

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Angry Theatre: New British Drama

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Philippine Studies vol. 11, no. 3 (1963): 458—459

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Fri June 30 13:30:20 2008

tions not only tend to point out the more important matter covered in each chapter but also tend to develop the student's power of comprehension. The suggested activities at the end of each chapter aim to develop in the students habits of thinking, planning and doing things. Photographs abound and most of them are local setting. They are good and clear and a credit to local printing.

An *Experiment and Demonstration Manual* accompanies the text. Some of the experiments are not however, experiments in the true sense of the word because the work to be performed is merely descriptive in nature, e.g., describing the characteristics of certain worms. It may be better to refer to such works as exercises rather than experiments.

JAIME C. JOAQUIN

ANGRY THEATRE

THE ANGRY THEATRE: NEW BRITISH DRAMA. By John Russell Taylor. New York: Hill and Wang, 1962. 286 pp. Illustrations.

On 8 May 1956 a new theatrical company opened a new play in the Royal Court Theatre in London. The script had been submitted by an unknown young man in answer to an advertisement. It was entitled *Look Back in Anger*. It received what is called "a mixed press." One critic called it "incredibly bad." Another said that he looked back in anger to an evening misconceived and misspent. A third said that the play should have been called *Look Back in Petulance*. Another said of the playwright: "When he stops being angry—or when he lets us in on what he is angry about—he may write a very good play." On the other hand, there were critics who praised it, some with reservations, others with none. It was called "the best young play of its decade." Another critic said: "It is intense, angry, feverish, undisciplined. It is even crazy. But it is young, young, young." Whatever it was, it was good box-office, and the 26-year-old author, John Osborne, became the first of several "angry young men" whose anger seems to have been chiefly directed at the fact that there were no more causes to fight for.

On the other side of town, in the same month of May, 1956, another theatrical group also opened another new play at the Theatre Royal in Stratford, East London. The play was by an Irishman who

had fought against the British in the IRA and who had known the inside of prisons in both England and Ireland. His name was Brendan Behan, and his play (*The Quare Fellow*) was about people in a prison on the eve of an execution. This play, under the expert editing of Joan Littlewood, also created much excitement and it was soon followed (under the same editing and direction) by a play written by an eighteen-year-old girl, Shelagh Delaney, called *A Taste of Honey*.

These plays ushered in a theatrical revolution which has given rise to what is called the "new drama" in Britain. The playwrights in this "new drama" are all young, all from working class families, and none of them has been to a university. Among the better known are Arnold Wesker and Harold Pinter whose *The Caretaker* we mentioned in an article which appeared in these pages last year. (See *Philippine Studies*, X, April 1962, 304-312.)

The book under review is a history of this new drama, with biographical accounts of the playwrights and directors involved and an analysis of their plays. The book was first published in England under the title *Anger and After: A Guide to the New Drama*. The American edition is a valuable addition to the growing library of theatrical literature published by Hill and Wang of New York.

There is no need to point out the excellent qualities of such a book. It is enough to say that it contains much valuable information, which is mostly what is desired in this case. If deficiencies must be pointed out, this reviewer would mention one: namely, a certain lack of perspective. The impression is given that before the night of 8 May 1956 when Osborne's play opened, no worthwhile drama existed in Britain. This writing-off of "pre-Osborne" drama is done in some detail in an introductory chapter called "The Early Fifties." Christopher Fry, T. S. Eliot, Graham Greene, C. N. Hunter, Peter Ustinov, and others are there mentioned. Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons*, which is contemporary with the "new drama" but not of it, is contemptuously dismissed in two places (one a parenthetical aside) in both of which passages it is given the epithet "commercial."

Possibly so. Yet the author admits that the anger of the angry young men has subsided, and the new drama itself may already be on the decline—after only seven years. John Osborne is quoted as saying that he can now no longer read the script of his *Look Back in Anger*: he says it embarrasses him. No such embarrassment need be felt by the author of *A Man for All Seasons*, or by the author of *The Cocktail Party*.