. 127.

²Ibid., p. 129.

roles undertaken by students. Properly speaking, such realization is beyond the capacities of the immature student. The director should only attempt to call forth from his players a sincere delineation of the character of the play, to bring about a realization of their significance and to develop a sufficient vocabulary of vocal and emotional expression to assure ease of rendition.¹

On the theory of "creating an illusion," Elizabeth Drew offers her interpretation:

A play is interpreted by actors. We speak sometimes of an actor 'creating' a part. This is not strictly true. What an actor creates is an illusion in the mind of the audience. It is the playwright who creates the character in his lines. The art of acting is the revelation of drama in terms of flesh and blood. He is a vehicle for that creation of illusion which is the essence of dramatic art, and the greatest actor is he who can so command and use his physical presence--his voice, his limbs, his features, his personal magnetism--that he can hypnotize the audience into the belief that he is the character.²

Granville-Barker writing on amateur acting has the following to say:

The best play director is he who ostensibly does least, not most. The actors are not puppets; and since, for the performance at least, they will have to be let go from leading strings, the less they are tied by them the better.

The actor's art, fully developed, is a veritable invitation to egoism, but at the price of discarding ego altogether. He is asked, not so much to assume another personality, as to interpret a character of an author's creating in terms of his own. To do this he may need to draw upon all his resources, appreciative, emotional, plastic, to magnify himself to the utmost. Yet the character remains the author's, and while the actor is interpreting it we should forget about him. It is a hall-mark of the quality of his performance that we do. There is a delicate but distinct difference between the art of an actor giving himself to his part and that of

¹Hume and Foster, op. cit., p. 38.

²Drew, op. cit., p. 18.

one who exploits himself in his part, and the sensitive critic of acting will discern it.¹

The actors who take part in community drama, as a rule, have more experience. It may be from numerous performances or from school plays. Therefore the development and sustaining of characterizations may be more complete in this realm of amateur productions. An actor above the school level can be expected to exhibit a certain polish to a role because his chief aim is to convey the author's conception of a character in its relation to the play as a whole in order to present a good show.

However Lillian Foster Collins does not believe that school dramatics should over-emphasize the phases of play production such as acting but rather consider the benefits students derive from it. She states,

The aim of the school theatre is not in the acting, but in something less tangible, a little loftier, perhaps. The acting, the play production, are just the means to that end which is the end of any artistic pursuit-- beauty, poise, and self-development.²

Both school and community theatre players can fulfill in a fair measure the five important factors of a good actor as set forth by David Belasco in this order: "ability, imagination, industry, patience, and loyalty."³ These will only be present in different degrees in different individuals and will grow as the actors learn.

¹Granville-Barker, op. cit., p. 37.

²Lillian C. Foster, The Little Theatre in School (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1930), p. 31.

³Johnson, op. cit., p. 84.

Granville-Barker, speaking as a director of both amateurs and professionals, says:

The contributory things to the art of acting are not only things which should be studied by us; they are things which should be studied by every person in the community.¹

But Henry Miller hits the crux of the actor's job when he states, "The actor's conception of a role is worth nothing until he gets it over to his audience."²

This statement leads us to the last major consideration, along with director's problems and acting conceptions of play production. Audience response should be considered by the critic because unless the work of the director and staff and actors causes one, the play cannot be called completely successful.

According to the late Alexander Dean,

Every real creation must arouse an emotional and intellectual response in the spectator, but it does not follow that every creation that achieves this is a work of art; nor does it follow that every great creation must achieve this for everyone.

The drama more than any other art suffers in these two respects from erroneous thinking on the part of the spectator. The most ignorant person does not hesitate to pass ultimate judgment on a play or its performance. Young and old alike condemn or praise with decisive and final words. The primary business of the drama is to arouse emotional states of one sort or another.

All arts must have both the technique of conveying a feeling and the purely creative impulse itself. Any

¹Ibid., p. 87.

²Ibid., p. 90.

experienced artist blends these two parts so that he creates in form. It is the same with the directors or actor.¹

From the above statements it can be assumed that the audience response is a necessary element for a successful performance, yet it cannot always be used by the critic as a guide to the worthiness of a production. A good audience response may indicate success in the purpose of entertainment, but for the setting of goals and accomplishing them, the critic would do well to acquaint himself with the other phases suggested here, the directing and acting involved in getting the audience response.

Again we cite a difference pointed out by Hume and Foster which might be recognized by critics:

Though an audience is ordinarily indispensable to a school production, pleasing that audience is not the first consideration of the school theatre. Yet the actual public production of plays is important, both as an incentive and as a fulfillment and certainly there is no reason for sacrificing the beauty and smoothness of theatre performances to a pedagogic principle.²

The realm of the amateur theatre broadens each year, and we are reminded that:

Today a new theatre flourishes in the land, a type of theatre which could never have entered the imagination of the professional of 1910. It is not yet a great theatre, but already in many localities it is doing an admirable job of putting on a play. It is teaching young and old people to imagine, to touch meanings, to sense beauty. It has spread from coast to coast; and as suggested every night near eight o'clock its auditorium begins to fill with all kinds of people who,

¹Alexander Dean, Fundamentals of Play Direction (New York: Farrar and Rhinehart Inc., 1945), pp. 19, 273.

²Hume and Foster, op. cit., p. 21.

since the disappearance of the traveling professional company, have looked to it more and more for their theatrical fare.¹

Briefly, the quantity of school and community drama is an established fact, and their problems are comparable. Yet the slight differences make writing critical reviews of such productions difficult for the beginning journalist. Even those who have had experience but have not been cognizant of the help which a constructive criticism can bring to the acting group and reading public may benefit from an "acquaintance with the field." This acquaintance involves some of the same information as that for director and actor.

Play production and criticism are arts, and "art refuses to be put up in cans; it is too living a thing."² One cannot become an artist by learning a set of rules, but with a few fundamentals as a guide, the critic can make his play reviews more than factual reports or bombastic fault-finding articles. As he develops his craft, he will develop more appreciation for the theatre. In time he may stimulate the amateur organizations to produce better plays in a less slipshod method and to educate the public in what to expect from them. Part II will contain specific elements which the critic of amateur plays should look for when "covering" a performance.

¹Crafton and Royer, op. cit., p. 21.

²Fish, op. cit., p. XIV.

Part II: The Criteria

Our statement in the beginning of this chapter was to the effect that the competent critic must be acquainted with how the tools of his trade are made and then be prepared to put them to use in actual practice. Therefore, this section of Chapter II is devoted to material which can be used as a reasonable criteria for judging amateur plays. The questionnaire can be helpful in writing critical reviews which will benefit directors, players and technicians in future work. And we feel, in time, that the results will be improved public taste, better evaluation of amateur efforts, and incentive to higher standards in productions. In this way the press will be of service to both art and the public.

Clayton Hamilton feels there is a definite tie between the dramatic critic and his readers:

In a special and immediate sense, the drama is a function of the populace. The reality of an acted play is evoked by a collaboration between those whose minds are active behind the footlights and those whose minds are active in the auditorium; and the phenomenon will fail unless the minds of the artists and the minds of the auditors answer to each other with sympathy and appreciation.

The reason why most newspapers and even magazines report plays as they report baseball games is that their publishers and editors honestly believe that the reading public does not care for scholarly, dignified, and earnest criticism. To cultivate a noble audience in America we shall need the service of true criticism and the honorable labors of true critics.¹

¹Clayton Hamilton, Studies in Stage Craft (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1914), pp. 259-272.

Katherine Anne Ommanney, a high school director, believes, "The future of the theatre in the U. S. depends entirely upon the development of a sound public taste."¹

W. T. Price in his discussion of the relation criticism bears to the drama emphasizes strongly the essential need for it in words such as these:

Of all the writers of the press, a critic does not preach in the wilderness. The theatre goer loves to be strengthened in correct views, and likes the explanation of doubts that rise in his own mind, and wishes to have shown to him why he revolted against this and that.

Criticism is absolutely essential to public morals and public taste. It is a guide to the people and a protector of the realm. Its responsibilities really require as high character and as strong force as the staff of a newspaper possesses.²

Several articles on criticism in the theatre by the famous English critic, S. R. Littlewood, Dramatic Critic of The Morning Post, are to be found in Theatre and Stage. In one of the articles in which he discusses the true service that criticism bears, he has this to say:

The critic, like the actor, dramatist, and manager, must give the public either what they want or what he can teach them to want. When he is not actually creative, he conveys ideas and discoveries to people who would otherwise never have thought or even heard about them. Also a good and sympathetic critic not only inspires the public with his own enthusiasm; he gives priceless encouragement to dramatists, players, and producers.

This creation of a general interest in the theatre by choosing it as a theme can illuminate as well as interpret. It is to my mind a far more important element of

¹Ommanney, op. cit., p. 93.

²W. T. Price, The Technique of Drama (New York: Brentano's, 1892), p. 215.

criticism than the mere delivery of an ex cathedra verdict upon the merits of this or that play, favorable or adverse.¹

Since the need for good criticism has again been pointed out, and before the actual criteria is presented, it might be well to give a few opinions as to the specific qualifications for a dramatic critic. In Chapter I the qualifications for critics in the arts in general were cited. In the Theatre Handbook, John Mason Brown points out a difference which is worthwhile keeping in mind, especially if the critic has had some experience. He says:

The dramatic critic differs from the reviewer and reporter in that he is more interested in the idea behind the event than in the event itself. He sees a play or performance not in relation to what it may say to a prospective ticket-buyer, but in terms of what it does contribute to the theatre and life. He must be the first to realize that the traditions of hard-boiled journalism which the reporter and reviewer have held up to the stage as its final standards have less than nothing to do with the theatre and can only harness and imprison the imagination that is its life blood. He must know the theatre's traditions and see behind its mysteries as well as record his personal impressions.²

Because of Mr. S. R. Littlewood's more than quarter of a century's experience in the field of critical dramatic writing; because of his expressed qualities in surveying the work of young reporters; and because he advocated many principles we have set forth in this thesis, we quote several paragraphs from his article, "Advice to Intending Critics."

¹S. R. Littlewood, "Aspects of Criticism," Theatre and Stage, ed. Harold Downs (London: Sir I. Pitman and Sons, Ltd., 1934), II, 4.

²Theatre Handbook, op. cit., pp. 194-196.

We will suppose, then that some young friend has been to a university, has had some drilling in journalism, has gone about in the world, just as much as his pocket and temperament have made possible, and is being given his chance. Some little hints born of long service may be useful. The chief of these is that he should resist any temptation to sneer, or to court cheap notoriety by those spiteful epigrams which are so easily concocted. They help nobody. They do not instruct old play goers or make new ones. In the end they are certain to bring their revenges upon the critic himself. At the same time, absolute candor, sincerity, and independence are essential.

More than any other--on account of its vitally practical effect--dramatic criticism should be constructive rather than destructive. By constructive criticism, I mean that which encourages good and struggling work, builds up reputations by persistent interest, interprets ideas that might be misunderstood, creates in the reader a wish for what is best in the theatre, and offers the suggestion of new possibilities. Young critics may be warned against the kind of 'constructive' criticism which is boring to everybody and of no use in the theatre. This is the bringing in of little niggling and purely technical matters--little points of setting, construction, or stage management which would be far better dealt with in a letter to, or talk with, the producer. This is a besetting sin of many young academic critics, desirous of revealing a nascent understanding of playcraft. I have always found it well to keep in mind that in the newspaper one is writing not for the theatre manager but for the public, many of whom will not see the play.¹

Clayton Hamilton also states one of the purposes of this thesis when he says:

The critic incurs a double duty, first to learn and secondly, to teach; to study in general the theatrical background, in particular the theatre of his own place, in an endeavor to discover what is best in current drama; and then to teach the public what is best by making clear the reasons why. The critic by teaching the public what is best in the plays it has already seen, may prepare it to appreciate what is best in the plays of the future.²

¹Littlewood, "Advice to Intending Critics," Theatre and Stage, op. cit., pp. 1077-78.

²Hamilton, op. cit., p. 287.

In his essay "A Critic of the Acted Drama: William Archer," Mr. Brander Matthews points out two obligations which distinguish the critic of the acted play:

Rare as the purely literary critic may be, the critic of the acted drama cannot be but rarer yet, since his task is far more difficult. The former needs to know the theory and practice of but a single art, the art of the writer; while the latter has to be possessed of the principles not only of his, but also of two others wholly different, the art of the playwright and the art of the actor. And his equipment is harder to attain also, for while the literary critic can take down a book at will to consider it at leisure, the dramatic critic soon learns that the mere perusal of a play is only half his duty, and that he has not seized its full, significance until he has seen it acted.¹

These opinions lead us to the conclusion that the play critic should do more than "see and report." If he aspires to launch out into the sphere of public utility, he must adopt enlarged interests. He will soon discover that in the art world familiarity breeds not contempt, but an enthusiastic love for the best.

Early in the first chapter it was pointed out that full appreciation began with finding the answers to questions. Therefore, the most pertinent questions about amateur plays, followed by comments on them from authorities, have been arranged in outline form for the use of the critic. The questions represent a condensation of those suggested by several authorities, and are based on the same four elements considered in Part I. They are restated here in the first paragraph from Miss Ommanney's chapter on "Judging a Play."

¹Brander Matthews, "A Critic of the Acted Drama: William Archer," Historical Novel and Other Essays (C. Scribner's Sons, 1914), p. 274.

To appreciate fully any type of drama and judge it fairly, you must consider the play itself, its interpretation by the actors, its staging by the director, and its reception by the audience.¹

It is our belief that the basis of criticism of all phases of play production is the understanding and answering of three questions:

What is being attempted?

How well has it been done?

Was it worth doing?

The most informative reviews are not always the most helpful, for the enjoyment of a play is heightened by an appreciation of what has gone into the making of it.

There are four participants in the making of a finished theatrical production--the playwright, the actor, the director, and the audience. Theoretically the playwright's job is finished when he delivers the play into the hands of the director, whose business it is to bring the play to life on the stage. What, then, are the questions to ask about the play, the production, and the audience?

The Play

Does the play have a story worth telling?

Is it old and obvious?

Is the play classified as comedy or farce, melodrama or tragedy? Is it naturalistic, symbolic, romantic?

Is the fundamental idea of the play true or false in its concept of life?

¹Ommanney, op. cit., p. 96.

Is the theme consistent with the setting, plot and characters presented?

Should the general public be encouraged to see it because of the theme?

Has the playwright interested you in his point of view?

If the play has no theme, is its delight in other things?

Are the sequence of events clear-cut and rising to a climax?

Are you held in suspense to the end?

Are you chiefly interested in events, people, or the place?

Does the dialogue advance the action, deepen the characterization, or intensify the mood?

In the questions about the play itself, its theme, its merits as literature, and its appeal, the opinion of Alexander Dean is given. He says:

The critic must possess a thorough knowledge of innumerable plays and the performance methods of the past, because in addition to having a keenly appreciative nature, the critic must be able to judge intellectually the value and originality of the subject matter as well as the originality and suitability of the form to express the subject.¹

To clarify the answers to the first five or six questions we quote extensively from Studies in Stage Craft by Clayton Hamilton.

¹Dean, op. cit., p. 356.

In all the arts a distinction may be drawn between works which are objective and impersonal and works which are personal and subjective. It is the merit of certain works of art that they tell us nothing of their makers; but it is no less the merit of others that they tell us a great deal. The former is more admirable from the technical standpoint, but the latter is the more engaging from the standpoint of humanity. Criticism, in dealing with personal, subjective works, must therefore cast reason to the winds and estimate only the affection they evoke.

For any general work of art, because it is a living thing, may be imagined to have a body and a soul. The soul of a play is its theme and the body of a play its story. By the theme of a play is meant some principle or truth, or human life--such a truth as might be formulated critically in an abstract and general proposition--which the dramatist contrives to convey concretely to his auditors through the particular medium of his story. Granted a good theme, a playwright may invent a dozen or a hundred stories to embody it; but the final merit of his work will depend largely on whether or not he has succeeded in selecting a story that is at all points worthy of his theme.

The critic, therefore, should never condemn a playwright because his story is old, but he may reasonably expect the author to illuminate the narrative with ideas and moods that shall be new because they are essentially his own.

One of the first questions that must be asked of any play that appeals for popularity is, 'Is it plausible?' And the only all inclusive question that must be asked any play that bids for more than passing commendation is the question, 'Is it true?' For example, "The Blue Bird" is not a plausible representation of experience, yet it is eternally, immortally true.¹

The Production

Is the setting in keeping with the type of play,
characters depicted, period covered, theme discussed?

Is it artistic or merely functional?

Does it add to or detract from enjoyment?

¹Hamilton, op. cit., p. 153.

Does the stage business seem properly motivated or does it get in the way?

Does the production have unity?

Does the play have variety of tempo?

Are the characterizations true to life and consistent?

Do they arouse definite feelings?

Are the actors artificial or natural in technique?

Are you conscious of their methods for getting effects?

Do the actors cooperate with each other, the director, and the author in interpretation of the play by knowing lines, focusing attention on the center of interest, and losing themselves in their parts?

The production is in the hand of the director and he is primarily responsible for the answers to all the above questions. It is he who combines the directing and acting with other elements to "make" the play. According to Theatre Handbook, "The coordination of all the elements of the theatre with all the elements of the drama is the function of the director."¹

Lee Strasberg in giving his definition of the director's duties, makes the play's conception one of the first. He says:

What is performed is a conception of a play, not the play itself. And it will be the director's conception that reaches the stage. The major part of the director's job is concerned with guiding the cast in regulating, coordinating and controlling the characterizations so that the desired dramatic illusion, in accordance with the conception of the play, may be achieved.

¹Theatre Handbook, op. cit., p. 218.

While the fundamental task is the same for every director, obviously every director has his own particular method of working, which is merely his way of achieving the results he aims at. Interesting directing and acting can make a live and at times thrilling theatre, no great theatre can exist except through the medium of great plays and playwrights; and the director is born to serve the play.¹

Gertrude Johnson says, "The most important factor in the ultimate success or failure of a play is the director."²

If the critic, then, is aware of the great responsibility the director bears he can be prepared to correctly place critical remarks.

Henning Nelms, the editor of Stage Practice, corrects a misconception about the value of scenery in amateur production. He says:

Most amateur production groups are fostered by the urge to act. Settings are often regarded as necessary nuisances to be wished off on members who 'can't act.' This is not so. Scenery has an important effect on the actor. It sets a standard for his work and helps or hinders his imagination in direct ratio to it's quality. Improved scenery increases audience approval and opens the way to better attendance. It offers a new, varied, field of activity and permits more people to perform.³

As a general rule the public cares little for "behind-the-scenes" activity. But the critic can make his comments valuable means for further appreciation of settings and other technical work.

Robert and Lillian Masters of Indiana State College have definite suggestions for the director. They list some

¹Lee Strasberg, "The Director," Theatre Handbook, op. cit., pp. 218, 220.

²Johnson, op. cit., p. 98.

³Henning Nelms, A Primer of Stagecraft (New York: Dramatics Play Service, 1941), p. 2.

hints as essentials all directors should know; therefore, directors offer themselves for adverse criticism who do not follow them. Among their fundamentals are these:

Before selecting a play, consider well the audience, the cast and the occasion.

Arrange definite schedules for rehearsals and have at least one week for polishing.

Strive always for pictorial balance on stage, avoiding straight lines and wedge arrangements.

Remember thought precedes action in stage business.

In stage business, the shortest line to a place is the best rule.¹

The two most important phases of play production in the hands of the director are those of unity and tempo.

"A play like any other work of art, must be an harmonious whole, however diverse its parts, they must be so related that an effect of unity is produced."²

"It should always be remembered that the play, the players, and their grouping, the scenery, the costumes, the lighting, the properties, all compose one unit."³

In an article in the magazine Dramatics, April, 1952, the importance of tempo of the play was discussed:

Unless careful attention is paid to tempo two errors can arise, either of which will ruin all the values of a performance more quickly perhaps than any other single

¹Robert W. and Lillian D. Masters, The Curtain Rises (New York and Dallas: D. C. Heath and Co., 1938), p. 31.

²Theatre and Stage, op. cit., p. 926.

³A. M. Drummond, A Manual of Play Production (New York: New York State College of Agriculture, 1937), p. 38.

thing that can go wrong with a play. One error is a tempo that is consistently too slow and the other is a tempo that lacks all variety. Unfortunately, these are two of the commonest flaws to be found in amateur productions.¹

These two vital elements are often overlooked by critics who are not familiar with why a play "lags" or "runs smoothly." Mr. Hamilton places all responsibility on the director when he says:

There is one phase of dramatic art which has rarely been described by critics and is scarcely ever noticed by the average theatre-goer. The merit of many dramatic scenes is resident in the sheer rhythm of their presentation and the deft manipulation of this rhythm in the tempo of the acting. For the manipulation's of these effects the stage director is finally responsible.²

Stephenson Smith endorses the same theory about this essential element when he says:

In producing a play, all the arts are fused together--or should be. It is the combined effect which determined the rhythm of the production. A good director tries to weave all the artistic elements of his script into a design which shall have a good "flow," easy forward movement and an unforced continuity. His effort, like the author's is directed toward achieving a synthesis.

The critic, on the other hand, has before him the task of analysis. He needs to disentangle the various artistic elements. He requires therefore an acquaintance with the auxiliary arts employed in the theatre and is especially concerned with the contribution each element makes to the total effect of the production.³

For assistance in answering the questions relating to acting, it might be well for the critic to remember two quotations from A Primer of Stage Craft.

¹Mary Ella Boyce, "Allied Activities and Dramatics," Dramatics, April, 1952, p. 29.

²Hamilton, op. cit., p. 188.

³S. Stephenson Smith, op. cit., p. 237.

As an analyst, the critic must look for the devices which enable the actor to make the character live, but the dominating central fact of such perfect acting lies in the imagination of the actor.

A skillful actor soon makes the audience forget the minor conventions of the theatre, in any event. He evokes that willing suspension of disbelief, which Coleridge thought the first requisite of dramatic illusion.¹

In the book Practical Stage Directing for Amateurs, Emerson Taylor names Chapter V, Amateur Actor's A-B-C's. A few of these rules have been selected with the viewpoint in mind of a critic analyzing the actor.

The mental attitude is very important. The actor should feel the part, but not lose himself entirely.

Eyes are important. They can reveal character and betray the actor.

Movement must have meaning. Unless there is a purpose there is no movement. This is difficult for amateurs.

Speech follows action on the stage.

How the actor stands is watched by the audience more than his hands.

Keep consistent character. Never let down.

Success of a play depends on total effect--team work.²

Richard Burton has this explanation which would be helpful in the above rules:

It is common in criticism to sneer at the tendency of modern actors to shift position while the dialogue is underway; thus producing an unnecessarily uneasy effect of meaningless action. This is based on a sound law of

¹Nelms, op. cit., p. 262.

²Taylor, op. cit., p. 98.

drama; a desire for new pictures--in drama, composition to the eye is as truly a principle as in painting. Also motion implies emotion. The Greek word for drama means doing. To exhibit feeling is to do something. The drama must express the things within by things without, that is its method. The wise director will not call for a change of picture unless it represents a psychologic fact.¹

Van Cartmell continues in the same vein:

It is true we seek an effect of naturalness, but that is obtained usually only by virtue of skilled technique. Very few players by being natural can appear natural. Unless the characterization calls for marked 'under-playing,' the actor, like the painter, must know the value of color and shading to present a convincing and satisfying picture to his audience. Acting is portraiture, not photography.²

The third element which must be considered in judging plays is audience response.

The Audience

Is the audience restless or attentive?

Is there a definite response?

Is there immediate appreciation of clever lines, dramatic situations, and skillful acting?

We recall again the warning about the audience response as an unreliable index to success mentioned on page twenty of Part One in this chapter. At the same time we present the viewpoint of the combined authors of Behind the Footlights.

An audience is not man or woman multiplied by the necessary figures to make the total number in attendance. It is made up of various sorts of individuals

¹Burton, op. cit., p. 165-166.

²Van H. Cartmell, The Amateur Theatre Handbook (Garden City, New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1945), p. 20.

pervaded by a group consciousness that is the most baffling phenomenon in the realm of psychology. There does not exist the man, however expert in the world of theatre, who can say with absolute assurance that such and such a dramatic situation will interest an audience. It is just that element of uncertainty that keeps the theatre alive.¹

Mr. John Rosenfield, amusements editor of the Dallas Morning News, in an article entitled "Without the Living Theatre," has this to say about audiences:

To some the theatre is a place of amusement or recreation, to others a place of stimulation. The long dispute whether the theatre should inspire and educate or merely divert and release could be resolved by recognition of the fact that there are people who can be relaxed by a little edification and entertained by the flight of creative inspiration.²

To continue his belief that the living theatre has an even deeper sociological meaning, Mr. Rosenfield quotes extensively from Brooks Atkinson's article in "Antioch Notes," a publication of Antioch College. Mr. Atkinson, drama critic of the New York Times, and labeled by Mr. Rosenfield as an "expert on the theatre," has the following to say about audiences:

Without a theatre a democratic community is not fully alive. Audiences have a capacity for creation, and the theatre is one of the places where people fulfill themselves as members of the race. For nothing about the theatre is so characteristic of its genius as its audiences.

Obviously the author is the primary creative force and the actors his collaborators. But the art or the community experience of theatre does not come to life until an audience begins to assemble, either receptive or hostile as the case may be.

¹Charles Mather et al, Behind the Footlights (New York: Silver, Burdette, and Co., 1935), p. 7-8.

²Dallas Morning News, January 30, 1952.

Radio and screen audiences cannot participate intimately in what they are seeing and hearing because a mechanical process separates them from the actors. But in the theatre, the audience not only gives the verdict but participates in the performance of the play and re-writes the author. It is a hackneyed jest of the theatre that plays are not so much written as re-written because audiences pounce so unerringly on the things that are wrong.

Fortunately the theatre cannot help being a democratic institution. It is controlled by its audiences, and audiences are not afraid of ideas or differences of opinion. Never question the final judgment of audiences. They have an "idiotic genius" for knowing what rings true. And don't worry about a community that has a lively theatre lighted up in the evening. People are passing judgment on life.¹

Finally, the reporter needs to take inventory of his own methods. The questions below will assist him.

The Critic

Do you use every opportunity to see a play acted?

Do you go 'back stage' during performances?

Do you attend rehearsals of plays? Read the play?

Do you have frequent talks with directors about their purposes and methods?

Do you precede a critical review with an interview story with the director or members of the cast?

Do you have a feature story on costumes, unique lighting effects, unusual props, particular directorial problems?

These last two questions may prove helpful to the critic who evaluates a performance to make his reviews more interesting to the reader. These additional articles suggested

¹Ibid.

by the questions will make the criticism understandable to the readers who did not attend, and will point out much to appreciate to those who do go. The critic should remember this notation from The Critic's Notebook:

The critic's job is to boost or jack up the individual reader to as high as possible a level of enjoyment, to move him from the cellar to the penthouse, where he can get a better view.¹

To briefly reiterate the critic's considerations and responsibilities, we cite this summary thought from Drama and Dramatics:

You considered first the play itself, its story, its theme, its structure, the author's purpose, and attitude toward life.

You were not dismayed if the play refused to be put into any narrow classification; but looked only to see if its comedy and tragedy were deeply rooted in human nature; its melodrama and force sincerely or cheaply sensational. You asked whether the characters were true and well-motivated if the dialogue was true to the characters, lively and dramatic.

In the actor you looked for real creation of characters, for sincerity, for voice adequately expressing character, intelligent reading of lines, above all the projection of character.

You watched to see if the play as a whole was pitched in the right key, played at the right tempo, and had unity.

You noticed whether the set had the necessary functions of simplicity, suggestiveness, harmony, and expressiveness. Also you noted if costumes expressed the idea of the play in color and design and appropriate to background, grouping, and type of character.

All this examination did not destroy the illusion, but rather enhanced it.

¹The Critic's Notebook, op. cit., p. 3.

You fulfilled your responsibility of going to the play with something besides a free ticket. Namely, a receptive, intelligent mind, a background knowledge as good as was possible to obtain, a spirit disposed to be sympathetic.¹

In conclusion, Milton Marx would remind the critic:

The three elements of acting, staging, and audience must be considered along with the play to arrive at an evaluation of the finished production. A fine production of a fine play is always a memorable experience for all concerned. A poor production may spoil a good play; a good production may improve a poor play.² The play is the constant, the production the variable.

In presenting criteria for use in judging the performances of amateur plays, we have attempted to keep two facts in mind. First of all, the questions had to be condensed and phrased from the viewpoint of the busy, and often inexperienced, reporter. Then, they had to be compiled in such a way as to be useful to one writing in all three realms of the amateur field. Most city newspapers have one person who covers dramatics, professional and amateur. In the smaller towns and on college campuses this person may have added assignments such as social or club news, book reviews, movie publicity, or even sports. The first reporter might use the criteria as a reminder of the considerations to make between the professional and amateur. The latter would find them guides to the essentials of play production.

Part I has been devoted to pointing out ways in which each of these reporters may gain a background for reviewing of amateur plays. For that reason several noticeable

¹Fish, op. cit., p. 140.

²Marx, op. cit., p. 218.

differences in the three levels referred to as amateur have been disclosed. The educational angle in the school theatre, the limitations of cast experience and budgets, the higher standards expected of community theatres--all these are worthy considerations for the reviewer who is interested in constructive work.

A young amusements reporter should thoroughly enjoy the challenge offered to try his hand at reviewing high school, college, and community plays with the idea of pointing out differences which distinguish the classifications and noting how the audiences grow in appreciation. Many towns offer a situation with thriving acting organizations working in all three phases, plus added attractions of professional road shows.

To illustrate another reason why we felt the need of this information, we offer this typical situation. In discussing it with acquaintances in the journalism field, the illustration is a good example of this type of class the past few years. The class was one in Critical Dramatic Writing offered in the Journalism Department of North Texas State College, Denton, Texas. All of the young people enrolled in the course expressed a desire to join the Amusements Department of a newspaper after graduation, and all were of junior or senior classification. All expressed willingness to begin with the smaller paper where the duties would be varied as we have pointed out. All conceded that

part of his duty would be to foster appreciation for all local amateur talent. None had taken part in amateur dramatics since high school. One had a more than average acquaintance with the elements of a play as he had written several. He admitted his knowledge of production was very limited. Several members had minors in music but with not even a "reading knowledge" of the theatre. Two had had poems and short stories published; one had sold a few book reviews. These students were ready to go into the community and "review the arts", which would include high school and college plays and perhaps a Little Theatre production. Yet it can be readily seen how each of these reporters would be unprepared for such an assignment. Each one would see the play with a different viewpoint, from the background of a musician, book reviewer, playwright, etc. In filling assignments for the class mentioned above, that is reviews of local plays in all three amateur fields, these students spent much time in research. It is hoped they would do so in a real-life assignment, but again time limit might prove a handicap. With the idea of presenting a concrete, usable criteria for the assistance of such reporters, this study was instigated; and we feel that, over a period of time, the use of the material would produce more constructive reviews, improved performances, and a better informed public. People will no longer avoid "amateur" dramatics because it will

have learned a new appreciation through the reviewers who have been learning themselves.

In Chapter I the value and function of criticism and the critic were presented. Definitions of drama in the broad sense, the amateur play and its elements in particular were given. The need for constructive critical reviews was pointed out, and the intention of providing helpful material for the critic in this field was stated.

Chapter II has been concerned with the presentation of this material, Part I being background knowledge and Part II the criteria for judging the plays for criticism.

The following chapter will consist of actual reviews from newspapers, college publications, or magazines of plays which have been performed in each of the three fields of amateur production. Attention will be drawn to ways in which these reviews brought out suggestions which would help participants improve future productions and at the same time provide the reader with worthwhile reading. On the other hand some will demonstrate how little thought was given to the play itself or the production as a whole, but was merely a report of an event or a singling out of certain elements to praise or condemn. In conclusion a brief analysis of opinions of amusements editors, directors, and others will be summarized.

CHAPTER III

APPLICATION OF THE CRITERIA

Now that a brief survey of criticism in general--its relation to amateur dramatics in particular has been made--and reasonable criteria for use in writing reviews for the latter has been presented, we offer examples of reviews for further consideration. By the application of the proposed standards of judgment to these sample reviews, we hope to point out a need for and use of the criteria. Some examples illustrate how little value is obtained from announcement-type write-ups which follow a performance. Others show how some background knowledge of dramatics on the part of the reporter makes constructive criticism possible.

The analysis of the questionnaire which accompanied requests for the sample reviews is included in the summary of the chapters. It represents a cross section of attitudes toward publicity and critical reviewing of amateur plays. We have limited the review examples for the two following reasons. With the presentation of only a few of those which we consider typical of the points we wish to make clear, it appears less confusing to the reader. In making use of the examples from college and community drama we were guided by the fact that members of these groups can make better use of critical reviews than can high school students. The same

people participate over longer periods of time in the former groups and are more interested in improvement methods. Very few high school newspapers attempt to give an after-performance criticism of their plays, because the plays are usually given only once and because the students rarely have an opportunity to appear in varied roles.

In making this study we have found much space being devoted to amateur dramatics in leading newspapers. The Dallas Morning News gives an equal amount of space to publicity and reviews of amateur groups and the professionals. Write-ups about the play, author, unusual production angles and pictures of the cast are run several weeks before performance date. A critical review with by-line follows "opening night," whether it be the Arden Club of Southern Methodist University, the Civic Playhouse, Dallas Little Theatre, Center Players, or Theatre '52 and a New York production of Bell, Book and Candle. High school plays are not reviewed but are given publicity in weekly columns like Facts and Forecasts or Little Theatricals. In like manner, many college and community drama organizations within a radius of 100 miles of Dallas are given attention in these columns. The Daily Times Herald, another leading Dallas newspaper, also gives a large amount of space to amateur productions. Either because of previous agreement or for other reasons each newspaper reviews the play the other has not. Although the reporters who cover the amateur plays have had limited

personal experience in dramatics, both Mr. Rual Askew of the News and Mr. Bob Brock of the Times Herald are enthusiastic supporters of such endeavors. They spend time with directors discussing aims and purposes, visit rehearsals, do background reading on the plays to be presented, and are always searching for interesting angles to stimulate their readers' appreciation for the performance. Dallas is a large city, but its newspapers are fanatically devoted to the artistic achievements of its local citizens and students. This tribute cannot be paid to other localities such as Oklahoma City, Denver, Colorado, St. Louis, Missouri, or even Texas cities like Amarillo, Abilene, Fort Worth, and Austin. These cities have many activities in amateur dramatics in their vicinities; however, daily reading of amusement sections in their papers over an extended period does not impress one that the field is equally as important as movies or professional theatre. One exception is the Houston Chronicle which gives equal publicity space to the amateur and professional acting groups, but seldom gives amateurs a critical review. To illustrate the variety of amateur activity and the space devoted to it we call attention to the amusements section of this paper of October 12, 1952. With equal space and headlines for write-ups on the professional production Bell, Book, and Candle and the new plays on Broadway and Mark Barron's column there were also the following: two pictures of current amateur

plays, Arsenic and Old Lace at the Attic Theatre and Curious Savage at the Little Theatre; pre-performance write-up for the Civic Theatre play, Marco Polo; announcements of current productions, Aladdin at the Alley Theatre and Claudia at the Playhouse. The newspapers of Los Angeles, California also devote much space to college and junior college plays, but again the stories are of the publicity type.

In order to point out the need for some guide for reporters and how little value comes from announcements after the performance we refer to the following two reviews from the Denton County Journal. The story on The House of Bernarda Alba appeared after the play was presented as indicated in the first paragraph. Later in the write-up the reader is led to believe it is a future production. No appreciation or helpful criticism is expressed. Therefore, in its absence of style and in correct information it even fails as a news item. Granted there is little of a critical nature that can be included in a review of a high school junior class play such as the second article illustrates; it is given here as an example of the numerous ones of its kind which present no stimulation to the amateur's efforts or to the reader's enlightenment. The reading of numerous articles such as the ones printed here over a long period of time was the principle incentive for making the study for this thesis.

Tessie Spring Show Presented Last Week

House of Bernarda Alba by Federica Garcia Lorca, the Texas State College for Women College Theatre's spring production was presented in the Hubbard Hall "Theatre-in-the-Round" Thursday and Friday night.

"Theatre-in-the-Round" employs the same seating arrangement as that of a boxing match. Patrons sit around the stage instead of directly in front of it. The theatre is located in the basement of Hubbard Hall.

House of Bernarda Alba tells the story of a mother's suppression of her family and gives a picture of life of women in Spain.

Jonan Brown has the title role of Bernarda. Cast as her five daughters were Jo Causey, Pat Brown, Martha Nicholas, Liz Stroop and Carolyn Cawley.

Others in the production were Jean Armistead, Pat von Claustwitz, Ann Fouts, Judy Martin, Norma Jean Martin, and June Cosner. Women in mourning were portrayed by the TSCW acting class.

Josh F. Roach, associate professor of speech at the college, is director of the production, and Martha Nicholas is student director.

The play will be presented in connection with the observance of International Theatre Month.¹

Northwest Juniors' Play Big Success

The Juniors of Northwest presented a play, Look Me in the Eye, by Jay Tobias in the Northwest auditorium Monday night, March 24. The players were Loyce Thomas, Kenneth Mitchell, Marnice Hanes, Freddie Smith, Billy Powers, Billye Henderson, Gailya Lewis, Don Spradley, Wayne Tribble, Daphine Beam, Joe Wheeler, Juanelle Thorell.

Look Me in the Eye, a comedy in three acts was the story of a couple who, in spite of the threat of having their allowance discontinued and being disinherited if they married, decided to marry anyway and try to prevent their rich aunt and uncle finding them out. When the aunt and uncle happened to visit the couple at the same time things began to happen. Finally, with the aid of two hypnotists, the problems of all concerned were solved to give the play a happy ending.

¹Denton County Journal, March 27, 1952.

Between acts entertainment was a preview of the coming minstrel to be presented April 18, Floyd Barksdale, Kenneth Clark, and Teddy Reed, and Bobby Lewis and Charles Carpenter playing several popular numbers. Miss Evelyn Bass rendered a vocal selection, "Summertime." Garnett Grant "lipped" an Al Jolson number. Mrs. C. E. Shuford and Mrs. Launa Morrow sponsored the play.¹

For another comparison we use three reviews of a local college production, The Lady's Not for Burning by Christopher Fry.² Since the play was presented by North Texas State College Players the student paper gave it excellent publicity beforehand which prepared the public for what to expect in the type of play and its risk at the hands of an amateur group. The review which followed the performance was written by a regular member of the Amusements Staff of the paper. It was an announcement of the performance, its cast, and its production crew. No attempt was made to answer the questions which might have been asked as to how well the playwright's theme was portrayed. There was no indication in the news story of audience response or any other means of determining success. There was no interesting commentary to create interest in attendance. There was no helpful criticism for future work or praise for effort for actors or director. Naturally a straight news story would not carry these elements; but we point out the possibilities which have been omitted to show a need for a critical review to follow the build up of good publicity. For comparison we have placed in the

¹Ibid.

²Appendix, pp. 112-114.

Appendix¹a critical review of another play which included some of the same cast members. The attempt at giving helpful criticism is present in this review of Death of a Salesman. The writer, Tommy Kirkland, makes an effort to point out ways in which the characters did or did not fulfill the playwright's purpose. It is our belief that articles such as this are more worthwhile, journalistically and dramatically, than a news story when reporting amateur plays.

One of the assignments for the Journalism Class in Critical Dramatic Writing mentioned in Chapter II was to cover this play. A sample of the class work is Mr. Dimock's, the one included here. This writer was the most eligible as a possibility of going into this type of reporting, hence we chose his article. It is printed below as originally written; but the instructor had marked many grammatical errors and misspelled words as well as circled phrases which he termed "trite" or "bad metaphor." The reader would receive little from this review except perhaps a feeling that the play was difficult to present and that several actors and actresses were taking the wrong courses. To say there were "flaws" and never point out one; to say most actors' portrayals were "satisfactory," then proceed to condemn several in vitriolic terms; to give the director "orchids" and not point out references to show the deserving of such praise--bears little resemblance to constructive criticism.

¹Appendix, pp. 115-116.

dimock

review--"The Lady's not for Burning"--

As its spring presentation the College Players chose Christopher Fry's "The Lady's Not for Burning," a comedy of a witch hunt in the 1400s.

As a group the Players are to be commended on good acting, and their director should receive orchids for a job well done on a play hard to do.

Fry's play is not the easiest that might have been chosen for an unseasoned troupe, and the difficulties found in the enunciation of the longer and less harmonious words in the script were not an altogether easy ladder to climb.

But the actors did turn in a satisfying portrayal of their individual parts.

The set, one piece and sturdily built, was appropriate for the play and well executed. The costumes, too, were well done and they blended in with the atmosphere of the stage.

There were several flaws in the lighting and staging however, that might have been eliminated.

One of the most noticeable distractions was Miss Marian Laminack's acting, coupled with her voice. Either she has political connections with the casting department, or else there is a dearth of good female actresses on the campus. The latter statement seems to be born out by the other women in the play.

Miss Laminack, at times, including deliverance of several of her more important parts, chose to stand in the shadows instead of where the audience could see her without straining their eyes. This could have been lighting, also, which was never varied with the exception of adding a little blue at a window to give the appearance of morning.

Miss Pattie Bunch, the mother of the two boys who are in love with Miss Laminack, also stays in the shadows, and the delivery of her lines was in matter-of-fact tone of voice that gave the audience no hint of interest on her part.

Jerry Blackwell, who played the lead, was without doubt, the best of the cast. His performance gave life

to some of the portions of the play that would have otherwise dragged.

Other parts dragged anyway.

Una Glazener, an old timer with the Players, gave another performance that helps to build the ego of the actress but adds nothing to the theater.

The rest of the cast could be termed as character actors, and there work was among the best-received by the audience. The two brothers and their constant bickering and insane conversation add many sparks of laughter to the dead wood of the play.¹

The third attempt to review the same play came from Gilbert Gorman of the Record-Chronicle staff. His is of the announcement-type article and of little use to acting groups for the future. Mr. Gorman does acknowledge the production crew and its work, so often slighted by reporters. The fact that he names almost the entire cast under a "superb portrayals" phrase and the director under "special praise" definition of success leaves nothing to work toward in the future. Mr. Gorman has a "reading knowledge" of dramatics and with some study might develop his ability to see its "inside workings." His duties on the paper cover several areas, and some guide posts might prove helpful to him as he learns to write about plays.

NT College Player Production Lauded

Christopher Fry, that superb dialogician not in dictionary, held no terror for North Texas State College Players Thursday night.

Eloquent with personification and metaphor, the crisp and lengthy Fry free verse was expertly handled by the

¹Dimock, Review of The Lady's Not for Burning by Christopher Fry. Class Work, Journalism 432.

thespians, who presented the first performance of The Lady's Not for Burning, their annual Spring production, in the NTSC main auditorium.

Other showing are scheduled for tonight at 8:15 and Saturday at 2 p.m. The latter will be a special performance for high school students in the Denton area. Tickets are 50 cents for those other than students, who will use their activity cards as admission.

The Lady's Not for Burning, a comedy in three acts takes place in Medieval England around 1400, as Fry says: "Either more or less or exactly." It concerns a caustic young soldier, ill-disposed toward the world, who wants only to be hanged. He even allows others to talk themselves into thinking he is the Devil if it will bring him death that much quicker. Love thwarts his moody plans, however, in the form of a young lady charged with practicing witchcraft. The villagers want to burn her, but she doesn't want a "stake" in that kind of future.

Superb portrayals of the characters are turned in by Jerry Blackwell, Una Glazener, Jack Dunlop, Marian Laminack, Mike Henderson, Buddy Williams, Patti Bunch, Jim Swain, Ed Pilley, Ray C'Neal and Joe Edwards.

Norman Ramsey and Joe David Ruffin designed and executed the set. Walter Wolfram was in charge of lighting. Ruffin also acted as stage manager. The stage crew was composed of C. A. Waldekin, Paul Pettigrew, Minor Huffman, Edwards, Marian McNabb and Doris Smith.

Sound effects were handled by Jack Jones. Properties by Marguerite Higgins. Huffman acted as prompter, in addition to his other duties. Dorothy Barbour was costume mistress.¹

It can be seen from the above illustrations that little value to dramatics or journalism is present in such stories. Therefore, the reporter who constantly asks himself questions about the play, its production, and its results will bring out the answers in his reviews. They will not be obvious as such, but they will tell reader and

¹Gilbert Gorman, Denton Record-Chronicle, April 16, 1952.

acting group what was accomplished and how well.

For illustrations of conscious or unconscious use of such questions as those included in the critical guide in Chapter II, we may examine a few sample reviews from newspapers and student publications. The article in complete form is included in the Appendix. We have selected quotations which illustrate our points.

First, let us consider what might be said about the play itself, its selection, type, theme, and function of its dialogue. Mr. Bob Brock of the Dallas Times Herald in his review of a Dallas Little Theatre production Portrait in Black, said,

The drama is strictly an off-beat one, a brittle, sitting-room-type thing the British love so well. Violence and action is held to a minimum, the plot being allowed to run its course on the oft times 'takly' dialogue of Messrs. Goff and Roberts.¹

In writing a review of School for Scandal given by University Theatre of Louisiana State University, Corinne McClave let the type of play and its place in literature dominate her story. In her article from the Daily Reveille she has featured these pertinent facts.

The play, written in 1777, was one of four plays by Sheridan in protest to the "weeping comedies" of the 18th century drama. It is a witty satire, ridiculing certain groups of upper class society in England at the time.

School for Scandal remains one of the favorite English comedies. Sheridan is the last of the wits, and

¹Bob Brock, Dallas Times Herald, September 30, 1952.

with him the comedy of manners disappeared until the end of the 19th century.¹

Information such as this is welcome background material; but in this instance, as is so often the case, it takes the place of critical comment. The questions "What was done with the material and how well?" are still unanswered.

A review with well-chosen words in its opening paragraphs is the one by Lillian Massey of The Merry Wives of Windsor for the Northwest Arkansas Times.

"The Merry Wives of Windsor," which opened Tuesday night at the Arts Center Theater under the direction of Frank McMullan, visiting professor from Yale, is one of the funniest farces in English and has held the boards, not only in the English-speaking but in all countries with a tenacity which witnesses its universal appeal. As a single example may be mentioned a successful run at the Polski Theater in Warsaw, from October, 1948, to March, 1949.

Both main and sub-plot are sure fire. There surely breathes no theater-goers with soul either so simple or so sophisticated that he finds no pleasure in the spectacle of the punishment given the fat knight by the two middle-class women whom he hoped to victimize. And, although a 20th century American audience does not share the Elizabethian sympathy with the reformed wastrel who recoups his fortune by marrying a rich girl, any audience is sure to prefer young Fenton to either of his rivals.²

In the above quotation the reader is introduced to the type of play, its significance in history and drama, and what can be expected of it in modern performance. Within the remaining paragraphs the reviewer aims at showing how the acting group attempted to fulfill the purpose of the

¹Corinne McClave, Daily Reveille, October 24, 1952.

²Lillian Massey, Northwest Arkansas Times, April 24, 1952.

play. The writer in this particular case is not a regular member of the staff of the Times, but an outsider who contributes critical reviews for a certain fee per story.

Marilyn Meyer begins a review for her college paper, The Illini of the University of Illinois by stating the theme of the play as follows:

"A little learning is a dangerous thing" was effectively proved by Illini Theatre Guild Workshop when it presented Moliere's comedy The Learned Ladies in 112 Gregory Hall Friday night.¹

The remaining paragraphs only contain some one-adjective comments of the writer on the character portrayals.

In typical college lingo Merrill Clute of the Daily Oklahoman amusements staff describes his idea of a play and its merits as an acting vehicle:

A sassy, screwball comedy was ranked across the boards Thursday night at Holmberg hall as the drama school presented its first major production of the season--again saving the day with some good acting.

Playwrite Sam Specwack's Two Blind Mice is a weak plotted vehicle which lacks the wit he and his wife riddled Kiss Me Kate with. The actors strain to make the most of the fragments of clever dialogue occasionally furnished. Two Blind Mice is the sort of burlesque material one would expect to see at the Gaiety between strips.²

The quotation above was a commentary on a play by a professional playwright from an amateur reporter who saw it performed by amateurs. With the same fearlessness, Dave Martin of the Daily Illini criticises a student-written,

¹Marilyn Meyer, The Illini, October 18, 1952.

²Merrill Clute, Daily Oklahoman, October 10, 1952.

student-produced musical play. After branding the opening night a "dress rehearsal," he says:

The authors of The Lady Has a Right have attempted to create a professional-type musical in which a plot thread holds the show together and sustains audience interest and attention until the final climactic scene.

It was a memorable endeavor, but the show just did not come across. For the most part the script was undistinguished; there was no punch in it.¹

Rual Askew, a professional critic, is quoted here to show two contrasting comments of his on the worthiness of new scripts used by amateurs. He concluded his review of Montserrat presented by the S.M.U. Arden Club with this paragraph:

More important than any production details, however, was the fact that so valuable a play was brought to the attention of local audiences. That it found so forceful an outlet through Dr. Renshaw and her players is tribute enough.²

In like manner this critic concluded a review of a Civic Playhouse production, Five Wives Had Father with these words:

The challenge to bring new scripts to light will always lure, but it should only be accepted as long as these evidence legitimate merit. Many, like Five Wives appear to have been written for the trunk.³

Most of the examples just quoted show how the reporter did or did not have an awareness of the fundamental idea of a play, the worth of a script, the futility of acting without dialogue which performs its "three functions."

¹Dave Martin, Daily Illini, May 3, 1952.

²Rual Askew, Dallas Morning News, March 27, 1952.

³Ibid., June 25, 1952.

When we consider again the questions used in the second section, Production, we find they are ones which emphasize the responsibility of the director and conceptions of acting. The introductory questions in this section tend to bring to mind the true function of the setting and costumes. Previous quotations have already pointed out the effect a set might have on the reporter. Too often the reviewer feels it his duty to mention sets, costumes, and their creators. Too often the duty shines through, as it would appear in the quotations below:

Preston Magruder's charming set shows the exteriors of a row of Tudor houses; the action alternates between the street scene and inner stage so that the latter can be reset without any break in the action. The two intermissions are concessions to the comfort of the audience.

The costumes are colorful--some of them, notably that of the gentleman-with-dog, startling. A program note gives the information that the designs for them are based on the works of Pieter Bruegel the elder, a Flemish painter of the 16th century.¹

Norman Ramsey and Joe David Ruffin designed and executed the set. Walter Wolfram was in charge of lighting. Ruffin also acted as stage manager. The stage crew was composed of C. A. Waldekin, Paul Pettigrew, Minor Huffman, Edwards, Marian McNabb and Doris Smith.²

Contrast these with such apt phrases as those used by Bob Brock and Rual Askew:

John C. Heckler and his staff is to be complimented for the magic it wrought in turning the small Highland Park Town Hall stage into a modern and chip living room,

¹Lillian Massie, Northwest Arkansas Times, April 24, 1952.

²Gilbert Gorman, Denton Record-Chronicle, April 18, 1952.

with a ship's motif. Showcasing the production was the always professional lighting of DLT old faithful, Robert Miller.¹

Sets and costumes were convincingly drab to suit the atmosphere, and lighting lent an important emphasis to the oppressiveness of the basic situation.²

However, as has been mentioned before, the elements of production are welded by the director. Lillian Massie recognizes this in her headline for a review of The Merry Wives of Windsor: "Skillful Director and Cast Again Prove 'Merry Wives' Among the Funniest Farces in History of English Theatre."³

A tribute to coordination of directing and acting talent is evident in this quotation:

Director John Hanby has met and conquered, for the most part, a serious problem faced by most Little Theatre groups--young actors who play middle-aged or character plots. In Portrait in Black all but three of the characters are over thirty-five. Possibly two of the five over thirty-five were anywhere near their stage age, but again, youth served well and with conviction.⁴

Another example is found in Merrill Clute's review of Two Blind Mice. When writing of Miss Carole Linn's portrayal of Crystal Hower, he says: "She possesses, thanks to director Rupel Jones' experienced handling, a wonderful sense of timing."⁵

¹Brock, op. cit.

²Askeu, op. cit.

³Massie, op. cit.

⁴Brock, op. cit.

⁵Clute, op. cit.

One reviewer even goes so far as to place all blame for characterization upon the director who allowed it to develop. He says: "For Del Orlovski's whiny Southern masquerade, we blame the direction, which apparently felt such caricatures are still humorous."¹

For emphasis upon the director's "making" of a play once he has selected it, we call attention to two reviews written by Mr. Askew for the Dallas News. The first is a quotation from the review of To Dusty Death, an original script by Dr. Harold Weiss, chairman of the S.M.U. Speech Department. The Arden Club of that department presented it. These are examples of references to the type play and how it was handled by director and author;

Thanks to both Dr. Weiss and Barney McGrath, who directed, the production was folksy as all get out.

For his part, Director McGrath has taken the mixture of this well-tested theatrical recipe pretty much as it is, spread it over all the directorial burners and let nature take its course. Once more, oil and water don't properly mix, though the heat of delusion does give off some steam.²

The other quotations are from the same reporter's account of a Civic Theatre production.

Not too much has been done through direction to give the jape a semblance of honest-to-goodness animation. The curmudgeon hurls invective, the belles group themselves as best they can on a cluttered stage and try to make their lines sound like left-overs from The Women. In spite of several likeable performances nothing really happens to move the observers' interest one way or the

¹Rual Askew, Dallas Morning News, June 25, 1952.

²Ibid., May 1, 1952.

other. The initial reaction is one of "wait and see". After the seeing, an air of waiting persists.¹

In passing we might point out the fact that unity and tempo, the two most important ingredients for a smooth performance are rarely mentioned by reviewers. There is no special recognition made of their relative importance to a play's polish or professional air in these reviews. We feel most directors and actors would not resent being reminded of their responsibility and that every critic should train himself to sense these elements, even though they need not be named in a write-up.

Acting is the most commonly used weapon for both praise and ridicule in writing about amateur plays. Consistency in characterization, consciously used devices, and lack of cooperation are things upon which young actors need constructive criticism. To say as Bob Brock, "Mosko's performance was sketchy, but under moments of great stress, adequate"² or "Young Chappell is a promising lad, although his movements are slightly mechanical"³ is to give the young actors something to work for in the future.

It is my belief that the college actors criticized by their fellow student, Mr. Clute, in his review would not be offended but rather would make use of the suggestions in future work. His praises have reasons to back them up.

¹Askeu, op. cit.

²Brock, op. cit.

³Ibid.

Ronald Pitts, as Tommy Thurston the "newspaper man," runs away with himself at times. He has excellent deliverance but unfortunately doesn't get the lines he's capable of.

At times his arms resembled airplane propellers warming up for flight. But that was easily overlooked, for his machine gun delivery of some of the play's better lines were very good. Mr. Pitts couldn't have been much better, but Mr. Thurston could.

Art Johnson was rooked when handed the role of the stupid, love sick doctor. He's much more capable, as he showed Thursday night, than what the playwright provided him with. On stage Johnson created a solid character out of the weak character which had been put on paper.

Maggie Kozar as Doto is good, very good. It was a pleasure to watch her shape and mold Doto. Her comedy was never vulgar as she could have made it; she held it on a high level. She underplayed her drunk scenes as Chaplin might have if his Little Tramp could but speak.¹

In reading the entire review it will be noticed that criticism of acting dominates Clute's story as much as play type does in McClave's School for Scandal review and as does audience reaction in Halliburton's Gramercy Ghost article.

For another example of backing up high praise for acting ability with substantial evidence, we quote from the review of a college production of Montserrat:

Of the players, two powerful portraits were drawn by David Healy and Will Acker. Healy's Izquierdo was a mature creation of considerable consequence and skillful delineation that filled every necessary area of characterization. It impressed by the intensity of its illusion. Equally remarkable for its effect was the posturing lampoon of early 19th century acting by Will Acker. His Juan Salcedo Alvarez was an expert amalgam of projection, movement and development.

Robert Maloney was physically right as the idealistic "dreamer" put to the toughest of tests. He spoke

¹Clute, op. cit.

his lines with enough youthful sincerity and illustrated them with sufficient movement to convince.¹

Again we refer to Lillian Massie's review for the same kind of illustration:

William D. Holt's interpretation of the role has that quality of amoral innocence without which Falstaff would be offensive. Bolt's Falstaff is a child grown old and fat and knowing without having ceased to be a child.²

We can glimpse in the foregoing quotations the reporter's keen interest in interpretation of a role. There may be found examples of both methods of interpretation which were discussed in Chapter II. One conclusion would be that these reviews offer more proof for the popular belief that most reporters and writers comment at length on acting in writing about plays which they have seen on a stage.

For comparative purposes we might examine the reviews of Gramercy Ghost included in the Appendix.³ One, written by Gynter C. Quill for a city newspaper is of a college production. The other, written by Maurine Halliburton, Women's Editor of the Tulsa World, is of a recent Little Theatre production in her city. In her story Miss Halliburton gauges the success of the production almost entirely on audience approval, mentioning a "packed house"⁴ which greeted the

¹Askew, op. cit.

²Massie, op. cit.

³Appendix, pp. 99-103.

⁴Maurine Halliburton, Tulsa World, October 12, 1952.

play with "laughter and applause"¹ and prompted "many curtain calls."² Mr. Quill, a professional reviewer, relies upon his own judgment of the play's success and cites "jitters and forgotten lines,"³ and "kinks in actual performance to be ironed out"⁴ to balance his "at times highly polished"⁵ and "always deliciously entertaining."⁶ He is able to point out a "weak moment"⁷ in the playwright's construction and recognize "painstaking direction"⁸ and classify the play as "comedy-fantasy."⁹ Both reviewers were aware of the function of the set, Quill calling Mr. Beavers "adequate,"¹⁰ which signifies little to the reader, and Miss Halliburton terming the Little Theatre set "a room to live in"¹¹ which indicates more than just adequacy.

In the section of the Criteria devoted to questions which the critic might ask himself the suggestion of pre-performance write-ups is intimated. For an example of the

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Gynter C. Quill, Waco News Tribune, July 18, 1952.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Halliburton, op. cit.

coverage of an amateur performance from announcement to critical review, let us look at that used by the Los Angeles Collegian, student publication of Los Angeles City College. The play was Tennessee Williams' You Touched Me given by the college drama department.

A week before the opening there appeared a story with a headline across the seven-column page in the Radio-Drama Section. The headline in bold print read: "Williams' 'You Touched Me' Starts Thursday," and the subhead was "Highlights New Effect." A three-column picture of a rehearsal scene was in the center of the page. A reading of the clever write-up included in the Appendix¹ will reveal the writer making more than a report of a coming event. The opening paragraphs paint a picture for the reader, then as the writer says, "Amidst all the uproar, a play is emerging."² In addition to this article, there is a two-column story about the male lead, every line of which will add to the enjoyment of his work in the play by those who attend as well as presenting the reader with interesting facts. Throughout the week spot announcements and stories giving time, place, cast, etc., appeared on this page. The critical review was written following opening night performance. In many ways it falls short of climaxing the build-up material. Jackie Macy's

¹Appendix, pp. 116-120.

²Jackie Macy, Los Angeles Collegian (L.A.C.C.), October 17, 1952.

comments are chiefly about the acting, but not worded in such a way as to give the reader a feeling of how well they served the purpose of the author or the theme of the play. The conclusion one draws from this record of individual performances is that "teamwork" was lacking. The description of Mr. Wexler's portrayal of Captain Rockeley was necessary as a follow-up to the special article about his ability. Audience and reader would expect it in the review. On the other hand Miss Macy's story is well organized and her phraseology apt without being "slangy" as is Mr. Clute's. It shows that she is familiar with such important things in production as timing, consistency of characterization, and theme. We can answer the questions "What was done, and how well?" from this series of stories thus: This play was a fast comedy with an unusual theme. It evidently was given a better than average performance by amateurs presenting a sophisticated play. The group fulfilled its purpose by furnishing the audience with the merriment it had been prepared to expect.

The value of having a critical review follow build-up material may be seen in the examples from The Daily Lass-O, student paper of the Texas State College for Women, for the College Theatre play, Trees Die Standing¹. Well-written stories and several pictures appeared in the paper just before opening night. By examining these stories the reader

¹Appendix, pp.110-112.

will find that such significant facts were brought to the prospective audience as the play's unique place as a first English translation, an unusual title which illustrates the theme, typical methods used by Spanish playwrights, the emotional undercurrent in the dialogue, the enjoyment the girls were receiving from their roles. One mistake, perhaps, was in the use of the misleading term "Spanish Play" in the headlines. Unfortunately, no critical review followed to inform reader, audience, or acting group the answers to the three vital questions: What was done? How well was it done? Was it worth doing? The director, Mr. Josh Roach, lamented, "I have only audience response to go on!" This reminds us of the statement made by Hermon Ould. When audiences indicated success, he would say: "An audience is not interested in intentions: it judges by results and ought not to be asked to make allowances."¹

In our reading and study of particular situations we have found further proof for our contention that destructive criticism, or that given without substantial background can destroy amateur enthusiasm. Whereas reporters trained in dramatics, through reading, attending plays and rehearsals, and by the use of a critical guide might be more useful in encouraging amateurs to accept and use criticism.

¹Theatre and Stage, "Aspects of Dramatic Technique," Herman Ould (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, Ltd., 1934), p. 926.

To point out the difficulties many reporters face, and in many instances are subdued by, we quote from Tracy Tothill of the Abilene Reporter-News. Abilene, a city of 55,000, has two colleges and one university besides its public schools, all with active dramatic organizations. Mrs. Tothill wrote of her situation:

As you are aware Abilene is the location of two colleges and one university: McMurry College, Abilene Christian College and Hardin-Simmons University.

We have no community theatre as such. However, we do have a series of plays presented each year by traveling or road show companies which are sponsored on a local basis. If time and the condition of the staff permits, we do review these plays.

However, it has not been our practice to "review" the presentations of the college dramatic departments in the strictest sense of the word.

My ordinary approach is to write a column preferably before the performance giving a sketch of how rehearsals are going and what it is all about. Ordinarily, I select the last dress rehearsal for this material. If something interferes and I cannot attend the dress rehearsal, I attempt to write a column on the basis of the performance but restrict the material to "backstage" happenings and audience reaction.

I have found and think it was true long before I came and will be true for years to come that there is intense rivalry between the three schools here about how much and what is said about the colleges in the paper.

You can readily see without my going into detail what sort of a situation could be created if Theatre offerings were reviewed by a very strict critic.

It is my belief on the basis of my conversations with various officials in charge of theatre at the colleges that they prefer that the major productions be given attention before the performance--again for obvious reasons. So in that respect the paper does give them its support.

Abilene sounds like a large town--maybe even a city --but my ears are still ringing from the time I dared slip into a column the idea that the local art museum could do a little better.¹

Mr. Gynter C. Quill of the Waco-Tribune-Times Herald says that he encounters no such rivalry in his attempts to criticize both Waco Civic Theatre plays and those of Baylor University. The Baylor Lariat also carries write-ups and reviews of the Civic Theatre productions of Waco.

Amusements Editor, Mr. John Bustin, of the Austin American is another columnist who works closely with the Daily Texan staff of the University of Texas. We use as a typical instance his caption for a picture of a scene from The Devil's Disciple, presented by the University's drama department, October 22, 1952.

A study in contrast is revealed in The Devil's Disciple as Robert Cass, l., playing Christy Dudgeon, leans at Claude Latson, portraying his brother, Dick, as he stands trial during play's famed courtroom scene. The famed George B. Shaw comic melodrama, a Shavian protest against Puritanism, opens a four-night run Wednesday at Hogg Auditorium as the first production of University of Texas drama season.²

The above quotation is used to point out its excellent wording for publicity pictures. It reveals the type play, leading characters, playwright's purpose, and a bit of suspense to whet the imagination. This method is far better than an advertisement, or even a two-column article of "canned information" about the play. A background knowledge of dramatics, in addition to journalistic skill, makes it

¹Tracy Tothill, Personal letter.

²John Bustin, Austin American, October 22, 1952.

possible for reporters to write in this fashion.

In presenting this brief analysis of the sample reviews with reference to the questions which make up the criteria we hope to have brought out some ways in which the guide might be used.

We concede that to make any contention as to the widespread results of its use would be material for another thesis. It would entail a sustained period of application by inexperienced reporters and the collection of their articles written with it as a guide. In this study it has been our purpose to point out a need for such a critical criteria, to produce one which might prove useful, and to show how its use might stimulate acting group, reporter, and reader.

The short survey conducted in connection with this study shows a cross section of newspapers' opinions about reviews and publicity given to amateur dramatics. The principal conclusion drawn is that the majority of reviewers do not have the proper background for reviewing amateur plays. Therefore, we would agree with Burton who says:

In the modern educational scheme, then, room should be made for some training in intelligent play going. So, far from there being anything Quixotic in the notion, all the signs are in its favor. The feeling is spreading fast that schools and colleges must include theatre culture in the curriculum and people at large are seeking to know something of the significance of the theatre in its long evolution from birth to present, the history of the drama itself, of the nature of a play regarded as a work of art; of the specific values, too, of the related

art of the actor who alone makes the drama vital; and of the relative excellencies in the actual playhouse of our time, of play, players and playwriting; together with some idea of the rapidly changing present-day conditions.¹

It is our feeling that young reporters of the future will have much to do with developing the trend indicated in the above opinion.

In conclusion, we again emphasize the place of criticism in the amateur field. Because of our belief that it has not always furnished helpful material or given an adequate consideration to what might be expected we have written this discussion. We feel, as Ivor Brown does, that there is a real feeling for drama in its totality in the amateur theatre. Moreover, we agree with him that the best kind of amateur puts up with a reasonable censure far better than the professional, who reads criticism with a hungry eye for epithets. Hence the amateur has more chance for growth and the field itself opportunity for raising of standards. To substantiate our contentions we quote other observations and suggestions from Mr. Ivor Brown:

Amateur actors get little newspaper criticism of value. Amateurs in small towns that have an average press at work receive the usually flattering attentions of a reporter who cannot be expected to have special knowledge or strict standards of assessment. It is much better fun for him to go to a play than to attend a public meeting and record its round of speeches and so everything in the dramatic garden is apt to be lovely in his eyes. This kind of journalistic attention is doubtless pleasant to the amateur exhibitionists; it assists publicity and may help the box office at the next performance; but it is of no use to the amateur as theatrical worker.

¹Burton, op. cit., p. 24.

The expenditure on criticism should not be regarded as a luxurious extra; it should be regarded as essential to the health of the society. I suggest that, where the local newspaper criticism is no more than a form of amiable reporting, the amateur group should ask the editors to print instead the opinions expressed by the qualified visiting critic. The editor might even be coaxed into paying for this copy, as he would have to pay his own reporter. The visiting critic presumably has a "name" in his own line of business and speaks with authority; hence his copy would be better for the local paper than an unsigned description by a reporter who may be an excellent all-round journalist but cannot be blamed for a certain innocence about the theatre.¹

The introduction to this paper was concerned with clarifying the terms with which we would work. After pointing out that the critic of amateur plays might be a professional who considers it part of his job or a young reporter who has the task thrust upon him, we advocated as the best method for both the question and answer. Both experienced and inexperienced would begin by asking what criticism is and what its functions are in amateur dramatics. That criticism involves more than fault-finding, that criticism is more than mere reporting, and that criticism springs from appreciation of what goes into a total work were offered as preparatory material. The critic himself, then, must have the necessary command of his craft as a journalistic writer plus background knowledge of the field--in this case--amateur play production. His duties are to learn and to inform. To present material that is interesting to readers, to provoke thought as well as appreciation, to encourage groups he serves

¹Theatre and Stage, Ivor Brown, "The Critical Faculty," p. 5.

are his ultimate aims. Because we feel that these particular aims have not been developed in critical writing for amateurs, we pointed out the need for a simple, applicable criteria which might be used to assist reporters in two ways: as a guide to background knowledge of dramatics, and as a guide to what is expected of the amateur.

Therefore the second chapter is devoted to the presentation of the suggested question and answer summary for helping the reporter in the two ways mentioned above. Part I is made up of information which the critic who desired to fulfill his true function as a reviewer of amateur plays might find essential. The actual question--form criteria for judging amateur plays, arranged in terms of the play itself; the production, which includes directing and acting; audience response; and the critic constitute Part II. The questions are results of the study of similar ones from several books on dramatics and compiled with the idea in mind of use by a busy reporter. Quotations from authorities are cited after each section of questions to assist the reporter in finding the answers. It is our belief that the use of such a method over a period of time will help the critic to better serve public and theatre. For as he learns he will convey ideas, enthusiasm and appreciation to his readers. At the same time, he will give encouragement to players, directors, and to all workers in the theatre.

The final chapter is made up of a few examples both of well-written and valueless reviews of amateur plays with explanations of their contribution to reading public and acting group. The quotations used for illustration are based on the questionnaire in Chapter II to strengthen our contention for the need and potential use of the criteria. With the requests for the clippings, a card was sent to be checked by the reporter who was responsible for covering the amateur plays. For additional consideration on the need and proposed use of such a guide for play reviewing, we present this brief summary of our survey.

Thirty newspapers were contacted about information or to secure copies of reviews. There were seventeen responses which gave enough information to be helpful. The others either failed to return cards or indicated no interest in play reviews. Answers were received from city and town newspapers and campus newspapers. These represented localities where the plays were given in at least two of the amateur levels and seven different states. The questionnaire was in the following form:

NAME OF PAPER:
LOCATION:

Please check one or more

Much Little space is devoted to:
Critical reviews Publicity of amateur plays.

The reporter who covers the above is:
a regular member of paper staff
an outsider who contributes articles
one who has had little or no theatre
experience

one who has had professional experience____
 one who has a "reading knowledge" of
 dramatics____

This paper's interest in amateur plays is:
 to report them merely as news events____
 to report them in a way that will
 foster improvement in acting groups____
 foster appreciation in readers____

SIGNATURE_____

From answers to the above questions, from additional comments submitted by editors and reporters, and from consistent reading of student publications and daily newspapers we can make the following observations.

All but two of the papers responding devoted much space to both publicity and critical reviews of amateur plays, and indicated the purposes were to encourage the acting group as well as foster appreciation in readers. Only one paper admitted that its chief interest in reporting play performances was only as a news event. Twelve of the seventeen papers have a regular staff member who writes reviews of amateur plays, but only three of the total number had had experience in amateur dramatics. Most of the reporters acknowledged a reading knowledge of the field. This might indicate that, in many instances, the need for helpful information was present. Indications are that the desire to review amateur plays is widespread, but awareness of the little differences to be considered in such criticism is not developed. As we stated in the beginning of this thesis,

the critic can apply the epitome of standards to the professional, but the range and possibilities, the purposes and aims of amateurs should be considered more carefully. Even these may be different in the school theatre and community dramatics, as we have pointed out.

In the beginning we advanced the theory that critical reviews of amateur plays are so often inadequate since they are written in the style of a news event. It is our belief that this is largely due to two reasons; namely, inexperienced reporters with many, varied events to cover, or experienced reporters who tend to apply the same standards used in judging professional groups. Therefore, we have attempted in this study to find a criteria for judging amateur plays which might be useful to both types of reporters and which might be applied to high school, college, or community performances. And by critical reading of many reviews from plays on these levels over a period of some twenty months we have reason to believe that the use of such a criteria would be beneficial to theatre and journalism.

With our advocating the use of more suitable standards for the amateur play, we feel that reporters will be adding much to their writing which will make it distinctive. Therefore, we conclude with this opinion.

If the steadily growing and spreading interest in the drama both as a fine art, a civic asset, a source of intellectual entertainment, and a force in education, results in a general raising of our critical standards and an intensifying of our sympathetic appreciation, what vast good will be accomplished!¹

¹Taylor, op. cit., p. 5.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES USED IN

APPLICATION OF CRITERIA

Critical Reviews from The Dallas Morning News

(Thursday, March 27, 1952)

STAGE REVIEW:

'MONTSERRAT'
GETS STRONG
INTRODUCTION

By Rual Askew

Montserrat (Arden Hall, March 25 to 29): Drama in two acts by Lillian Hellman, from a play by Emmanuel Robles. Directed by Dr. Edythe Renshaw. Irene Sharaff costumes from original New York production. The cast:

Zavala.	Charels McLine
Antonansas.	George Holland
Soldier	Norman Bennett
Montserrat.	Robert Maloney
Morales	Hugh Lampman
Izquierdo	David Healy
Father Coronil.	Robert Ruppert
Salis Ina	Joe Klibanow
Luhan	Pat Tims
Matilde	Patricia Young
Juan Salcedo Alvarez.	Will Acker
Felisa.	Gailya Reese
Ricardo	Randell Aaron
Monk.	Phil Franklin
Soldier	Dan Peterson

Lillian Hellman's admirable adaptation of "Montserrat," a French play by Emmanuel Robles, was auspiciously introduced into Dallas theatrical parlance Tuesday by SMU's Arden Club. The production, in spite of a few cast weaknesses and spells of indecisive direction, was a stimulating evening of theater nonetheless.

Miss Hellman's stage elaboration of individual courage standing up to oppressive cruelty is a deeply impressive display of craftsmanship that only occasionally talks too much. Its device whereby innocent victims are murdered because one

idealist will not betray his cause is completely effective even when its mechanics are obvious. Its dramatic statement is so expertly fashioned that no onlooker would doubt for a minute the righteousness of Simon Bolivar's cause in an enervated Venezuela of 1812.

For the Arden Club production, Dr. Edythe Renshaw chose one of the most uniformly capable casts of recent SMU seasons. With this as ballast, the direction allowed clear sailing, once the indecision of the opening scene was passed. The vessel's interior furnishings were among the handsomest and aptest yet devised for Arden.

OF THE PLAYERS, two powerful portraits were drawn by David Healy and Will Acker. Healy's Izquierdo was a mature creation of considerable consequence and skillful delineation that filled every necessary area of characterization. It impressed by the intensity of its illusion. Equally remarkable for its effect was the posturing lampoon of early nineteenth century acting by Will Acker. His Juan Salcedo Alvarez was an expert amalgam of projection, movement and development.

Robert Maloney was physically right as the idealistic "dreamer" put to the toughest of tests. He spoke his lines with enough youthful sincerity and illustrated them with sufficient movement to convince. There were effective characterizations also by Patricia Young as the uncomprehending mother whose children will die without her, by Joe Klibanow as the lecherous old merchant and by Randel Aaron as the adolescent whose faith in liberty would not be shaken.

More important than any production details, however, was the fact that so valuable a play was brought to the attention of local audiences. That is found so forceful an outlet through Dr. Renshaw and her players is tribute enough.

(Thursday, May 1, 1952)

STAGE REVIEW:

'TO DUSTY
DEATH' ENDS
ARDEN YEAR

By Ruel Askew

To Dusty Death (Arden Hall, April 29 to May 3): Original folk play in three acts by Dr. Harold Weiss. Directed by Barney McGrath. Sets by Vern Reynolds. Costumes supervised by Cleta Watson. The cast:

Maw.	Mary Ann Bennett
Paw.	Charles McCline

John.	Hugh Lampman
Edith	Tad Lee
Evangeline.	Marjorie Lucas
Aitch	Norman Bennett
Henry	Vern Reynolds
Will.	Pat Tims
Vachbio	Bill Dunn
Conti	Bert Barnes

Arden Club concluded its 1952 season Tuesday evening with the opening performance of a new work by Dr. Harold Weiss, head of SMU's speech and theater department. In three short acts, the piece bore the title "To Dusty Death," whose origin is the popular quote from Shakespeare's "Macbeth." The well-springs for the script's ingredients were almost as readily apparent, being compounded almost in equal portions of the Kirkland-Caldwell "Tobacco Road," Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath" and Eugene O'Neill's "Beyond the Blue Horizon." As a result the over-all mood was simultaneously diffused in the directions of melodrama, farce and message.

Thanks to both Dr. Weiss and Barney McGrath, who directed, the production was folksy as all get out. It introduces the washed-out Jackson family presided over by the fierce-eyed, iron-willed Maw and to a lesser degree, Paw, a loutish, tobacco-spitting slob. Their offspring include Will, the ne'er-do-well and Maw's favorite; John, the tubercular dreamer of a better life; Vangie, who hankers to play a violin; Edith, who likes men, and Aitch, a stuttering echo of Paw. This hopeless brood, overwhelmed by its environment, grubs the eroding earth of Oklahoma for its existence during the whistling dust storms of the early 1930's.

FOR HIS PART, Director McGrath has taken the mixture of this well-tested theatrical recipe pretty much as it is, spread it over all of the directorial burners and let nature take its course. Once more, oil and water don't properly mix, though the heat of delusion does give off some steam.

Oddly enough, the students turn in some of the best acting of the season. If the club awarded Oscars, surely one should go to Mary Ann Bennett as the matriarch. Her portrayal was steadied by a maturity far beyond her years and unwavering in its projection. Charles McLane took to Paw's excesses in personal habits without flinching and won loud roars from the audience for his earthy realism. Norman Bennett stuttered relentlessly and Marjorie Lucas hankered furiously, though too faintly at times to be understood.

Sets and costumes were convincingly drab to suit the atmosphere, and lighting lent an important emphasis to the oppressiveness of the basic situation.

(Wednesday, June 25, 1952)

STAGE IN REVIEW

'FIVE WIVES HAD
FATHER' HARMLESS

By Rual Askew

Civic Playhouse (June 23 to 28): New comedy in three acts
by Ted Wynn and Jack Reed. Directed by Jack Reed. Set
designed and executed by Jack Reed. The cast:

Jonathan V. Appleby.	Jim Shelbourne
Martha	Ann Lettieri
Jeffry	Charlie West
Eva.	Anne Reed
Hortense	Georgienne Schneider
Lila Mae	Del Orlowski
Pat.	Peggy Brown
Barbara.	Genevieve Boles
Jonathan V. Appleby Jr	George Profitt
Agatha Herschel.	Sadie French
Reporter	Martin Gudenberg
Photographers.	Carleton Wilson, Jack Burney
Adam Appleby	Bill Williamson
Justice Spahn.	Gilbert Milton

If you seek a weightless trifle to while away a hot summer's evening, then most assuredly the air-conditioned Civic Playhouse has just the knick-knack you've been looking for. By name, "Five Wives Had Father," the new script was given the first of a week's performances anywhere Monday evening at the Oak Lawn theater. It was originally carpentered by Ted Wynn, a Hollywood studio writer and subsequently reworked by the Playhouse's Jack Reed, who also directed, designed and put together its stage set.

We couldn't be too sure just when Wynn's script first left the typewriter, though it was at least during that period when references to Popeye and spinach were the rage. There have been numerous self-exposing efforts to freshen time references throughout, though they have no real effect on already dated procedures. And dialogue about housing shortages is nowhere near as pertinent as it was eight years ago.

THERE'S NO argument to the contrary that "Five Wives" is harmless and clumsily diverting at times. But its humors are obvious and its aim pointless. What trace of plot there is hangs about the growling curmudgeon whom everybody knows really has a heart of gold. Tarnish begins to accumulate

with daughters-in-law, five of them, who, by the merest contrivance, all come to weather temporary abandonment by their spouses with dear old daddy.

Daddy doesn't like one little bit, at first, but predictably soon, there is a change of heart and a swatch of gossip column clips about an aging roue and his deliberately unidentified harem. And so it goes, including an outbreak of pregnancies.

NOT TOO MUCH has been done through direction to give the jape a semblance of honest-to-goodness animation. The curmudgeon hurls invective, the belles group themselves as best they can on a cluttered stage and try to make their lines sound like left-overs from "The Women." In spite of several likeable performances nothing really happens to move the observer's interest one way or the other. The initial reaction is one of "wait and see." After the seeing, an air of waiting persists.

Jim Shelbourne spluttered agreeably enough as Appleby Sr. and managed to make several line fluffs sound acceptable. The role seems to want more positive aggression than he gave it, though it may be Mr. Wynn we had in mind. Of the scrapping in-laws, we preferred Anne Reed, who read and moved with authority, Peggy Brown, who projected an unsure sincerity, and Georgienne Schneider, who battled a natural dryness of speech and woodenness of movement convincingly.

Elsewhere, George Profitt again burst at the seams with bouncing enthusiasm and Bill Williamson brought off his stuffy Adam with ease. As Aunt Agatha, Sadie French created one of the few real characterizations of the evening and made much of its brevity. For Del Orlowski's shiney Southern masquerade, we blame the direction, which apparently felt such caricatures are still humorous. The rest of the cast ranged from adequate to unnecessary.

THE CHALLENGE to bring new scripts to light will always lure, but it should only be accepted as long as these evidence legitimate merit. Many, like "Five Wives," appear to have been written for the trunk.

Daily Times Herald, Dallas, Texas

(September 30, 1952)

MYSTERY DRAMA OPENS LITTLE THEATRE SEASON

"Portrait in Black," a three-act mystery by Ivan Goff and Ben Roberts. Directed by John Hanby. Settings by John Heckler. Presented by the Dallas Little Theatre at Highland Park Town Hall at 8:15 p.m. nightly through Saturday. The cast:

Tanis Talbot. Shirley Holmes
 Gracie McPhee Dortha McClain
 Peter Talbot. Wallace Chappell
 Winifred Talbot Mary Lee Dunham
 Cob O'Brien C. Bennett Harrington
 Rupert Marlowe. George Russell
 Dr. Philip Graham Joseph Kosko
 Blake Ritchie Rod Rogers

By Bob Brock

Modern manners, morals and murder provided an interesting study as the Dallas Little Theatre raised the curtain on its 1952-53 season Monday night with a sprightly mystery, "Portrait in Black," by Ivan Goff and Ben Roberts.

The drama is strictly an offbeat one, a brittle, sitting-room-type thing the British love so well. Violence and action is held to a minimum, the plot being allowed to run its course on the oftentimes "talky" dialogue of Messrs. Goff and Roberts.

Director John Hanby has met and conquered, for the most part, a serious problem faced by most Little Theatre groups--young actors who must play middle-aged or character plots. In "Portrait in Black," all but three of the characters are over 35. Possibly two of the five over 35 were anywhere near their stage age, but again, youth served well and with conviction.

Tanis Talbot (Shirley Holmes), is the attractive and recent widow of a giant in the steamship lines business. She never knew happiness with her husband, but she longed for love and turned to other men. One of the other men was Lawyer Rupert Marlowe (George Russell), an ardent pursuer of her for many years and the father of her illegitimate child, Peter (Wallace Chappell), marriage to Talbot.

Also in the immediate family is Winifred Talbot (Mary Lee Durham), Tanis' stepdaughter, who bears no apparent love for her stepmother, and likewise very little for her overpowerful father. Her rebellion against the giant company her father has built up vents itself in her love for Blake Ritchie (Rod Rogers), a labor leader of the dock forces, who are striving for better working conditions. An interloper is Dr. Phillip Graham (Joseph Kosko), who has more than an antiseptic interest in the Widow Talbot.

The Talbot household is completed by Gracie McPhee (Dortha McClain) and Cob O'Brien (C. Bennett Harrington), the maid and chauffeur, respectively, of many years' standing.

Action Holds Audience.

Plot machinations slip into high gear when we learn that the elder Talbot was really murdered and that the perpetrators are planning another equally clever killing, that of Lawyer Marlowe. Just who the murderere are, is clearly

visible to the audience, but the motivation and denouement is an interesting one that holds the auditors to the final curtain.

As the almost nymphomaniacal widow, Miss Holmes is physically and thepically equal to the part. Her exquisite wardrobe, all in black, is truly a high point of the play. Miss Dunham, one of the most capable of the Little Theater's young actresses, lends a certain dash to her role, and provides an interesting contrast with Miss Holmes' characterization.

The Three Lovers.

The three lovers of the play, Messrs. Russell, Kosko and Rogers, have their own individual brands of romance, with Kosko winning out in the suavity department. Russell is a believable lawyer and frustrated lover. He shares with Miss Holmes one of the play's better moments in the first scene of the second act, where most of the action takes place in a living room illuminated only by the glow of a fireplace. Kosko's performance was sketchy, but under moments of great stress, adequate. Rogers seemed to be the play's one bit of miscasting, as his strength and forcefulness was not up to the part's demand.

Miss McClain and Harrington, were welcome oases in the desert of drama. Miss McClain convinced as she could have been a maid all her life and Harrington had down pat the movements and voice characteristics of an Irish sailor turned domestic. Young Chappell is a promising lad, although his movements are slightly mechanical.

John C. Heckler and his staff is to be complimented for the magic it wrought in turning the small Highland Park Town Hall stage into a modern and chic living room, with a ship's motif. Showcasing the production was the always professional lighting of DLT old faithful, Robert Miller.

The Dallas Little Theater's next production will be "The Fappy Time." Presentation is scheduled for late November. "Portrait in Black" will play nightly through Saturday.

Three Reviews of Gramercy Ghost

(Tulsa World, Tulsa, Oklahoma)
October 12, 1952

PLAYHOUSE PACKED ON FIRST NIGHT

'Gramercy Ghost' Wins
Audience Approval

By Maurine Halliburton

A ghost around the house might be rather nice. Especially if it were the ingratiating ghost of Nathaniel Coombes, as played by Karl Janssen Friday night in Tulsa Little Theater's season-opener "Gramercy Ghost," by John Cecil Holm.

The Playhouse was packed for the first show of the 1952-53 season, and the laughter and applause which greeted the rapidly-timed comedy situations proved that the days and nights of rehearsal had been well spent.

The production, Little Theater's 174th, went smoothly through the three acts, with almost no noticeable first-night slip-ups.

The love triangle--or quadrangle if you include the ghost as one of the lovers, and he certainly was, since he was the one who straightened out things for Nancy, consisted of Tommie Ruth Gardner, (Nancy), William K. Donaldson as Parker Burnett and Don J. Kile as Charley Stewart. The contrasting roles made them good foils for each other; while Janssen as the ghost was so convincing that I'll always wonder how he made out in heaven to which he reluctantly returned.

The other ghosts, W. Irwin Nichols and Wayne F. Maxwell Jr. were equally (excuse it) spirited.

Good work was done by the supporting characters, Mary Nichols as the housekeeper; Glenna June Fogle, as the lawyer, who wowed the audience with her brief appearance on the stage; Shug Meade as the understanding officer; Millie Bowie and Shirley Barton Rhoades as the ambulance drivers; Esther K. Hibbard as the girl ghost, and Georgia Noel, "the voice."

The work of the Sea Gulls on the set deserves more than a passing mention. It is a room to live in, and Bill Embry's painting of the park background is beautifully done.

The many curtain calls the cast was called upon to take should warn them that this is another play which probably will go into performances beyond the 15 scheduled, through Oct. 25.

Director Viehman and technical supervisor Ted Kehoe can take bows for this, their first production of the play year. The consensus of the audience was that it was a complete success.

(Tribune-Herald, Waco, Texas)
July 18, 1952

'GHOST' OPENS
WITH GUSTO IN
BU's THEATRE

By Gynter C. Quill
Amusements Editor

"Gramercy Ghost"--A Baylor Theatre presentation of the John Cecil Holm comedy in three acts. Directed by Virgil Beavers. Costumes by Mary Boles. At the Baylor Theatre. The cast:

Nancy Willard.	Mary Boles
Parker Burnett	Tom Scott
Charley Stewart.	Joe Peacock
.	Bill Stinson
Nathaniel Coombes.	Willie Reader
Margaret Collins	Cumale Shirley
Augusta Ames	Betty Lou Crippen
Officer Morrison	Bob Schmidt
Ambulance Driver	Marian Lewis
Assistant Driver	Virginia Angelo
Molly.	Sandra Shields
Irv.	Thom Feuerstein
Rocky.	Jack Reese

The South Waco theatre group known variously at this time of the year as the Southwest Summer Theatre and the Baylor Theatre, Thursday night opened its two-week-end run of John Cecil Holm's "Gramercy Ghost." The comedy-fantasy which two seasons ago enjoyed a respectable Broadway run, was acted with gusto and, now that the kinks in actual performance may be ironed out, will provide some summer entertainment even better than last night's opening.

Quantity Is Missed

It would be untrue to say the regular production staff and the regular production staff and the cream of the current Baylor talent, now absorbing Fallic culture in Paris, are not missed. It may be said that what will be missed most is the quantity of previous summer plays rather than the quality. Last night's performance of the group's only play this summer was, with allowance for jitters and forgotten lines, smooth, at times highly polished and always deliciously entertaining.

The play is set in the exclusive Gramercy Park sector of Manhattan, at the time of the revolutionary war the site on which one Nathaniel Coombes was slain by the British as he tarried too long with a maid and the wine instead of delivering a message given him by General Washington. For his indiscretion, his ghost was doomed to haunt the spot until the message was delivered.

Upon the death of a wealthy dowager, the housekeeper Margaret Collins inherited the house with the ghost. Young Nancy Willard has inherited Nathaniel, invisible to all but her. Her conversations with the ghost lead her fiance Parker Burnett to doubt the soundness of her mind. Newspaperman Charley Stewart not only believes her but contrives to have Washington's message delivered two hundred years late and frees Nancy of her guardian angel.

Contrived is the word, for that contrivance in the final scene is the play's weakest moment. Until then, even with the ghost and his cronies, Holm's work does have some measure of credibility.

Willie Reader Best

The role of Nancy Willard is played with unusual verve by Mary Boles, whose portrayal is rich and warm, but perhaps the best piece of acting in the play is done by Willie Reader as Nathaniel. Also carrying the main burden of vitalizing the play are Tom Scott as the fiance and Joe Peacock as the newspaperman. Peacock will alternate in the role with Bill Stinson, whose illness forced a one-week delay in the play's opening.

Bob Schmidt blusters and strides through the role of the vengeful cop and Cumale Shirley offers a neat portrayal of the housekeeper. Nice background coloring and realism is given by supporting players--Betty Lou Crippen as attorney Augusta Ames, Marian Lewis and Virginia Angelo as ambulance drivers, and Thom Feuerstein, Jack Reese and Sandra Shields as other ghosts.

Virgil Beavers' direction is painstaking and the results are rewarding in their smooth facility. He also designed the thoroughly adequate set.

(The Lariat, Baylor University, Waco, Texas)
September 17, 1952

'GRAMERCY GHOST'
RE-OPENS AT THEATER

How to present a believable ghost in full view of his audience is a practical problem that confronts any playwright who writes a spook play. John Cecil Holm seems to have met the challenge successfully, according to reports, in his play called "Gramercy Ghost."

The play will be presented September 26, 27 and October 3, 4. A midnight show will be given on the 4th. Students will not be given late permission.

No character in "Gramercy Ghost" can see the spectre that haunts her apartment but the hapless heroine. The delightfully scrambled comedy situations in the play all stem from this embarrassing dilemma.

How can this girl who inherited a ghost convince her friends that she isn't ripe for a sanatorium when the wraith is visible and audible only to her? And what are her associates to think when this ordinarily sensible young lady starts carrying on conversations with a little-man-who-isn't-there? And how in the world does a girl explain to her fiance and another male admirer--both very much alive--that they have a rival in a ghost who has been smitten by her charms?

The answers to these and other supernatural problems are said to be solved neatly, and with a maximum of laughter.

The title role is being played by Willie Reader; Mary Boles is the ghost inheritor, Tom Scott is the girl's fiance who believes that his fiancée is about ready to follow her aunt to the booby hatch, Joe Peacock is the story-seeking reporter who has complete faith in the ghost, Cumale Shirley will be seen as the non-plussed housekeeper and Betty Crippen as the family lawyer.

The play has been designed and directed by Virgil Beavers.

Prices, the same for Baylor students and public, are \$1.50, \$1.20, and 95 cents; reserved seats; and 45 cents unreserved.

Review of "Merry Wives"

(Northwest Arkansas Times, Fayetteville, Arkansas)
Thursday, April 24, 1952

SKILLFUL DIRECTOR AND CAST AGAIN PROVE

"MERRY WIVES" AMONG THE FUNNIEST

FARCES IN HISTORY OF ENGLISH THEATER

By Lillian Massie

"The Merry Wives of Windsor," which opened Tuesday night at the Arts Center Theater under the direction of Frank McMullan, visiting professor from Yale, is one of the funniest farces in English and has held the boards, not only in the English-speaking but in all countries with a tenacity which witnesses its universal appeal. As a single example may be mentioned a successful run at the Polski Theater in Warsaw, from October, 1948, to March, 1949.

Both main and sub-plot are sure fire. There surely breathes no theater-goers with soul either so simple or so sophisticated that he finds no pleasure in the spectacle of the punishment given the fat knight by the two middle-class women whom he hoped to victimize. And, although a 20th century American audience does not share the Elizabethian sympathy with the reformed wastrel who recoups his fortune by marrying a rich girl, any audience is sure to prefer young Fenton to either of his rivals.

"Merry Wives" is crammed with hilarious situations--Falstaff's impudence about Ford to Ford disguised as Brook, Ford's search of the clothes hamper which contains only clothes, the "duel" between Sir Hugh Evans and Dr. Caius, Slender's wooing--and with comic characters, which, though many of them are derived ultimately from the stock characters of classical comedy, are inimitable Shakespeare's own and

somehow themselves and not types at all: Shallow, who at 80 still loves to boast of what a dangerous dog he once was; his silly, sissy young relative Slender; Sir Hugh, the Welsh parson; Falstaff.

Though it cannot be denied that the Falstaff of "Merry Wives" is not the incomparable Falstaff of the two Henry the Fourth plays, it can be argued that he has much of that Falstaff's wit, in perturbability, and clear-headedness. After all, the trick of the robbers robbed played Falstaff by Prince Hal and Poins is about as obvious as the pranks of Mistresses Ford and Page. Besides, nothing is more likely to delude even the shrewdest of men than is wishful thinking about their power to attract women.

William D. Bolt's interpretation of the role has that quality of amoral innocence without which Falstaff would be offensive. Bolt's Falstaff is a child grown old and fat and knowing without having ceased to be a child.

Jack L. Sigman's handling of Dr. Caius, the French physician, a part that incompetent acting reduces to mere caricature, is deft and finished. Al Hazelwood, as the Welsh parson, is at his best since "Born Yesterday." Throughout, his performance leaves little to be desired and in the scene where he is waiting for Dr. Caius is excellent. Keith Vinsonhaller carries the straight role of Page competently.

Among the women in the cast, Margaret Carner, as Mistress Ford, carries off the honors. Marion Clayborne gives a somewhat uneven performance in the part of Mistress Page. Lynn Carruth over-acts Mistress Quickly, and Lois Mellor's Ann Page has a faintly sinister flavor that did not come out of Shakespeare.

The production affords an example of the practical benefits of modern scholarship, which has recovered sufficient knowledge of the Elizabethan popular stage to free the producer of Shakespeare from many 18th and 19th century theatrical conventions which are entirely unsuitable to the plays of the late 16th and early 17th centuries. One of the most important of these benefits is the adaptation of the modern stage so that continuous action permits the presentation of most plays, little cut within the space of only a little over two hours.

Professor McMullan's only noticeable cuts--and they are noticeable only if one has recently re-read the play--are lines from long speeches; the revenge taken by Dr. Caius and Sir Hugh on the Host, which Shakespeare seems to have left in a pretty unsatisfactory state, anyway; and a short scene involving a lesson in Latin, which serves no real purpose in the play and is not likely to seem very funny nowadays.

Preston Magruder's charming set shows the exteriors of a row of Tudor houses; the action alternates between the street scene and the inner stage so that the latter can be reset without any break in the action. The two intermissions

are concessions to the comfort of the audience.

The costumes are colorful--some of them, notably that of the gentleman-with-dog, startling. A program note gives the information that the designs for them are based on the works of Pieter Bruegel the elder, a Flemish painter of the 16th century.

Professor McMullan opens the play with a lively dumb show which sets the gay tone of the piece. He closes it with a delightful procession of couples from Windsor Park to Page's house. He also introduces three mutes, of whom Shakespeare surely would approve: a flirtatious lady; a foppish gentleman with a dog; and, best of all, a lame, blind beggar who proves to be neither lame nor blind. And, throughout, the actors act; although they sometimes clown, they never merely recite lines.

Critical Reviews from Student Publications

The Daily Oklahoman
University of Oklahoma
Norman, Oklahoma

(October 10, 1952)

'Two Blind Mice' Draws Laughs ACTORS PULL ONE OUT OF FIRE

By Merrill Clute

A sassy, soreball comedy was raked across the boards Thursday night at Holmberg hall as the drama school presented its first major production of the season--again saving the day with some good acting.

Playwrite Sam Spewack's "Two Blind Mice" is a weak plotted vehicle which lacks the wit he and his wife riddled "Kiss Me Kate" with. The actors strain to make the most of the fragments of clever dialogue occasionally furnished. "Two Blind Mice" is the sort of burlesque material one would expect to see at the Gaiety between strips.

The gist of the story is: A newspaperman discovers that a government office, operated by two old ladies, is still functioning after it had been abolished for 43 years. He takes over the place and proceeds to make fools of the President, army, navy, and airforce by creating a fictitious top secret bureau out of the ladies' harmless business.

The play stumbles at first but comes roaring into a home-stretch with some good old fashioned farce. Though the story is enemic it has hilarious spasams. For an evening of good, long laughs it's dependable--thanks to some of the cast.

Top comedy honors go to Carole Linn who portrays Crystal Hower, one of the old ladies. Miss Linn pockets the whole play from the moment she opens her mouth in the first act and lets out that goose-fleshed but hilarious voice. She possesses thanks to Director Rupel Jones's experienced handling a wonderful sense of timing.

Ronald Pitts, a Tommy Thurston the "newspaperman," runs away with himself at times. He has excellent deliverance but unfortunately doesn't get the lines he's capable of.

At times his arms resembled airplane propellers warming up for flight. But that was easily overlooked, for his machine gun delivery of some of the play's better lines were very good. Mr. Pitts couldn't have been much better--but Mr. Thurston could.

Marilyn Harris, as the other old lady, Mrs. Turnball, was the play's "old reliable." Her performance was convincing at all times and she never missed a chance to show the good actress she is.

A couple of other good, convincing bits of acting were handled by Vernelle Daniels and Art Johnson. Miss Daniels undoubtedly has the sexiest head of hair to trod on the old boards at Holmberg.

Her habit of getting mad at her ex-husband and then sweeping across the stage to the footlights and looking out at the audience never became as corny as it might have in less capable hands. Her acting was a neat little package of suave, convincing sophistication.

Art Johnson was rooked when handed the role of the stupid, lovesick doctor. He's much more capable, as he showed Thursday night, than what the playwright provided him with. On stage Johnson created a solid character out of the weak character which had been put on paper.

Some of the bit parts were surprising well handled. Especially Edgar Springer. His acting of the harassed Major left little room for improvement. Other bit parts were turned in by Kenneth French, Ronnie Edwards, Monte Aubrey and Vance Ward.

The two old ladies' costumes were good, particularly the dress Miss Linn planned to wear when she went to prison. That hit the audience right in the face, and it was one of the biggest laughs.

GOOD CAST CARRIES COMEDY

By Merrill Clute

The Drama school opened its season Friday night with one of Christopher Fry's poorer plays--the 1-act comedy, "Phoenix Too Frequent," directed by veteran Edrita Pokorny Oden.

Fortunately for the audience the tools were in much better shape than the blueprint. The play is too long (one hour),

too wordy, and not as witty as Fry pretends.

The playwright didn't intend the actors to take their roles too seriously. The cast didn't disappoint him. The result was good.

The play, in blank verse, concerns Dynamene, young Grecian widow, who is trying to die in her husband's tomb. Her servant, Doto, is with her to take the ride "to Hades."

Tegeus-Chromis, young Centurian soldier, discovers them, falls in love with Dynamene. They decide to hang her dead husband in a tree in place of a stolen body the corporal should have been guarding--thus declaring their love for each other.

Maggie Kezer as Doto is good, very good. It was a pleasure to watch her shape and mold Doto. Her comedy was never vulgar as she could have made it; she held it on a high level. She underplayed her drunk scenes as Chaplin might have if his Little Tramp could but speak.

Reba Jo Webster, a bit slow at first, gradually lifted her Dynamene up to the best that Fry's lines could offer. She spoke and moved with refreshing sureness, demonstrating her fragile interpretation of Dynamene with two of the most attractive but melancholy arms seen in a Greek costume in a long time. Miss Webster's change from one lover to another in one hour was a nice bit of cool, suave acting.

Don Holley, as Tegeus-Chromis, could have remained in one spot and still have been as good as he was. Unlike most college drama students, Holley has an excellent speaking voice which he knows how to use. His occasional moronic treatment of the corporal was highly amusing.

Edrita Oden has a neat, concise little production in "Phoenix," so far as the cast is concerned. Her performers show a good backlog of stage instructions. Occasionally some of the "old Edrita" cuts threw abruptly in Miss Webster's performances--a credit to any actress.

The Daily Reveille
LSU, Baton Rouge, Louisiana
(Friday, October 24, 1952)

R. B. SHERIDAN'S COMEDY

EXECUTED WITH BRILLIANCE

By Corinne McClave

Enthusiastic applause filled University Theater last night as the curtain rang down on the Louisiana Players' Guild's lively performance of "School for Scandal."

This first-night presentation, under the able direction of Dr. C. L. Shaver, executed with brilliance Richard Brinsley Sheridan's comedy of manners.

Rupert Barber was outstanding in his role as Joseph Surface, the sentimental hypocrite, while Edward G. Luck, in the role of Sir Peter Teazle, convincingly portrayed an elderly lord bewildered, angered and at the same time, enchanted with his young, headstrong bride.

Outstanding in the play were the oleo scenes, played downstage in front of the curtain. Taking the audience by surprise, at first, these scenes added greatly to the rapid staccato effect, a characteristic of comedies of manners, with which the scenes took place.

The play consists of two themes--the story of the Teazles and that of the "Scandal School."

The plot is concerned with two young brothers, Joseph and Charles Surface. Joseph, although known as the good man, is really the villain, whereas, Charles, the dissolute spendthrift, is the good man.

Sir Oliver Surface, wealthy uncle of the two brothers, returns from India after an absence of 16 years. He visits each of them in disguise to see which one is more deserving of his fortune.

Things are further complicated by aging Sir Peter Teazle and his young bride. Sir Peter suspects Lady Teazle, who, incidentally, keeps company with the "scandal school," of having an affair with Charles. More entanglements are created by members of the scandal school, such as Lady Sneerwell, Mrs. Candour, Mr. Crabtree, and Sir Benjamin Backbite.

In the end, however, everything is straightened out satisfactorily for all, that is, almost all.

The play, written in 1777, was one of four plays by Sheridan in protest to the "weeping comedies" of 18th century drama. It is a witty satire, ridiculing certain groups of upper class society in England at that time.

"School for Scandal" remains one of the favorite English comedies. Sheridan is the last of the wits, and with him the comedy of manners disappears until the end of the 19th century.

The cast includes Luck, Barber, Dallas Williams, Roy Hebert, Mike Shankle, Eddie Martinez, Richard Flowers, Felix Frederick, Donald George, Gil Lawton, Roland Simon, Marjorie Atlas, Lenore Evans, Sara Latham, Charline Mitchell, Oren Adams and Barbara Robinette.

The Daily Illini
University of Illinois
Urbana, Illinois

(October 18, 1952)

'LEARNED LADIES' PRESENTED
BY ILLINI GUILD WORKSHOP

By Marilyn Meyer

"A little learning is a dangerous thing" was effectively proved by Illini Theatre Guild Workshop when it presented Moliere's comedy, "The Learned Ladies," in 112 Gregory Hall Friday night.

Moliere, a 17th century French dramatist, satirizes in the play the affected elegance and superficial learning that afflicted the "ladies" of his day. But like all good neo-classicists, Moliere hit upon a universal human frailty that still exists.

As the "learned ladies," Martha Messner, Mavis Hoffman and Avis Raasch were highly vitriolic. Joan Burch was more restrained and demure as Henriette the sister, niece, and daughter they tried to force into marriage with their favorite pedant, played by Joseph Black.

Jay Sheffield had the calmness necessary for his role as Clitandre, suitor of Henriette and mouthpiece for Moliere's own advocacy of common sense. Gerald Veach was properly humorous as the father who finally revolted against the tyranny of his wife.

(Saturday, May 3, 1952)

SPRING MUSICAL SHOWS GOOD, BAD POINTS

By Dave Martin

Good and bad points battled each other last night in the presentation of the 1952 Illini Union Student Association spring musical, "The Lady Has a Right," but the less favorable of the two unfortunately finished victorious.

The show we caught, which was the first of the two performed on the stage of the Orpheum theater, appeared to be a rough dress rehearsal; it was a dress rehearsal as far as the Orpheum stage is concerned, for the cast had not had the opportunity of playing on it before last night's performance.

This year's musical is a step in the right direction despite its shortcomings. The authors of the "Lady Has a Right," have attempted to create a professional-type musical in which a plot thread holds the show together and sustains audience interest and attention until the final climactic scene.

It was a commendable endeavor, but the show just did not come across. For the most part the script was undistinguished; there was no punch in it.

The band was slow in its cues for numbers, almost all words to songs were inaudible, lighting was confused and most of the performers' acting was lifeless and forced.

The music of Karl Brix and Will Reveal was fresh, tuneful, and indicated an imaginative talent.

Nini Burnier was the obvious show stealer as the fluttering Hortense Witherbaird and Dave Heneberry portraying the butler Buttons was a real breath of fresh life.

The choreography was most effective in the finale in which the winner of the presidential race, on which the story is based was revealed.

Bill Mason played Spence Mathieson, the male campaigner, with conviction, and his wife, Penny, was sung by Clare Sievert. The young lovers portrayed by Diana Domko and Fred Ottinger, reached the high note of their performances when singing a tuneful and haunting number, "And So It Goes."

Other outstanding numbers were the catchy "Life is a Crazy Business," a novelty "A Womans Own Mind Is Her Own," "Call It Love," and probably the highlight of the show "The Alphabet Agencies" featuring Nini Burnier.

Series of Articles from The Daily Lass-o
Texas State College for Women
Denton, Texas

(October 21, 1952)

SPEECH STUDENTS
PRESENT FIRST PLAY

"Trees Die Standing," a three-act serious comedy, will have its world premiere in English on the stage of the College Theater tomorrow night.

The play, recently translated by Ruth Gillespie and Elizabeth Cubeta, is set in Spain. Josh P. Roach, director, feels that it is a superior play, and one that audiences will appreciate.

"It is very well written," adds Mr. Roach, "and we are pleased to be presenting it for the first time in English.

Preparing for their roles in dress rehearsal tonight are Pat von Clausewitz, Martha-Isabel; Liz Stroop, Grandmother; Ann Fouts, Genevieve; Patsy Jo Nash, Helen; Clara Cooper, Phyllis; Onis Cuesta, Amelia; Jo Ann Rutledge, Maurice; Connie Jenkins, Mr. Balboa; Gloria Bendy, Arch-Thief; Merline Bonner, pastor; Pat Brown, magician; Mary K. Anderson, hunter, and Jean Armistead, the Other One.

On the technical end of production are Jo Ann Proctor, Susan Wasson, Jackie Yellverton, Suzane Garland, Pat Crowder and Elaine Fisher, construction; E. Robert Black, setting and lighting and Peggy Robinson, program cover.

The College Theater staff includes Mr. Roach, director; Jo Causey, graduate technician; Mr. Black, technical director; Carolyn Silvernale, make-up supervisor and secretary and U. J. Ramsey, scenery construction.

Mrs. Bonner is a graduate assistant. Patsy Jo Nash is stage manager; Miss Brown and Miss Fouts are handling properties; Misses Cooper and Cuesta, sound and music and the make-up class, make-up.

(October 22, 1952)

SPANISH PLAY WILL OPEN
TONIGHT IN LITTLE THEATER

A cast of 13 College Theater actresses is staging "Trees Die Standing," a three-act play, tonight in the Little Theater at 8:15 p.m.

This is the first time that the Spanish written play has been reproduced in English. The interpreting work was done by Ruth Gillespie and Elizabeth Cubeta of Yale University this summer.

Jo An Rutledge, as Maurice, portrays the grandson of a Spanish family. She impersonates the family's real grandson, a scandalous degenerate, in a favorable light to save the health of the grandmother, Liz Stroop, who lives for memories of her grandson.

The impersonator-wife is Pat von Clausewitz. Jean Armistead, portraying the real grandson, appears in the final act only.

The comedy-farce progresses smoothly until the real grandson appears and threatens to reveal the impersonators.

He warns the grandfather, played by Connie Jenkins, that unless he gives him money, he will reveal their plot.

As typical of Spanish authors, Alejandro Casona, the author has included highly dramatic suspense scenes, deep characterizations and moments of poetic expression within the prose lines.

Ann Fouts provides several moments of comedy relief as the housekeeper with Claire Cooper, the maid as a gossip companion.

Likes Men's Roles

"I like to play men's parts," says Miss Armistead, "there is a better chance to portray definite personalities."

The cast found it hard at first to get into character in the male leads, but after they became accustomed to the parts even such things as talking in husky voices, playing romantic scenes from the man's standpoint, or threatening fist fights came naturally.

Cast members agree that the play is one of the best ever produced here, and they have enjoyed working out the characters very much.

"There is strong emotional undercurrent in the play that is very important," explains Miss Armistead.

The jacranda tree, basis for the title does not topple when it dies, but remains standing. The character and faith

of the grandmother is compared to the death of such a tree.
Students Visit Rehearsal

High school students from Lewisville who visited dress rehearsal last night liked the play very much, and agreed with one of the cast, Mary Catherine Anderson, the hunter, that it "was fascinating."

Miss Rutledge adds that the play is "deep and interesting." She found that the most difficult thing in her role as Maurice was adopting a suave continental air.

Play Has Comedy, Too

The play is spiced with comic lines, a magician's act by Pat Brown, and performances of other actresses, Patsy Nash, the secretary; Onis Cuesta, the stenographer; Gloria Bendy, the scarfaced arch thief and Merline Bonner, the pastor.

Miss Bendy noted that the stage settings are "very beautiful."

Josh P. Roach is director and Jo Causey graduate technician. Robert Black is technical director.

Students will be admitted to the production on their Concert and Drama Series tickets.

(October 23, 1952)

SPANISH PLAY OPENS SERIES

A student audience saw the first of three performances of "Trees Die Standing" in the College Theater last night.

Directed by Josh P. Roach, the play is an adaptation from a Spanish drama. This is the first time that it has been produced in English. It was translated from the Spanish original this summer. The play will run Friday and Saturday night, skipping tonight because of the Concert and Drama Series program.

The play is a serious comedy built around the Spanish family. The plot becomes rather involved when two characters impersonate the family's grandson and his wife who are supposedly dead, to make the last days of the grandmother happy. Later, when the real grandson appears, a crooked degenerate, the play takes a surprise ending.

Students may enter on their C&D tickets. Public admission is \$1.

Reviews of The Lady's Not For Burning

Presented by College Players of North Texas State College
 Pre-performance Write-up from The Campus Chat
 (March 19, 1952)

PLAYERS TURN TO 14TH CENTURY
IN 'LADY'S NOT FOR BURNING'

With an eye to outdoing their successful fall production of "Second Threshold," College players are deep in scripts, 14th-century costumes, and grease paint for the Christopher Fry comedy, "The Lady's Not for Burning."

Under the direction of Mrs. Myrtle Hardy, the players will present "The Lady" on April 17-19. Evening performances will be given on April 17-18 in the main auditorium, and a matinee for high school students will be given on April 19.

Endowed with a sense of rhythm and a surplus of rib-tickling word combinations, Fry uses free verse to convey his story of witchcraft, reluctant romance, and prejudice.

Jerry Blackwell, as the devil-may-care-but-doesn't Thomas Mendip, enters the English village of Cool Clary, hoping to be hanged for two murders. His first stop is the mayor's office where he meets a young, attractive witch, played by Una Glazener, who is unwilling to part with her daily intake of oxygen.

To show his contempt for life, Mendip boasts, "I have left rings of beer on every ale house table from the salt sea coast across half a dozen countries, but each time I thought I was on the way to a festive hiccup, the sight of the damned world sobered me up again."

Remembered for her giggles and flounces in the Barry drama, Marian Laminack will again bounce into the role of a sweet young thing, Alizon Eliot. Her three suitors are Richard the clerk, played by Jack Dunlop, and Humphrey and Nicholas Devize, played by Buddy Williams and Mike Henderson.

The Devize boys' mother will be played by Patti Bunch. Sincere in her superstitious beliefs, Margaret Devize exclaims, upon seeing the witch, "I can almost feel the rustling-in of some kind of enchantment already."

Jim Swain will portray Mayor Mebble Tyson, pompous, self-righteous town official. Tappercoom the jailer will be played by Ray O'Neal, and the chaplain by Ed Pilley. L. A. Kindrick will play Matthew Skippis, the rag and bone merchant.

Minor Huffman is prompter for "The Lady." Jack Jones will direct sound effects, and Marguerite Higgins will be in charge of properties. Walter Wolfram is director of lighting.

Members of the cast, Mrs. Hardy said, will remain on the campus during the Easter holidays to rehearse for the spring production.

Post-Performance Write-up From The Campus Chat

(April 18, 1952)

COLLEGE PLAYERS TO REPEAT 'LADY'
TONIGHT AT 8:15 IN MAIN AUDITORIUM

Special Matinee to Be Presented
To High School Groups Saturday

Tonight College players will repeat their performance of Christopher Fry's "The Lady's Not for Burning" at 8:15 in the main auditorium.

The play was also staged Thursday night.

Activity tickets will admit North Texas students to the production. Other persons will be charged a 50-cent admission fee, Mrs. Myrtle Hardy, director, said.

A special matinee for high school groups will begin at 2:15 Saturday. Prior to the presentation, the players will demonstrate drama and make-up techniques for their guests.

The plot of "The Lady" revolves around 15th-century life--the period of history when superstition was law and whim was justice. The setting is Cool Clary, England, in a courtroom in Mayor Hebble Tyson's home.

Members of the cast include Jerry Blackwell as Thomas Mendip, Una Glazener as Jennet Jourdemayne, Jack Dunlop as Richard the clerk, Marian Laminack as Alison Eliot, Buddy Williams as Humphrey Devize, and Mike Henderson as Nicholas Devize.

Other members of the cast are Patti Bunch as Margaret Devize, Jim Swain as Mayor Tyson, Ray O'Neal as Tappercoom the justice, Ed Pilley as the chaplain, and Joe Edwards as Matthew Skipps.

The town officials--Mayor Tyson, Tappercoom, and the chaplain--are confronted with the problem of whether or not to burn a young and lovely enchantress, Jennet Jourdemayne. The superstitious townspeople are insistent but the law-makers hesitate, smitten by Jennet's charm.

To further befuddle the minds of these simple Cool Clarians, a former soldier, Thomas Mendip, makes his grand entrance through the courtroom window and expresses a desire to be hanged.

While Mendip and the witch wrangle with Mayor Tyson, Alison Eliot, the village belle, is wooed by three young Englishmen.

Stage manager for "The Lady's Not for Burning" is Joe David Ruffin. His assistant is C. A. Waedekin. Norman Ramsey designed the one-piece interior set.

Marguerite Higgins is properties manager; Minor Huffman is prompter, and Jack Jones and his assistant, Barbara Peacock, are in charge of sound effects. Walter Wolfram is director of lighting.

Doris Smith, Joe Edwards, Marian McNabb, Paul Pettigrew, and Nevilla Frensley are other members of the backstage crew.

Critical Reviews of the Performance

Record Chronicle, Denton's City Newspaper
(April 18, 1952)

Student Assignment in Critical Dramatic Writing
(Journalism 434)

(The articles listed above quoted in full in thesis.)

North Texas State College, Denton, Texas
Friday, November 21, 1952

THESPIANS SCORE HIT, WIN APPLAUSE
WITH MILLER'S 'DEATH OF SALESMAN'

"Death of a Salesman," College Players production in studio theatre of historical building. Last performance tonight at 8:15. Produced and directed by Mrs. Myrtle Hardy. The cast:

Willy Loman.	Jack Dunlop
Linda	Kay Dodson
Happy.	David Minton
Biff	Mike Henderson
Bernard.	David Carnahan
The woman.	Rose-Mary Brau
Charley.	Ed Pilley
Uncle Ben.	Lee Kramer
Howard Wagner.	Norman Grogan
Jenny.	Marilyn Agan
Stanley, first waiter.	Clay Newton
Miss Forsythe.	Mollie Wagner
Letta.	Joyce Byers
Second waiter.	Paul Pettigrew

By Tommy Kirkland

College Players have learned word-of-mouth advertising pays.

The group opened its "Death of a Salesman" Tuesday night and first-nighters liked it. As a result every performance has had a full audience and tickets are gone for tonight's presentation.

It's easy to see why, too. Jack Dunlop, as Willy the salesman, gave of his best to that which demanded a psychologically perfect torn heart and soul. He never once lost character. The audience never once lost his story of a deep desire for approval that he, as Willy, wanted so dearly.

Dunlop was very clearly the man of the evening. And since the whole play was built around Willy, the character could very easily have lost the significance for which it was intended.

But Dunlop didn't let it. Instead, he excelled in portraying every emotion--and those emotions were plentiful and varied. All his scenes were excellent and the Players as a whole aided him well in proving the underlying motive of the

moving drama--a desire for being "well liked, not just liked."

However, Kay Dodson as Linda, his wife, failed, in many scenes, to uphold the mood of pleasures and sorrows Dunlop worked so hard to attain. She did a nice job of the scenes that required a lighter vein. But in the more dramatic scenes, she often just "read" lines that really could have pushed the drama into a more deeply conscious realization of those pleasures and sorrows.

Willy's sons, Biff and Happy, were meant to have different dispositions and were intended to be one of the causes of Willy's downfall. Mike Henderson as Biff, however, exceeded David Minton's portrayal of Happy, even though both were above par.

David Carnahan as Bernard, Ed Pilley as Charlie, and Rose-Mary Brau as the woman probably took the prize for the best minor parts. Carnahan won immediate approval for the perfect "bookworm."

Lee Kramer as Ben turned in a noteworthy performance in his unusual role of the Alaska-bound uncle.

Joe David Ruffin's set was what it should be as it erased the confusion that could have developed in the many flash-backs. David Brown's handling of the lights also helped greatly in showing Willy's past.

Series of Articles on You Touched Me

Presented by Drama Department of Los Angeles City College
Los Angeles Collegian

Pre-performance Write-ups
(October 10, 1952)

WILLIAMS' 'YOU TOUCHED ME' STARTS THURSDAY

Highlights New Effect

"Emmie's turned her brain into a flower pot with little petunias growing in it!"

The angry Captain Rockeley turns to the malignant Emmie as he says these words of Hadrian, who loves the "flower pot," Matilda. And Matilda cowers on a corner of the couch, hearing the words that bring her to realize the frustrating influence her Aunt Emmie has brought on her.

Then the scene ends. Captain Rockeley becomes Len Weksler; Emmie, Barbara Erion; Hadrian, Jack Stewart; and Matilda, Louise Marmo.

They sigh wearily and pull up chairs as close as they can to faculty adviser, Miss Alice Parichan, and discuss their parts.

Make Believe

So goes a typical rehearsal of the first play to be presented by the drama department this semester, "You Touched Me," by Tennessee Williams and Donald Windham. A scene is enacted, talked over, and improved upon. Then another scene is tried.

During all this, director Ray Aghayan is busy giving directions, stage manager Bill Rutler is making notes; his assistant, Al Weitz, is cuing; electrician Nancy Trimlett is hammering; and sound man John Hacker is working backstage.

Amidst all the uproar, a play is emerging.

Big Hit

Edmund Gwenn and Montgomery Clift starred in the original version of "You Touched Me" at the Booth Theater in New York City. The play premiered Sept. 26, 1945, and ran for over 100 performances.

In concerns the triumph of an alcoholic old sea captain over a sadistic spinster who controls his home and his daughter. He manages to have the boy he raised elope with the daughter, to the discomfort of the spinster, then trick her into thinking the Rev. Guildford Melton wishes to marry her. The play ends with an appeased Emmy, who believes the Reverend to be the next unfortunate for her to dominate.

Short Time--Long Play

The three act, six scene play takes place over a period of two days. It is laid at the close of World War II in England. Modern dress will be worn. The Captain will wear a naval uniform, and Hadrian a Canadian lieutenant's outfit. Emmie and Matilda will appear in flowing organdies and English tweeds.

In the new staging at the Bungalow Theater, a raised dais will be placed in the right hand corner. Both this and the center of the floor will be used for stage action.

Nothing Brash

The center will be used for a living room, set in a conservative Georgian style. Captain Brockeley's study will be set on the raised stage. This room will be a replica of a ship's cabin, with bunk, helm, telescope, and ship's lantern.

Seating will be on three sides of the room. The usual purple velvet seats are tiered in four rows. They seat 50 persons.

Other members of the cast include Gene Nelson as the Rev. Guildford Melton, Diane Topp as the Cockney maid, Phoebe, and Plato Chamis as the policeman called on a false alarm. Not to be overlooked in the cast is a Pekingese, pet of the Rockeley household.

Prop men are Thurston James and Don Heflin.

"You Touched Me" will appear at the Bungalow Theater two weekends beginning Oct. 16.

Box office opens at 7:50 on performance nights. No reservations will be taken, so tickets should be picked up as early as possible for seating.

GREASE PAINT ATHLETEWEKSLER LIKES CHARACTER PARTS;
PREFERS COMEDY TO DRAMATIC ROLES

Grease paint and baseball combine to provide enjoyment for versatile actor Len Weksler.

Winner of last year's Collegian Critic's best male actor award, Weksler handles the lead in Tennessee Williams' "You Touched Me," opening Thursday night on Bungalow Stage.

Fairfax High claims him as a graduate and former student body vice president.

Radio Major

City College's radio department brought him to the local campus, he reveals. As a radio major and member of LACCTRA, he performed in a series of westerns over stations KFAC and KRKD.

Graduating to State College, Weksler changed his major to drama and attained his B.A. degree. In '49 he returned to City College for post graduate work.

At present he is attempting to gain teaching credentials in language-arts "and possibly a Masters, depending on the army."

Ham'n Eggs

The stage is Weksler's main objective; failing to reach it, he plans to teach. If his teaching plans are unsuccessful he will "go into my dad's egg business. I'll be an educated actor breaking eggs," he announces with a chuckle.

Tall, dark, and handsome Weksler maintains "a preference of comedy over drama." While attending high school he entertained in supper clubs with various comedy monologs.

Character Roles

Weksler expresses a strong liking for character parts, no matter how small. "You can get a lot of meat out of a character role," he claims.

In connection with this idea, he has developed a life motto: "The longer an actor is on stage, the longer an audience has to hate him."

"Candida," in which he had his first major part, and "The White Steed" comprise the plays he most enjoyed doing. "Miss Julia," which gave him his first lead, "was a lot of hard work and good experience," according to Weksler.

Choice of Two

If given his choice of roles, Weksler would select Mephistopheles in "Faust" and Abe Lincoln in "Abe Lincoln and Illinois." His chief regret is that though he has enacted many scenes from "Abe Lincoln" he has never had the chance to put them all together.

Portraying a "salty old English sea captain" who remains slightly inebriated through the whole play, Weksler says his most difficult task is maintaining drunkenness.

An amusing incident occurred during a dramatic scene in "The White Steed"--much to everyone's surprise a large moth flew out from beneath Weksler's three-cornered hat.

Weksler hails from Detroit, Mich., In the 16 years he has been in this state, he credits California with having given him hay fever and sinus trouble. "Otherwise I wouldn't trade it," adds Weksler with a twinkle in his eye.

Food Fancy

"In my spare time I love to eat," he emphasized. Favorite pastimes include "bowling and Las Vegas." Weksler was captain of City and State College's bowling teams, and professes a love for all sports. The latter he claims is due to the fact that he never had time to participate in athletics.

People sometimes take offense at Weksler, not realizing that he uses the word "stinkweed" as a term of affection.

Weksler's pet peeve is parking. When he was an alpha he used to park his car on Heliotrope, across the street from the school. "Now I park on Mariposa," he exclaims. "This is progress?" Weksler's life ambition is to park on Heliotrope once more.

Critical Review

(October 17, 1952)

'YOU TOUCHED ME'

By Jackie Macy
Drama Desk Editor

Take a whiskey loving sea captain, mix him with a neurotic spinster sister, then add a moody virgin and a grinning air force lieutenant, and you have all the ingredients of the drama department's "You Touched Me," by Tennessee Williams and Donald Windham.

Though this was Williams' first play, the theme of female frustration he was later to develop in "Summer and Smoke" and "Streetcar Named Desire" is evident. This play, however, is aimed more at laughs than serious problems.

Suppressed Household

The romantic comedy takes place in Britain just after World War II. Captain Rockeley has lost his sea papers because of drinking. His sister Emmy is dominating his daughter and running his home. It is the advent of the captain's charity ward, Hadrian, returning after five years away, that instills rebellion in the suppressed household.

Leonard Weksler once more proves his acting ability as Captain Rockeley, hilariously relating his love affair with a porpoise and being generally noisy. His interpretation consisted of a steady stream of alcoholic witticisms, with

periodical swigs at what was probably colored water in a whiskey bottle. His voice, mannerisms, and inveterate scene-stealing are reminiscent of the late John Barrymore.

Louise Marmo

As the two lovers, Louise Marmo and Jack Stewart were very likeable. Miss Marmo has an appealing and sensitive face. (Stewart is not so accomplished an actor as Weksler, but handles his part with a show of promise.)

One moment of levity in the play is when Stewart sheds his clothes to his shorts, but climbs into bed with his socks on. The audience tittered at this point, but Stewart seemed non-plussed.

As the frustrated spinster, Barbara Erion, though too strident at times, sustains an aura of suitable priggishness. She had one fine moment when she breaks down after the drunken captain had boisterously interrupted the Rev. Guildford Melton when he was about to propose to her.

Gene Nelson was humorous as the straight laced Reverend Melton, speaking through his nose and making faces of astonishment at the goings-on at the Rockeley's.

Despite Diane Topp, as the Cockney maid, losing her accent at times, she managed to steal many of the best laughs of the evening. At one point, she runs from the captain's cabin, bumping into Emmy and the reverend. "Pardon me, Mum, but the captain's tickling me!" She giggles. She has troubles like that all evening.

Flora Was Silent

Plato Chamis has only a walk-on as the British bobby called on a false alarm, but he looked uncomfortable. Flora, the pekinese, played her part silently, but with suitable straight man expression.

Both the captain's cabin and the living room can be seen at the same time throughout the play. The comedy is heightened by such scenes as Emmy explaining to the reverend that the captain is writing a novel, when the audience can see he is in reality drinking, swearing, and pinching the maid.

Ray Aghayan directed the fast paced comedy. He also designed Miss Marmo's filmy tea gown.

The play is now entering its second weekend at the Bungalow Theater. Tickets can be obtained on performance nights. The box office opens at 7:40.

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