

ABOUT DRAMA

A Comparison of the Therapy Index of American and French Plays

By ROBERT BRUSTEIN

Assistant Professor of Dramatic Literature, Columbia University.

A few months ago, I abruptly was confronted by a gifted, but highly effusive actress, intently devoted to an inspirational Broadway play in which she was then starring. Having learned that the work had failed to inspire me, she proceeded to defend its merits, emphasizing its effect on audiences.

"You don't seem to realize," she announced, flourishing her expressive hands a hair's breadth from my nose, "that every night someone leaves our theatre a completely changed person!" When I raised an eyebrow, she added, "You don't know! Every week I receive letters from people who say our show has given them a more mature outlook on life!"

I ventured—somewhat timidly in view of her evangelistic fervor—to express my doubts that three hours in the theatre could work wonders that eight years on the couch sometimes fail to achieve. She chided me for my skepticism and, unreconstructed, we went our separate ways.

It struck me later that what she had been voicing was not just an eccentric personal opinion, but a growing conviction of the Broadway stage. Clearly, the newer American playwrights often confuse themselves with psychological counselors, for deeply imbedded in their plays will generally find an object lesson about the diagnosis and treatment of romantic, emotional, family or social disorders.

Prescriptions

William Gibson affirms that by charitably helping others you may absolve your own guilt; Robert Anderson tells us that adulterous encounters can be considered a form of self-sacrifice and sympathy; William Inge plumps for "maturity" in love and family relationships, and Paddy Chayefsky suggests that romantic passion will conquer psychosis, neurosis and evil spirits. There is an unwritten law in our theatre, countersigned by producers, directors and critics alike, that a play must illustrate a significant forward development in the lives of its characters so that the audience may depart with hope in their hearts and a renewed conviction about the possibilities of change.

As a consequence, our younger dramatists invariably see man in relation to his "problems"; and, sharing a warm-hearted belief in progress and human perfectibility inherited from the social dramatists of the Nineteen Thirties, they tend to view existence as a temporary ailment that can be easily cured if you find the proper medicine.

In the past, the recommended medical reference books were the writings of Karl Marx. Today—with "love" and psychological adjustment the inevitable prescription—they are the cheery chapbooks of the neo-Freudian revisionists. The "cures" outlined in present-day drama are, of course, only nostrums—or, at best, sedatives—packaged in pleasant tasting pills to be swallowed painlessly by the audience.

But it seems to me that even some of the older and tougher dramatists, who recommended

social rather than psychological change, were confusing their function and getting the drama all mixed up with the social sciences. For most American playwrights, past and present, have a tendency to define man exclusively in relation to his institutions, implying that man finds health through integration with a real or ideal society. In America, Utopia is invariably confounded with Levittown.

French Drama
Compare the modern French dramatists who, far from emphasizing integration, seem obsessively concerned with disintegration. You will find, in advanced French drama, few attempts at therapy, uplift or improvement, little belief in the "infinite perfectability of man," and no conviction that humans realize themselves through togetherness and community living. Quite the contrary, the younger French writers seem to create on the (truly Freudian) assumption that it is civilization itself that has caused the discontents of man. Consider their attitudes toward the social unit. For Samuel Beckett, whose world consists of impotent old creatures, sitting and listening to their organs decay, society is no more than a noise in the street; for Eugene Ionesco, it is a source of planned inhumanity, its language a species of absurdities, clichés and gibberish; and for Jean Genet, the social world is an enormous brothel, and those who preside over it are impersonators of Authority.

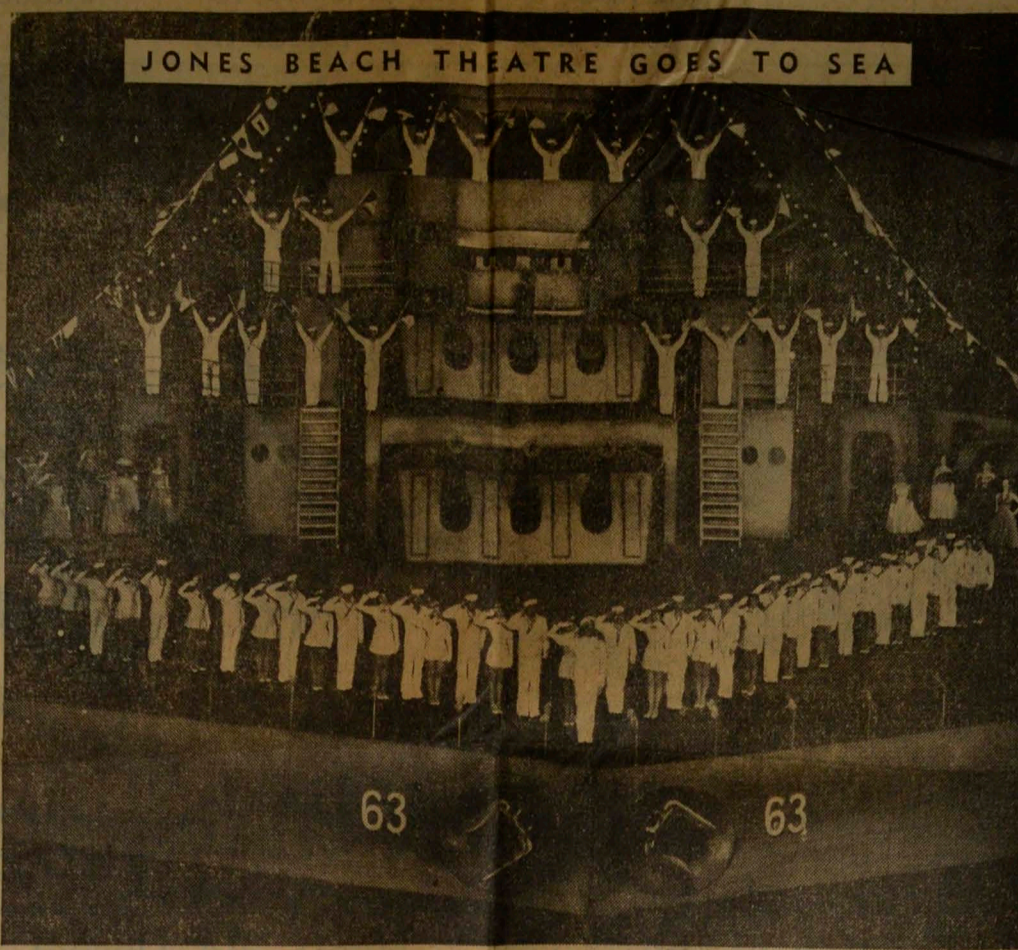
Liberal critics have severely censured these writers for assaulting the "dignity of man," but the French might reply, and sometimes do, that man surrendered his dignity long ago when he capitulated to debased institutions and permitted himself to be dehumanized in a mass culture. But although these playwrights may focus on the spiritually diminished man, implicit in most of their works—and explicit in the plays of Camus and Sartre—is a desire to rediscover the last outpost of man's dignity, that existential quality in man's spirit that is irrational and ecstatic and that cannot be defined away by social, psychological or scientific theory.

If the function of art—like that of the social sciences—is to create cooperative citizens, then the French drama should be burned and the playwrights banished. A good case probably could be made for the argument that French nihilism has been partially responsible for the instability of French government. On the other hand, our government is relatively stable and our public arts soothing.

Unhappy Results

Yet, we have paid for our surface calm by becoming a notably docile, passive and un-angry people—overly addicted to anodynes like alcohol, drugs, tranquilizers and TV, and plagued by startling increases in homosexuality, insanity, delinquency and divorce. You would never suspect, for all the sociology in our drama, that payola and the fix have become a national way of life; nor would you guess, for all the therapy, that a "well-adjusted citizen" is not necessarily a more honest one.

JONES BEACH THEATRE GOES TO SEA



Gobs and gals conclude a nautical item in this summer's revival of the 1927 musical, "Hit the Deck." With music by the late Vincent Youmans, its book by Herbert Fields modernized by Ira Wallach, it is being performed through Sept. 5.

THE SCREEN: NEW YORK AND HOLLYWOOD

By A. H. WEILER

There has been an inordinate speaking of minds, sometimes with justification, indicating that Hollywood is less a geographical point on the West Coast's sunny citrus belt and more a synonym for the superficiality, glitter and slickness evident on the world's screens. And, equally, there has been much talk, also with justification on occasion, that Hollywood's film-makers are noted for the indignities they wreak on the books they buy as source material for features both epic and ordinary. Both of these theories were appreciably weakened last week with the arrival of "Elmer Gantry" at the Capitol Theatre.

This, to be specific, redounds, in large measure, to the credit of Richard Brooks, scenarist-director of the powerful and memorable adaptation in color of Sinclair Lewis' famed novel. Mr. Brooks' work, it becomes obvious almost from the outset, is a labor of love and artistry. In short, he has seen his dedication to "Elmer Gantry," rights to which he has owned for about five years, pay off. If he has changed, amended and edited the original, he has done so with the expert's knowledge that the screen and literary fields generally are separate and apart and what may be fine and striking in one may be dull and ineffective in the other.

Artistic Adaptation
What he has created—and it is, basically, a creation—is a hard-hitting, briskly-paced, often moving and believable drama out of an important but also a sprawling, angry and, in sections, discursive and pamphleteering novel. One may

argue that the sawdust trail traveled by revivalists such as the Elmer Gantry and Sharon Falconer satirized by Lewis in 1927 rarely reaches Madison Square Garden and, therefore, its drama is exotic and alien to big-city audiences. Mr. Brooks makes this point of view somewhat specious. Through a skillful and arduous process of adaptation—he stated in these pages last week that the script was the result of eight previous drafts—he has made Elmer Gantry, Sharon Falconer and their colorful coterie come alive. They are not strange figures set against papier-mâché backgrounds, but human beings, fault-ridden, majestic, foolish, wise, sinning and pure.

Some of the characters who originally populated Lewis' many pages are missing from the script. Some loom more importantly here than they did in the book, the characters of others, notably those of the reporter Jim Lefferts, forcefully portrayed by Arthur Kennedy, and George Babbitt, the hail-fellow, hot-shot realty man, played in fine style by Edward Andrews, have been changed or enlarged. Out of some three decades of Elmer Gantry's life in the novel the script uses practically only that section in time devoted to his explosive work with Sister Sharon Falconer and her revivalists.

Able Aides
It would be obvious oversimplification to state merely that Mr. Brooks alone was responsible for the impact of "Elmer Gantry." Without the performance in the title role by Burt Lancaster, one of his best in many years in this observer's opinion, the film's over-all effect would have been vitiated. He is a con man to the manner born, an Elmer Gantry who would have delighted the cold, inquiring eye and crusading soul of Sinclair Lewis.

He is a toothy, ribald, lecherous, sometimes sacrilegious pitchman always on the alert for a fast buck or girl and as eager to sell an off-color joke, or a vacuum cleaner as he is to purvey the gospel. But he is also a gent whose love for Sharon Falconer is authentic despite the many shams in his life. This is paralleled by the Sharon Falconer devised by Mr. Brooks and beautifully characterized by Jean Simmons. As the realistic revivalist, devotedly dedicated to spreading salvation through the Bible, her ardor is even transferred to the tough Elmer Gantry. As noted previously, other supporting players, including Dean Jagger, as Miss Simmons' harried manager, and Shirley Jones, as the brassy but pitiful prostitute first set on the road to easy virtue by our lusty hero, are as much a part of the picture's color as its Bible-belt tabernacle, its psalm singers and its small-town types.

HOLLYWOOD NOTES

By MURRAY SCHUMACH

Though much of the talk in the movie industry last week was about the Democratic convention due to start tomorrow at the near-by Los Angeles Memorial Sports Arena, the big dream was about pay-television.

'Elmer Gantry' Makes Impressive Use Of Lewis' Angry, Pamphleteering Novel

Movie executives and union leaders alike seemed convinced that the choice of the next Democratic candidate for the Presidency—or even the next President—can hardly mean more to Hollywood than pay-TV.

All phases of the movie industry—from production to exhibition—were deeply concerned with the prospects of widespread pay-TV. Most discussions of such major issues in the movie industry as the future of studio operation, or the sale of post-1948 films to present television, were heavily seasoned with speculation about pay-TV.

Open Horizon

At times it has become difficult to tell by comments on pay-TV whether it is a union or a company president issuing the statements. Thus, the latest issue of the official publication of the Screen Actors Guild predicts, in an editorial, that "pay-as-you-see television may well bring back to motion pictures the 'lost' audience, multiplied many times over." Barney Balaaban, president of Paramount Pictures, which is financially supporting the pay-TV project in Etobicoke, a suburb of Toronto, said: "I am intrigued with the possibility . . . that pay television can add a sum that goes into nine figures to the motion picture industry's grosses from the domestic market."

That Mr. Balaaban, in his report on the Etobicoke operations, has pointed out that it is still too early to be certain of the future of pay-TV, is glossed over here. For Hollywood has good reason to be wishful in its thinking about pay-TV. With only seven movies now being filmed at the eight major studios here, there has been considerable concern about the economic feasibility of maintaining huge studios.

Pay-TV could justify studio operation. If dreams materialize, pay-TV would need all the movies Hollywood could produce. The studios, since they are capable of mass production, would then be the most efficient method of movie-making. The flight of American movie production abroad would end. Movie companies, led by United Artists, which has been content merely to finance and distribute films, would probably have to acquire studios.

Old Reliables

With studio operation in full force again, the movie companies could once more build up large stables of stars, writers, directors and producers under long-term contracts and end their dependence on talent agencies or actors' whims.

The question is—assuming pay TV will grow—can the movie industry maintain studios that are largely unused until the happy day? Actually, the industry has been selling off many of its assets. Universal sold its studio and is now a tenant on part of it. Twentieth Century-Fox is willing to sell a large section of its valuable studio land. Warners has sold a ranch. There have been many rumors that at least one company may sell its entire studio. However, before it becomes necessary to sell studios, the companies have an important asset in their film libraries. It

Has been estimated that movie companies could obtain \$300,000,000 by selling or leasing their post-1948 movies to television.

In recent weeks reports have been insisted that some studios are negotiating such deals. Samuel Goldwyn has said he is prepared to lease his movies to television.

But those movie executives who think pay-TV is not more than a few years away believe this to be a mistake. They say that post-1948 movies on present television would offer formidable competition to movies made for pay-TV.

The seriousness with which the movie industry views pay-TV is most apparent in the attitude of theatre owners. They are vociferous and energetic in their opposition to any attempt to plant pay-TV in the United States. At a recent convention of theatre owners, they were urged to raise a fund to combat pay-TV and to urge Congress at its next session to prohibit pay-TV. It is ironic that the exhibitors seem to be in the same camp as their enemy, the television networks, on this subject.

Operas Presented

British viewers have been able to see and hear portions of "Figaro" and "Don Giovanni" from Munich, "Orfeo" from Drottningholm, "Cosi fan tutte" from Salzburg, "Tosca" from Paris and "The Magic Flute" from Aix-en-Provence. Nearly each year since 1951 there has been a relay from Glyndebourne. "Cosi fan tutte," "Macbeth," "The Abduction From the Seraglio," "Don Giovanni," "The Barber of Seville," "Le Comte Ory," "The Rake's Progress" and "La Cenerentola" have been made available.

The B. B. C. commissions have been Arthur Benjamin's "Mañana," Joan Trimble's "Blind Raftery," Richard Arnell's "The Petrified Princess" and Guy Halahan's "The Spur of the Moment," as well as "Tobias and the Angel." The National Broadcasting Company, by the way, deserves credit for a number of commissions and premieres. "Tobias and the Angel" provided me with an opportunity to observe the quality of B. B. C.'s operatic work on television. The tape was run off in a studio not far from the im-

THE MUSIC FIELD

Support by B. B. C. Gives Opera A Firm Place on Television

By HOWARD TAUBMAN

LONDON. Opera on television in Great Britain does not stand hat in hand waiting for a generous broadcasting executive to be kind to it. Thanks to the activities of the British Broadcasting Corporation, which is Government-supported, the lyric theatre is accepted as a vital element of program building.

B. B. C. televised opera as long ago as 1936, when TV had almost no scope or influence. The latest operatic broadcast took place in May when "Tobias and the Angel," a work with music by Sir Arthur Bliss and text by Christopher Hassall, which was commissioned by B. B. C., had its premiere. This was the corporation's 188th opera transmission. Ninety-four of these broadcasts were of complete works, and five were commissions.

A glance at B. B. C.'s operatic record on television reveals the catholicity of its achievement. It began in 1936 with scenes from Albert Coates' "Mr. Plockwick." It has embraced the great familiar pieces of the repertory and an abundance of works scarcely known to any but the most devoted enthusiasts.

Small-scale chamber operas have alternated with ambitious music-dramas. Most of these productions stemmed from B. B. C.'s own studios, but some were piped in from European centers through the good offices of Eurovision, the system that hooks up nations in networks for special occasions.

Operas Presented

British viewers have been able to see and hear portions of "Figaro" and "Don Giovanni" from Munich, "Orfeo" from Drottningholm, "Cosi fan tutte" from Salzburg, "Tosca" from Paris and "The Magic Flute" from Aix-en-Provence. Nearly each year since 1951 there has been a relay from Glyndebourne. "Cosi fan tutte," "Macbeth," "The Abduction From the Seraglio," "Don Giovanni," "The Barber of Seville," "Le Comte Ory," "The Rake's Progress" and "La Cenerentola" have been made available.

The B. B. C. commissions have been Arthur Benjamin's "Mañana," Joan Trimble's "Blind Raftery," Richard Arnell's "The Petrified Princess" and Guy Halahan's "The Spur of the Moment," as well as "Tobias and the Angel." The National Broadcasting Company, by the way, deserves credit for a number of commissions and premieres. "Tobias and the Angel" provided me with an opportunity to observe the quality of B. B. C.'s operatic work on television. The tape was run off in a studio not far from the im-

pressive new television center being completed for B. B. C.

The new opera is based on the Book of Tobit in the Apocrypha. It offers the composer a chance to deal with a theme that is other-worldly and human, grandiose and intimate. It provides the producer with a number of visual problems.

Under the guidance of Rudolph Cartier, a leading director of B. B. C. dramas who staged the opera, "Tobias and the Angel" had a striking blend of simplicity and exoticism. One might carp at the asting and costuming of Asmodey, an evil spirit, and one might wonder whether the struggle between the angel and the demon needed to be attempted so literally through the device of trick filming. Otherwise, one has only admiration for the visual side of a production that gave the illusion of color even though it was in black and white.

Often Attractive

As for the opera itself, it is a serious, often attractive effort. Sir Arthur's musical idiom is conventional. While he does not write for the voice with the greatest felicity, he respects it. His strength is in his command of the orchestra. "Tobias and the Angel" is caparisoned in a rich web of tone that consorts well with the subject. In a theatre his instrumentation would have an enveloping lushness. Emerging from the sound equipment of a television set it did not have sufficient definition and was overbearing.

Sir Arthur is not essentially a writer for the theatre, and has come too late to this medium to do more than manage a brave try. But he is not alone in this respect. With the expanding vogue for opera in our day, many composers have eagerly turned to it rather belatedly in their careers. The truth is that the important operatic composers have generally grown up in the lyric theatre.

The musical side of the B. B. C. production was of a high order. The conductor was Norman Del Mar and the orchestra was the London Symphony. Elaine Malbin, the American soprano who has done some notable interpretations for N. B. C. Opera Theatre on television, sang Sara, the daughter of a merchant who was possessed. Her performance was sensitive and convincing.

John Ford as Tobias, Ronald Lewis as Azarias, a hired man who was Tobias's guardian angel; Jess Walters, another American singer; Janet Howe, Trevor Anthony, Carolyn Maia, Richard Golding and William Lyon-Brown showed that in Britain, as in the United States, it is possible to recruit singers who can act.

JAZZ: THE BLUES AT NEWPORT

By JOHN S. WILSON

The debacle at Newport last week-end, when a battle between the police and collegiate beer-can bombardiers outside the park where the Newport Jazz Festival was being held led the City Council to cancel the last three programs of the festival, caused some musical aspects of this year's festival to be overlooked even while it brought into focus some extra-musical matters.

Musically, this summer's festival was well on its way to being the best of the seven-year series when it was interrupted by the melee. The three evening and three afternoon programs that were presented showed more consistent evidence of careful planning than had been

apparent in the past and the over-all production was much smoother. Unlike recent years, when performers with a large popular following but with little or no relation to jazz, such as the Kingston Trio and the Four Freshmen, were used as crowd bait, this year's programs were oriented almost completely toward jazz.

Willingness to Learn

Those who produce the festival have shown a commendable willingness to learn from experience and to attempt to improve both the artistic aspect of the festival and the maintenance of order in the park. But this willingness has been less evident on the part of Newport officials and business men. They have condoned a lax at-

mosphere in the town, attracting an element of youngsters who are less interested in jazz than in what one observer listed as "chicks, drinking all night and sleeping on the beach."

In great measure, these did not appear to be people who came to Newport to attend the festival. The extent of their interest in the festival is indicated by the fact that they were out on the streets drinking when the sparsely attended afternoon programs were being presented and, although the box office was open all day, they made no effort to buy tickets before the beginning of the evening performance so that, as a result, they were on the streets around the park during that program, too.

Newport's tolerance of these festival hangers-on stems primarily from the shot in the arm they give to Newport's economy. The town is alleged to take in a million dollars during the festival.

Gravy Train

Because of this, the Newport business community has chosen to ride the festival gravy train with what can be described as an extremely loose rein. The festival itself is not without blame in creating this situation, for it has deliberately aimed at "bigness." It has in the past two or three years used non-jazz attractions that would assure a large audience. In the early years of the festival, it was quite pleased that Newport was encouraging its out-of-state visitors to have a good time.

But festival officials at least heeded the warnings of danger that Newport officials chose to ignore. And then, in the aftermath of the blow-up when the streets were patrolled as never before and every liquor store and tavern in town was shut down, the City Council, in what seemed to many to be a topsyturvy decision, closed the festival. As Willis Conover, producer and announcer of the Voice of America's jazz programs, commented: "In attempting to cure the disease, they shot the patient but did nothing about the germs."

ART: 1960 VENICE BIENNALE

By DORE ASHTON

VENICE. If the current thirtieth Venice Biennale seems like a furious eruption of all the uneasiness of the century, it cannot be blamed on the Biennale. As an institution the Biennale functions well, presenting painting and sculpture as they exist in more than thirty countries. The institution itself is neutral and beyond reproach.

In fact, this year's edition serves as a perfect and welcome reflector of the general hysteria, the profound malaise at the bases of what has become a suspiciously glittering international art world. In putting great stress on the competitive aspects—prizes and international publicity—and in serving as a gigantic and barely disguised market place, the Biennale clearly reproduces the superficial bustle of the art world and its despair.

Nothing supports the theory that modern art is in a state of crisis more than the frantic effort on the part of organizing critics to produce a midcentury "school" or "movement" in painting. With a nostalgia for the homogeneity of previous schools, such as cubism and surrealism, these critics have used the embarrassing expedient of mounting two major exhibitions—those of Jean Fautrier and Hans Hartung—with the patent aim of proving that the two painters were the inventors of what is called "informal" painting. According to Fautrier's ad-

mirers, since 1928 he has worked with the amorphous forms and thick matter that have come to be identified as informal painting. To prove his precedence, 130 paintings and drawings are exhibited in the Biennale, among them some recognizable expressionist early landscapes that are labeled "The first informal paintings." There



"T-1936," oil by Hans Hartung in the French Pavilion at the Biennale in Venice.

are also numerous sketchbook notations, fragmentary and of the improvisational character that almost any modern painter would have in his notebooks, all carefully dated and labeled. It is certainly true that Fautrier has pursued an image peculiar to himself since 1930

when first his scribbles asserted themselves into cloudlike formations. And it is true, too, that Fautrier has been obsessed more narrowly and intensively than any other painter with the possibilities—both pleasant and disagreeable—of matter itself. But if his work is examined coolly, as it can be in this overblown exhibition, the obsession is neither interesting nor powerful enough to be considered the basis for a "movement" in painting. The frothy surfaces of his central shapes and the saccharine colors that are never true colors but only tones, are so repetitive and limited that Fautrier can hardly be considered a seminal force in an authentic movement.

In the case of Hans Hartung, whose exhibition in the French pavilion seems hastily put together, there is more justice in the hopeful labeling and dating. Hartung has certainly developed a distinct style emerging from Kandinsky, surrealist automatism and Miró and has influenced many younger painters with his paintings of "forces" and his stress on linear calligraphy.

But, again, it is rather embarrassing to find sketchbook scraps, some of them clearly figurative, reverently labeled and exhibited to "prove" his precedence. In their anxiety to deliver the goods, to make important distinctions, the organizers have rushed headlong into the falsest of premises: that priority is a real distinction in art.