

THE DRAMATIC CRITICISM OF NORMAN NADEL

by

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DEDICATION

For my parents, who provided financial support and
who knew when push needed to become shove

and

For Norman, my cooperative subject, teacher and
very dear friend.

PREFACE

For as long as they have been practicing their craft professionally, theater critics have endured reproach. They have been called everything from parasites to gossip columnists, and needless to say, some of these so-called makers and breakers of plays deserve this reputation. Yet, there are respectable critics: men and women who care a great deal about what they write, and most importantly, about what they see on the stage. The responsible critic does not exist simply to hack away indiscriminately at all theatrical works as a means of acquiring profit and fame. Rather, he or she approaches the theater with an open mind, and then analyzes each play on its own terms, scrutinizing its particular strengths and weaknesses. In this way, the responsible critic makes a contribution to the art form by encouraging the maintenance of high standards.

After devoting over 40 years to the practice of criticism, Norman Nadel indeed has contributed his fair share of time, effort and expertise to the theater. For Nadel, his lengthy career has been a labor of love. It was his caring, in addition to his deft analytical ability and lucid writing style, which landed him a position as first-string critic in New York in 1961. And it is his compassion which manifests

itself so clearly in the hundreds of reviews he has written professionally. But caring alone does not a critic make. A reviewer also must be able to intelligently evaluate every aspect of a production and have the talent to articulate these insights in an interesting and understandable manner. As a successful critic, Norman Nadel possesses all of these abilities, and his skill is abundantly revealed in his work.

What follows is a pragmatic analysis of Nadel's approach to dramatic criticism. It is an attempt to expose the nuances of his technique which collectively produce a deceptively simple result. The reviews that form the basis for this study are drawn from the years 1961 to 1980, the period during which Nadel was employed in New York. Such considerations as the technical and stylistic aspects of his writing, in addition to his critical treatment of the play and the production, all have been taken into account. However, before any kind of meaningful examination of his method can take place, it is necessary to understand Nadel as a critic and as a human being. Criticism is, after all, an intrinsic reflection of the person who writes it; of his ideals, his beliefs and his background. And who could be better equipped to reveal these qualities than Nadel himself. Consequently, the first chapter of this thesis is a personal interview with Nadel in which he talks about his life, his philosophies and his work.

Though this study focuses on only one approach to reviewing plays, it sheds light on the complexities of dramatic criticism. Additionally, the steps in Nadel's critical process could be used as practical guidelines to help the novice critic in developing his or her talent.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND PHILOSOPHY

As a veteran drama critic, Norman Nadel labels himself a "professional outsider." And without a doubt, the term professional is aptly and easily applied to this man's insightful, intelligent work.

However, on the surface, "outsider" seems less apropos. Nadel is an outsider in the sense that he is not directly and personally involved in the plays he criticizes. But "outsider" also implies a certain uncaring attitude which in no way relates to Norman Nadel as a man or as a critic.

"No critic can afford to hold himself aloof from his chosen field. Of course, we must be impartial, objective at a certain stage of the process, and we must not let ourselves get so involved with a particular event or artist to risk sentimental influence. The critic always must be the professional outsider. Nevertheless, unless we bring to our work a passionate involvement with the arts, the sensitivity to be outraged, if need be, by what is poor, and exalted by what is noble and fresh and vital, we will miss feelings, insights and understandings that we are professionally obliged to take into account."¹

With an almost religious zeal, commitment and caring for the arts, Nadel has worked as a professional critic for nearly 40 years, 20 years of which he spent in New York. Nadel's deep affection and compassion not only is evident in his attitude toward the arts and in his criticism, but in his feelings about all things. As a young man, Nadel took career placement tests which revealed that he should become a missionary, and as Nadel sees it, in a sense he has followed that calling.

"When I was in school, whenever I took one of those career placement tests, I always came out as either a clergyman or missionary, and I had no intention of becoming either a rabbi or a missionary, but such are my enthusiasms, my beliefs, that I am willing to go to bat. And being a critic is going to bat, just taking a stand out there in public and letting your intelligence, or your stupidity, show for all to see. So basic to my philosophy of criticism is caring about theater; wanting to make it better, and wanting to spread the gospel.

"My nature is to care about things. If I see a play, or something is happening in the theater or anywhere in the arts that is important, I have a missionary zeal in writing about it. My satisfaction in writing about a good play, or a good performance, is that I am a born sharer. I want to take everybody I know by the hand, and a lot of people I don't know, and bring them to this event. Well, obviously I cannot.

But, I can write about these things and spread the word, and as a writer I've been able to reach a lot of people. If a play is inferior the motivation is not that different, because while I'm not trying to destroy the inferior work, I want to maintain a level of theater that I think it should have."

This "born sharer" came into the world in Newark, New Jersey in 1915. He went to high school in Rochester, New York, where he also studied extensively at the Eastman School of Music. Following high school, Nadel attended Denison University in Granville, Ohio, acquiring a bachelor's degree in both music and psychology.

"It might seem like odd reasoning, but it wasn't then and it isn't now. I figured that whatever I did, the more I could learn clinically about people, the better prepared I would be. In criticism, in one respect you seem to be judging such details in performance as the artist's brush-stroke and how the violinist bows his fiddle, things like that which seem to be of a technical nature. But basically criticism deals with human values, because criticism deals with the humanity of the communication between the stage and the audience, the humanity of communication between the author and the reader, between the listener and the musician and so forth. So inevitably, in any writing you do, psychology becomes important because you are dealing with people, with human values."

Although Nadel received his college degree in music and psychology, he has had a long and active interest in the

theater and some training as an actor. While a senior in college, Nadel studied with the renowned Edward A. Wright, a teacher and actor who has prepared many actors, including Hal Holbrook, for the professional stage. Because of his involvement in music and psychology, however, Nadel was unable to take many theater courses in college and has acquired most of his extensive knowledge about the theater through self-education.

"In my work as a critic and all along I've continued to study, so I suppose I have accumulated the equivalent of quite a number of theater courses. I gained most of my knowledge about the different genres and historical periods of theater through background reading for plays I've reviewed. I'm a great believer in self-education."

Though Nadel's theater education, both in and out of college, has been an asset to him in his profession, Nadel said he believes his life experiences have proved equally valuable in providing him with the insights and perceptions necessary to being a sensitive critic.

"Criticism is a technique which is very catholic, all-embracing in the literal meaning. Before I began to earn my living as a critic and since then, while I've been earning my living as a critic, I have continued to work in as many fields as possible to broaden myself. I've done a variety of things, including acting, toward that end. I do not feel at this point, at the age of 67, that my education is complete, and I don't think it ever will be.

"Everything I have ever done has been useful to me as a writer, as a critic. And so in my college education, the traveling I've done, my lecturing around the country, and in my teaching, I continue to find things which I sort of tuck away to use in my writing."

The critic, Nadel says, is only the sum of his resources, which include native intelligence, direct experience and vicarious experience. Though these resources increase the ability of the critic to evaluate, reason and communicate, Nadel adds that "there is no point at which you can say you have all the experience you'll ever need to function as a critic."²

"What the critic must have is sufficient total experience to provide empathy with the characters in plays whom he or she must write about. We need not have lived in a brothel, been burned at the stake, seduced countless women (or men, as the case may be), contemplated suicide, written poetry, bet on horses, murdered our parents or endured divorce.

"But it is good if we have been around enough, have looked intimately enough into our own and others' experiences, to recognize truth, to reject falsity, and to bring both sternness and compassion to our appraisals."³

"I've often wondered how a Roman Catholic priest can be a very good marriage counselor. He might be a brilliant man and have studied it thoroughly, but how can you know about

marriage without having been married? Half the time, when you go to the theater you are dealing with love situations. Well, if you don't know about loving, or have never been involved, it's hard to grasp the force of jealousy, or the anguish of separation, or the dilemma of being angry and loving at the same time."

Armed with a basic college education and eager to work, Nadel graduated from Denison University in 1938 to launch what would be a lifetime career in journalism and criticism. Though his degrees were not specifically related to criticism, Nadel said he always intended to become a critic.

"My intention was to stay in the area of the arts. I was aware of the fact that the arts were terribly important, but somehow there was a great lack of liaison between the arts and the general public, and I felt that as a writer about the arts, with an understanding of the public and of the arts, I could serve a useful purpose."

Nadel actually began his career as a critic while working for the Columbus, Ohio Citizen, a job which he started in 1939, but was interrupted by four years of military service during World War II. From 1946-1961, Nadel served as drama, film and music critic, and entertainment editor for the Columbus Citizen-Journal. There he first tried his hand at music criticism and then more or less drifted into criticizing drama.

"My principal experience in the arts as a performer is as a musician. I started out writing music criticism, and

then was asked to do movies and gradually plays too. I just sort of drifted into it. It was my writing about the theater that attracted the attention of the New York newspapers. I was interviewed to be the critic of the New York Times, the Long Island News Day and then the World Telegram. So, I got to New York as a theater person, even though my principal training was in music."

Accepting a job as drama critic with the World-Telegram and Sun, Nadel landed in New York with his wife Martha and their three children in 1961. He stayed with the World-Telegram until it ceased operations in 1966 and then worked for a year as the drama critic for the New York World Journal Tribune. From 1967 to 1980, Nadel served as critic and cultural affairs writer for Scripps-Howard Newspapers, a 21 newspaper alliance with a circulation of about three million. In 1977, Nadel took on the additional responsibility of being critic-at-large for the Newspaper Enterprise Association, writing criticism and features on drama, music, literature, the visual arts and other aspects of the culture for about 700 newspapers in the United States and Canada.

Currently, Nadel is contributing editor for Horizon magazine and arts writer for Independent News Alliance, a feature syndicate serving about 60 newspapers. During his lengthy career, Nadel also has lectured on theater and criticism at colleges and universities, served as president and is a continuing member of the New York Drama Critics Circle,

and in 1970 completed a book entitled A Pictorial History of the Theatre Guild.

When Nadel worked in New York, he considered himself a "rule breaker" primarily because he reviewed off-Broadway productions at a time when virtually no other newspaper was sending its first-string critics to do so. Nadel says he ventured off the beaten path not because he wanted to be a nonconformist, but because he believed the experimental and creative approaches to theater which were taking place off Broadway deserved attention.

"In New York I was one of the first of the so-called first-string drama critics to regularly cover off-Broadway and off-off-Broadway. There was a little of this going on, but until I was a critic there most of the Broadway critics only covered the Broadway scene, and I was certainly one of the revolutionary ones. I went off-Broadway because I felt exciting things were happening there, and they deserved the attention of the first-string critic, not because I was necessarily a better critic than my associates, but because I was in a prominent position where people were more apt to read me, and my reviewing lent a certain prestige to it.

"I felt that creativity in terms of new ways of using theater was more apt to occur off-Broadway and off-off-Broadway. I went to La Mama when it was in a basement and then when it was above a do-it-yourself laundry. It was not only a crummy space, but a crummy laundry. You'd go up there

and pay a dollar to become a member of the coffeehouse, get a cup of coffee and see plays."

The non-professional theater in New York also attracted Nadel's interest, and occasionally he would bend the so-called rules by devoting critical attention to an amateur production.

"The general rule in New York among the critics is that if it is paid admission then you cover it. I violated this rule too sometimes, but generally if it was an amateur production you didn't cover it. It was a logistics problem, in a sense, because if you started covering non-professional theater in New York you'd never rest. There is just so much going on. But I bent the rules. When deciding whether or not to cover an amateur production my judgement was based on the value of what was happening in terms of theater and its potential interest to a readership."

In addition to reviewing off-Broadway and non-professional productions, Nadel was unlike his fellow critics in that he often participated in productions when audience involvement was a required part of the performance. Such participation, Nadel said, often made him and other critics uncomfortable, but Nadel believed that if audience involvement was necessary then he should take part because it provided him with the proper perspective on the production.

"I would do it because if I am working as a critic and they [the company] are going for what used to be called

'happenings,' the total experience in the theater where you go in and hold hands with other people and whatnot, and if audience participation is required, then I do not have the right to sit outside and be exempt from it. I should participate.

"I don't want to set myself up in a judgemental position. I am not a judge sitting on a bench removed from it. I cannot get too involved, of course, because if I get too married to a production it's bound to impede my judgement. But, likewise, if I remove myself too much from theater, as from life, I decrease my effectiveness as a critic, and as a person."

Though as a responsible critic Nadel does not often give preferential treatment to plays of particular genres and historical periods, Nadel has, over the years, developed personal favorites. Of the types of drama which interest Nadel most, he said he prefers plays which have a universal quality or make a social statement.

"If I saw two plays of equal dramatic value, and one dealt with matters that touch a lot of people, a social attitude kind of play, I would probably treat that with more importance than a play which is sort of egocentric, where the playwright is in effect writing about his own particular hangups. I think every critic looks for universality in a play. I'm also interested in plays which deal with the problems of loving between a man and a woman because I suppose the loving between a man and a woman is the most important thing in my life.

"Plays such as Shaw's St. Joan are universal because they address matters of the spirit which people can relate to. Death of a Salesman also is a universal play. Many people look at the problems of Willy Loman and understand when in mid-life, or whenever it occurs, you realize there is no value to what you've been doing and the friendships and attachments you've made are insubstantial and false. You go along and suddenly the bottom falls out. A lot of people for one reason or another have had the ground shot away from underneath them. All of us."

Nadel said he prefers plays with substance, which probably inclines him more toward serious drama than comedy, though he added that even comedy can have the universal quality which appeals to him.

"O'Neil's Ah! Wilderness has a universal nature because it deals with teenage love and people getting older which are universal experiences. It is still being played, even though it is 50 or 60 years old, because it still speaks to people."

Included among the playwrights whom Nadel finds most fascinating are August Strindberg, Anton Chekhov and Henrik Ibsen. Nadel said he enjoys almost any historical drama because of its educational value but added that plays of the Elizabethan period, the social protest drama of the 1930s, and the "angry young man" movement in England in the 1950s especially appeal to him.

"I am much interested in the plays of Strindberg and the kind of world in which these were occurring and the kind of life he was leading. I think Strindberg's plays are still applicable today. The angry young man of the 1950s in England is a very interesting movement to me for several reasons. One is the period itself, and the other is the change in writing style which took place. I am interested certainly in the Elizabethan theater which was so remarkably vital. Even some of the bad plays of the Elizabethan theater are sort of interesting bad plays. Shakespeare, whether it was a strong play or a lesser play, wrote so much to capture your interest and provide a challenge in acting and directing."

However, no matter how compelling any of the past playwrights or periods might be to Nadel, he said the theater which interests him most is that which is taking place right now.

"The theater period which interests me most is this minute. The principal concern for me as a writer has always been the new playwright, the playwright who is writing a play right now, or the play that is being produced for the first time this season. This does not mean I downgrade historical theater, but as a critic it is more important that I write about emerging playwrights than the established playwrights."

Throughout his career as Nadel's insights and attitudes about theater have grown, so have his ideas about his critical

principles, and the role and purpose of the critic in society. A critic is a human being, nothing more or less, and a critic's ethics are closely knitted with his personal values, values which began developing long before the person became a critic. A critic's principles, then, are actually a reflection of the human being, and such is the case with Nadel.

"I don't think I ever said to myself 'I think I better develop a set of critical principles.' In a sense, they were there germinating even as a student out of the values my parents taught me, and my teachers taught me and so forth. The fact I was involved in the arts, I was truly, passionately involved in the arts, made it a matter of deep caring with me and it still is. I also way very much interested in truth. What is truth, and how do you define it? What is truth in criticism? All these things appeal to me. I saw in the world so much distortion of truth, or misinformation being passed around, sometimes with very good motives, sometimes with terrible motives, and I was concerned about this. So my particular involvement with the arts and criticism is a caring involvement.

"I was once asked 'I bet you enjoy writing a scathing review.' Well I don't. I would rather that the play be good. If it isn't good, I certainly say so, and I say so as effectively and interestingly as I can. It is my duty as a critic to be informative, to provide insights, but at the same time

I don't enjoy beating anybody down. I'd rather celebrate the theater than point out all the things it is doing wrong. Some people think that critics should not be too negative because that will discourage people from going to the theater, but those of us who do criticism professionally feel that if we fail to come down on what's bad we are almost encouraging the theater to lower its sights, where we should be trying to make the theater raise its sights."

In Nadel's point of view, encouraging the raising of standards in the theater means more than simply evaluating a production in terms of its positive and negative qualities. It means the critic should, in a sense, act as a play doctor by providing suggestions as to how a production can be improved, a belief which apparently is uncommon among most critics.

"In John English's book Criticizing the Critics, he talks about whether or not the critic should be a play doctor. In other words, should the critic be concerned about making the play better, or should he just do an evaluation of it? Well, he said that the majority of critics he talked to said they were not the play doctor, that it was not their responsibility to make the play better except by being, well, as Howard Teichman the playwright said, by being the conscience of the theater. And this is a very good and necessary function. But, in English's book he says there are two critics who care enough about the theater to try to make it better,

who provide constructive criticisms when they can. One is Elliot Norton in Boston, and he named me as the other."

To Nadel, however, providing constructive criticism and raising theatrical standards are only the frosting on the cake, so to speak. At the vortex of Nadel's list of critical values is supplying practical insights.

"My basic critical principle is to provide useful insights, and if they are constructive as well this is fine. The critic should be useful, and I like to think of myself as being useful, not just to the theater in terms of productions, but to playwrights and useful to the audience certainly, useful to my readers."

In his speech, "openings and Insights," Nadel says that beyond a certain amount of straight reporting which must be included to create the setting for the critical statement, the most important aspect of a review is insight, which is the heart of all criticism.

"Insight is the name of the game. It is, in the final analysis, the reason for our existence. It is, or should be, our primary and most substantial value. Often a critic achieves popularity because he has a clever, funny, satirical way of cutting work and artists to pieces. If insight is incorporated in such an approach, okay, but without insight, such writing qualifies only as entertainment."⁴

"Insight reveals and clarifies the usually indefinable humanity of a work of art. It deals with those qualities

which transcend measurement, and which even go beyond evaluation of how well or poorly something was done, although that is a necessary prelude to insight, as well as part of it. If we cannot provide better insights than most people, if we cannot help them to understand their own responses--whether or not they agree with ours--then we shouldn't be critics."⁵

No matter how lofty a critic's ideals might be, the public will use and interpret reviews in whatever way they desire, and Nadel says this is a situation merely to be endured, not changed. Though he does not intend to write criticism as a theater shopping service for the public, Nadel believes his and other critics' reviews are often used in this way.

"I don't write shopping service critiques, although I know perfectly well they are used in that way. And how they are used doesn't really matter to me. If people read my reviews to decide whether or not to go to a play, that's fine if it serves that purpose, but I'm not doing a shopping service on plays as such. I'm trying to write about the theater in a way that will make people think about it and be interested in it and make some of their own decisions."

Of all the problems which critics face, Nadel states that one of the most difficult is the fact that there are no fixed criteria which consistently and invariably apply to the arts, and this often makes a critic's assertions

uncertain and unreliable. Without an artistic yardstick by which to measure the quality of a production, the critic is vulnerable, though Nadel believes this vulnerability is positive instead of negative.

"The only instrument of measurement [in the arts], the only setter of standards, is the individual, functioning either singly or as a part of a society, and his reliability is subject to such variables as his or her digestion, sex life, frustrations, antagonisms, pride, life experience, the weather and whether or not the person had trouble finding a parking space. This applies not only to random man, and random woman, but to those of us who are professional critics, and are supposed to know better. Perhaps we bring a degree of self-discipline, preparation and objectivity to the job. If so, it only lessens and does not eliminate the uncertainty and unreliability of our evaluations."⁶

"Lacking precise measuring instruments, we are vulnerable, and that is the way it should be. A critique is not and never should be a final statement, an Olympian judgment handed down from on high. It should be the point of reference, for the reader or listener, who, we hope, will expose himself or herself to the particular experience."⁷

Taken as a point of reference, criticism becomes what Nadel considers an important basis for necessary discussion about the arts. Nadel said that providing a public platform for private debate about theater, or any of the arts for that matter, is one of his primary functions as a critic.

"The critic is the conscience of the theater; this is one of his functions. The critic also tries to maintain standards, but most of all the critic maintains a public interest in the theater. Critics aren't necessary to the theater, but very useful to the theater. They provide a point of departure for all the decision-making that goes on in the public.

"We all have standards about things, and a critic is in the position to articulate these positions, or standards, to make a public statement. The hope is the public statement will excite a lot of private statements, pro or con doesn't matter. What is important is the fact that all the arts benefit from discussion.

"One of the worst things that could happen to theater would be for all criticism to stop, because it's not just the play that is important, it is all the discussion that goes on, and criticism triggers all that discussion. Criticism is like a fuse, it just sets things off. The theater needs that. All of the arts need that."

Underlying all Nadel's critical values, including his desire to raise theater's standards and encourage public interest and discussion about theater, is his personal, passionate affection for the arts. Basic to this attitude is Nadel's belief that the critic must approach the theater with both sternness and compassion, because, Nadel declares, a critic must care about theater to want to improve it.

"I do not trust the critic who boasts that he hates musicians, actors, artists and dancers. This is supposed to infer that he is a good critic, because he will be stern and unforgiving, and not settle for anything less than perfection.

"No, give me instead the man or woman who is so passionately dedicated to the arts, or the particular art form, that his or her disapproval will be crisply articulated and will ring with righteous indignation and disappointment. That same critic will be the first to detect and celebrate the accomplishments that really matter.

"The arts address themselves to the spirit. As critics, we had better be listening."⁸

Footnotes

Unless otherwise noted, all quoted material is taken from two personal interviews conducted with Norman Nadel on Feb. 22 and Feb. 27, 1983.

¹Norman Nadel, "Openings and Insights," Lecture Manuscript, p. 15.

²Norman Nadel, "The Incomplete Critic," Lecture Manuscript, p. 2.

³Nadel, "Incomplete," p. 3.

⁴Nadel, "Openings," p. 10.

⁵Nadel, "Openings," p. 15.

CHAPTER 2

PREPARING FOR AND WRITING THE REVIEW: TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Underlying the development of Norman Nadel's critical philosophies and values are the years he spent in the theater and at the typewriter composing reviews. Throughout the volumes of his critical work is evidence of Nadel's passion for the theater, passion which has been transformed from its basic abstract state into words which meticulously convey his feelings, insights and attitudes about the productions he has experienced.

Criticism is a process which begins before the critic sees a production and ends when the review has been printed and passed into the hands of the reader, who may then use it as the basis for further discussion. The critic must explore the background of a production, see the production, and then translate his abstract feelings about it into concrete terms. Beyond the actual analysis of the play and the production, the critic also must grapple with the technical realities of writing and organizing his review. Since writing is one of the critic's most basic tools, the technical process of writing, along with Nadel's approach to preparing for and seeing the play will be examined before undertaking an analysis of the content of his reviews.

Researching the background behind a production is the first step in the critical process. This provides the critic with information beyond what he sees on the stage to sharpen and add depth to his insights about the drama. Acquiring such knowledge may involve studying materials about the playwright or company, and especially in the case of classics, reading the play and examining the historical context from which it comes. Nadel does not, however, read new plays before he reviews them because, he says, this ruins the element of surprise which is an important aspect in the critic's response to a yet unseen play.

"If everybody knew what every play was about they wouldn't go to the theater very much. There are exceptions, of course. You love A Midsummer Night's Dream so you go to see it again and again. But, generally when you go to a new play you want to be surprised by something. If a playwright or producer offers me a script to read, then I do. I welcome the opportunity, but generally I don't read new plays and I don't worry about it.

"I do try to read classics before I review them though. I also try to read some commentary on the classic to give me a point of departure for my review, but not to fix ideas about it in my mind. If I go see a classic, I need to be alert to alterations or cuts in the text."

Nadel said he also likes to familiarize himself with the playwright and the situation out of which the play grew when preparing to review both classics and new plays.

"If there is an interview in the New York Times, for example, with the playwright about how he wrote the play or what led up to it, I do indeed read it. I like to find out all I can about the playwright. It's not a morbid interest or an idle curiosity, and it doesn't mean I'm going to review the playwright instead of the play, but it helps. Knowing where the playwright came from, whether he is young or old, and what kind of background he came from is helpful in understanding a play."

Once background knowledge about the play has been acquired, the critic must, of course, see the production. Though this sounds fairly straight-forward, Nadel has indeed arrived at an approach for viewing plays which he finds most beneficial in his work as a critic. Essentially, Nadel said he tries to "clear the decks" before going out on a reviewing assignment. In other words, Nadel avoids developing preconceived notions about a play before he sees it because he believes this is unfair to the playwright who may be presenting new ideas.

"So I have to be flexible enough, eternally young enough and eager enough in my approach to have my mind, my emotions, my awareness ready for anything that comes down the pike. Now this does not mean I'm going to love everything that comes down the pike, but at least I will listen to it, accept it into my conscience and my intelligence, and deal with it critically as best I can. So I feel very strongly that an

open mind is basic to whatever I do. It is important that I go in with kind of a fresh expectancy.

"I don't go [into a play] and say I'm going to watch this actor, and watch this. I go in and just let the play happen to me. Then, depending on what happens, or what fails to happen, then I begin the analytical procedure. I might, say, be bothered by some aspect of the acting. And then I have to ask 'Is the actor at fault? Is the director at fault? Is the directorial concept bad?' Or maybe neither is at fault, but the playwright has written a play which is uncomfortable for the actors. So you have to make these decisions. As the play goes along I will think about the lighting, the stage setting and how the actors are moving. But most of all I will think about what the whole purpose of the play is. What is the playwright's intent? Does he realize his intent, and how does he realize it? If he doesn't, whose fault is it? If he does, who should get credit for it?"

Perhaps the clearest expression of Nadel's approach to viewing a production and then moving into the analytical process which follows is found in his lecture "Openings and Insights." The critic, he says, must in essence be schizophrenic. He must allow his intuitive self to dominate during a performance, with his objective self emerging afterwards.

"I believe that the critic has no choice but to be schizophrenic, to divide himself, or herself, into two personalities, although preferably without the loss of a sense

of reality which usually accompanies schizophrenia. We expose ourselves to the art event or object as totally subjective, feeling, intuitive, emotional individuals. We are intrigued or excited, or bored, or irritated, or provoked, or satisfied, or dissatisfied. We are amused, or we laugh ourselves silly, or we cry. We are lifted out of ourselves, or are affected deeply within. We see the experience as foreign to our own nature and experience, or we identify with it. The evening at a performance goes quickly, or it lasts forever. Our minds wander, or are riveted. We feel no bodily discomfort, even when the seat is uncomfortable. Or we sit in luxury and ache.

"None of this is intellectualized. None of it is reasoned, thought out. It all is as intuitive as reacting to pain or love In the arts, we have no intelligent, or at least conscious, control over what happens or doesn't happen to us when we encounter the experience. We experience whatever is to be experienced subjectively. Art happens to us.

"Then, and only then, does the second self, the objective self, step into the picture. That is when we begin to ask ourselves the questions. Not 'should I like this?' but 'why am I liking it?' or not liking it, or crying, or being bored, or uneasy, or embarrassed, or angry, or exultant or amused or sentimentally moved. It is at the moment when the utterly human, utterly subjective response is subjected to objective scrutiny that criticism begins.

"Then we begin to search for reasons, and in those reasons is the value of our critical intelligence and experience, whatever they might be. Too many people think that criticism is merely a matter of finding fault, and of course, part of the time it is. But a true critique must look deeply into all aspects of what is being done, and that means not only noting excellence, or genuine creativity, or daring innovation, or a meticulous observance of tradition, but explaining how this excellence has been accomplished."¹

The first step in Nadel's critical process, after he has moved out of a subjective, intuitive frame of mind, is analysis of the play and the playwright's intent. Nadel does consider the intentions of the actors and director but says that this analysis follows chronologically after digging into the play itself.

"I am a great believer in the importance of the play and the playwright, because without the playwright, the theater ceases to exist. The theater, even in the most superficial kind of play, is dealing with ideas of some sort, so there has to be a genesis, a beginning, a heart or a core, and this is the play itself. Frequently I have written reviews in which I've said, in effect, the play is trash, but these performances are fine, or the director has taken this very superficial thing and worked a skillful entertainment out of it. There are times when a not very

good play can still work successfully as theater, as entertainment. However, these are the exceptions, and normally, whether the play is good or not, the play is the starting point."

After analyzing the play, Nadel then decides on the focal point of his review, which, he says, is one of the initial hurdles he must overcome as a critic.

"One of the greatest struggles I have as a critic is deciding on the focal element of my review. Normally, it will be the play, but sometimes it will be an element of performance. But assuming that it is the play, even so I have to decide what aspect of it I want to focus on. Is it the way the playwright deals with people? Is it the humanity of the play? The social content?"

Nadel's belief in the play and the playwright is reflected in his reviews. The focal point in most of his critiques is the dramatic work itself. For example, the play was the central element in Nadel's review of The Subject Was Roses (fig. 1), though he uses a discussion of the playwright's talent as a point of departure for his analysis of the play. The focal point of the review is declared in the opening sentence, "From this day forth, Frank D. Gilroy is a major playwright," after which Nadel launches into commentary on Gilroy's previous play and his talent as a new playwright.² From there Nadel segues into a discussion of the play's numerous strong points, an analysis which he integrates

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Figure 1. A review of The Subject was RosesThe Theater—Norman Nadel

New York World-Telegram

The Sun

May 26, 1964

Frank Gilroy Emerges as New Writing Giant



From this day forth, Frank D. Gilroy is a major playwright. The promise he showed in "Who'll Save the Plow-boy?" which was off-Broadway's best two seasons ago, has been fulfilled in "The Subject Was Roses," which opened last night at the Royale Theater. In this corner, the verdict is roses.

Gilroy has committed himself to excellence in this new family comedy-drama: the public will expect him to keep writing plays which will measure up to his own standard and which will be progressively broader in scope. The American theater needs Gilroy, and I judge from the urgency of his commitment through the medium of the stage, that Gilroy needs the theater. Last night he gave us more than a fine and beautiful play; he also gave us the prospect of others to come.

In its externals, "The Subject Was Roses" is the simplest of plays: you are inclined to wonder at the be-

ginning just how much strength can emanate from merely three characters and a single set.

Even the situation would seem to impose limits on the dramatist's resource. A 21-year-old son comes home to the Bronx after three years in the Army during World War II. He tries to adjust to his parents and they try to adjust to having him back. How far can you go with that?

To the most profound depths of the human heart: that's how far Gilroy takes us. Along the way he blends the humor and poignancy of family relationships into a play as beguiling as it is honest.

Martin Sheen portrays Timmy Cleary, the young man who better understands his parents after the three-year absence than he ever did before. That which he previously observed—and reacted to — about them, he now can appraise in a more mature context.

Most playwrights (and actors) would make Timmy a rebel, building up a head of steam toward that moment when he'd rip his parents to shreds in an explosion of righteous resentment. Not here. Gilroy's Timmy knows about "Honor thy father and thy mother," and he's an affectionate, respectful son even when he's making them face up to their own pettiness and covert cruelty. Actor Sheen's Timmy is a boy not often seen on stage, but familiar in life.

There is no single dramatic explosion: the play builds more quietly, and if anything, more powerfully for the subtlety of its revelations.

Jack Albertson as the father and Irene Dailey as the mother reveal the most intimate insights in superbly detailed, yet wholly fluid and natural performances. She nurses her convenient psychic injury, inflicted by his infidelity, not realizing that the disease stems from something taught her long before

she met him.

The father suffers her rejection, and nurses his own assortment of old guilt feelings — such as having been turned down for World War I service because he was the sole support of a family. He alternately covets his son's uniform and is angered by it as a reminder of his own failure to serve his country.

Gilroy's dialogue is so sensitive, so wise. The mother is crushed because the son had forgotten that waffles used to be his favorite breakfast. Her appraisal of her husband, in contrast to the baker from Paterson who also had courted her, has the clarity of poetry.

Clu Grodzord directed "The Subject Was Roses" as if he had lived within the three people involved. For that matter, Albertson, Sheen and Miss Dailey play it that way. I cannot imagine a line added or deleted, a gesture broadened or diminished. The production is just about perfect, which is no more than Gilroy's tender and lucid play deserves.

Nadel, Norman. "Frank Gilroy Emerges as New Writing Giant." New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 25 (1975), 254.

throughout the entire critique. First Nadel provides insight into the plot of The Subject Was Roses and its significance, then, in combination with an analysis of the acting, expounds on Gilroy's development of the main character. This is followed by comments on the structure of the play, and in a later paragraph Nadel makes note of Gilroy's ear for dialogue. Though other aspects of the production are brought to light in the review, they always are subordinate to the focal point of the critique, the play.

Although the play and playwright usually take center stage in most of Nadel's reviews, he sometimes shifts the focus to other aspects of a production. This especially holds true for better known plays or classics with which an audience may already be familiar. Such is the case with Nadel's review of Anton Chekhov's The Seagull (fig. 2) which is substantially centered on the acting of the National Repertory Theater. As in The Subject Was Roses, Nadel reveals the review's focus with crystal clarity in the first sentence: "once in a long while something in the theater reminds us that acting is--or can be--a transcendent art."³ From this point Nadel establishes the conditions necessary to make acting a "transcendent art" and then states that both The Seagull and the National Repertory Theater fulfill these conditions. To illustrate this point, Nadel develops an extended example which constitutes most of the review. With the exception of one paragraph which discusses the

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New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

April 6, 1964

The Theater — Norman Nadel

Chekhov's Genius Is Mated With the Cast It Deserves

Once in a long while something in the theater reminds us that acting is—or can be—a transcendent art. In order for this to happen, there must be an impeccable play, plus a cast of individual and ensemble mastery.



Anton Chekhov's "The Seagull" is such a play—substantial and spacious, to invite the full range of the actor's skill. And the National Repertory Theater has brought such a cast to the Belasco Theater, in a production both delicate and powerful which opened there last night.

Let me illustrate, not from the sweeping scenes and the climactic areas of this darkly luminous tragedy, but from the quieter, transitional moments. In the last act, several of the men and women we have come to know far more than casually are sitting in the living room of

Madame Treplev's (Eva Le Gallienne's) country home, awaiting the return from Moscow of this famous actress. Dorn, the doctor (G. Wood), is conversing with Sorin (Thayer David), Madame Treplev's old and ailing brother.

What they have to say is one current in this scene. The still-expanding characterizations of the two men are two more. Except for Konstantin (Farley Granger), the actress' bitterly unhappy son, the others don't speak, and yet the currents of personality continue to flow from each of them. Masha (Barbara Stanton) silently aches with her unreturned love for Konstantin, before he comes into the room, and consumes him with her eyes after he's there. His lack of awareness of her is like a shouted curse against her anguished spirit.

Her husband, Medvedenko (Ben Yaffee), broods over the emptiness of their marriage, until he is distracted by the doctor and drawn into the conversation. Polina, the steward's wife (Betty

more radiant, as you can well imagine, in the more crucial scenes.

The title's reference to a sea gull shot by a man with no reason for doing so is echoed in the love of Konstantin's unresponsive sweetheart, Nina (Anne Meacham), for the famous author, Trigorin (Denholm Elliott). Trigorin destroys and discards her, like the symbolic gull which Konstantin had previously killed.

Granger establishes himself as an actor of profound depth as well as good craftsmanship. Yaffee, Thayer David, Jerome Raphael, Miss Sinclair and Wood all help to make this "Seagull" not only the large play it is, but a recital of superior acting. Sinclair, watches the doctor, whom she loves with an adoration as specific as a narrow shaft of light in darkness.

So the stage is a glory of life forces in that particular quiet moment, and even

Nadel, Norman. "Chekhov's Genius is Mated with the Cast it Deserves." New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 25 (1964), 301.

symbolism of the title, the entire critique is devoted to the acting. By detailing only one aspect of the production Nadel adds insight to what an audience may already know about a familiar play.

Once Nadel has determined the focal point, he begins writing the lead, or opening paragraph, of his review. The lead is important, Nadel says, because it points the writer in the direction he is going to take in his critique. In fact, in many of Nadel's reviews, the lead and the focal point are one and the same. Both of the previously mentioned reviews, The Seagull and The Subject Was Roses, reflect this, as do numerous other examples. Essentially, the lead comprises whatever elements of the play Nadel believes are most significant or unusual. For example, in Nadel's 1962 critique of Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright he places a discussion of the directing at the top and uses his directorial comments as a point of departure for evaluating the weaknesses of the play in the second and third paragraphs. Although Nadel does not focus on the directing throughout the review, he apparently believed it was one of the production's most noteworthy elements.

Joshua Logan probably could direct a play with one hand tied behind his back, which is the way he should have done "Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright." If there is such a term as over-directed, it applies to the new drama by Peter S. Feibleman which opened Saturday evening at the Booth Theater.

In Logan's defense, let it be understood that he was nobly motivated. He has

tried, in his own vastly ingenious way, to whip up an urgency about this play that simply doesn't exist. He has attempted to make it seem both substantial and valid
⁴

In his review of Edward Albee's A Delicate Balance, Nadel leads with a detailed discussion of the intellectual process of analyzing a play and uses this as a basis for dissecting Albee's work. In this review, the focal point of the lead becomes the central focus of the entire commentary. Although Nadel does not express his opinion about A Delicate Balance in the first paragraph, he lays the groundwork for making his judgement through the detailed discussion of the analytical process. Even though he makes no mention of the play at all in the beginning of the critique, Nadel nevertheless leads with the most significant element of the production--his response to it.

When a play is going well--and only then--we assimilate it as a single, unified, emotional and intellectual experience, even though we permit ourselves mental asides to admire a detail of performance, the delivery of a line, or the line itself. When something is wrong, however, we tend to break the drama down into components to find out what is malfunctioning, and why. A car is a car when it's purring along the highway, but when it falters, it becomes a carburetor, ignition wiring, the distributor points, a manifold gasket and sundry other parts, one or more of which is faulty.

It was a while after the curtain rose on Edward Albee's "A Delicate Balance," at the Martin Beck Theater, that I began to separate it into components, and evaluate it part by part, to isolate the reasons for my nagging discontent with should have been a totally arresting drama.⁵

Nadel's leads not only draw into the light the most important aspects of a production, but often reflect the feeling, the ambience, of the play. These leads inspire a response in the reader which may be similar to the response generated by the play. This technique is nowhere better illustrated than in one of Nadel's earliest New York reviews, that of Tennessee William's The Night of the Iguana.

Under the splintering porch, the iguana, a giant lizard left over from an earlier eon, struggles in almost noiseless panic against the rope tied around his horny neck. He does not know that in the morning Mexican children will poke out his eyes with sticks, burn his tail, and similarly amuse themselves until it is time for the creature to be cooked and eaten for its tender white meat.

The iguana does know that he is captive, and that he cannot reach the dark security of the rain forest only yards away. He is desperate, and without resource, and he struggles.

This is the symbol. Tennessee Williams, a man of ominous symbols, is the playwright. "The Night of the Iguana," which opened last night at the Royale Theater, is the play.⁶

This descriptive lead is vivid and unsettling. It not only conveys the meaning of the play, but brings the meaning to life for the reader. The desperation of the tethered iguana is symbolic of the desperation of the play's characters, and therefore is one of the play's most significant elements. So, in keeping with Nadel's technique, the lead focuses on the play's most important aspect while also recreating the feeling the play arouses.

Another example of Nadel's ability to bring a play to life is found in the opening paragraphs of his critique of Inadmissible Evidence. In this lead, Nadel does not focus so much on the play itself as on the technique of the playwright, John Osborne.

First the skin. The other skin--the finest membranes that can be peeled. Square inch by square inch. The hair, around the eyes, the sensitive and secret places. Then the next layer. And progressively on to nerve strands, nerve ends, tiny blood vessels, then the bigger ones, sinews, and the organs, one by one. The brain, the eyes, the whitening skull.

The dissector is playwright John Osborne. Even dissector is not enough of a word. Inquisitor, confessor, torturer, executioner, and withal, the relentless beholder. The victim is Bill Maitland--English, an attorney, a lecher, a procrastinator, a man immersed in the agonies of self-contempt.

This lead itches; it hurts. The discomfort it produces is no doubt reflective of that which the production evoked in the audience. Masterfully written, the opening of this review becomes the launching point for Nadel's subsequent exploration into play's plot and the other characters involved.

The lead, then, brings to the fore the most significant aspect of a production, while also, in some cases, creating a sense of the play itself. However, the lead serves another important function, one that is in fact primary to reviewing; it previews or clarifies the critic's judgement of the production, be that opinion positive or negative or a combination of the two. Most productions, according to Nadel, are not

subject to all or none judgements, but usually exhibit strong and weak elements, both of which should be reflected in the critique. Highlighting the negative and positive aspects of a production in a review is what Nadel refers to as proportioning, a technique which he believes is elemental to criticism.

"One of the things you have to say in proportioning is this play was 75 percent okay and 25 percent not so good. You do not necessarily have to give those exact proportions to your review, but at least make it clear in the review that while you are finding fault with certain areas, there are other areas that are entitled to praise. Most of the time the play is not 100 percent and it is not zero; it is usually in between The unfortunate thing is that in a review you do have to make a kind of yes-no commitment, at least a qualified yes or a qualified no. That happens more than you can imagine. Unfortunately when a critic admits to this, he's called a fence-straddler, but that is just not true. It is just trying to be fair and accurate.

"Let's say you go to a bad play, and the direction is terrible, so you really pan the whole thing. But, some actors and actresses in there might have broken their tails to do interesting jobs, so you have to point this out. Otherwise, they go down with the play. They go down with the play anyway, in terms of economics, because the play closes and they are out of a job. But, if an actor can say 'well, the play got bad reviews, but Jack Kroll said this good thing about me,

and John Simon said this, and Norman Nadel said this,' [the actor will not have lost out entirely]."

When it comes to proportioning, Nadel practices what he preaches. Even if the lead paragraphs of a review are negative, a discussion of the positive aspects of the production will appear somewhere in the body of the critique. The same holds true for reviews with positive leads. However, in most of Nadel's reviews, both the lead and body are proportioned to reflect a production's strengths and weaknesses. This is aptly illustrated in Nadel's reviews of the musical Jennie and the play Entertaining Mr. Sloane.

The first paragraph of Jennie (fig. 3) is proportioned to give the musical credit for having some redeeming qualities, but indicates that the production is far from saved. This Nadel follows with three paragraphs which detail the musical's assets, one of whom is Mary Martin in the title role, and the other is a melodramatic opening scene. After a brief plot synopsis, Nadel puts his finger on the production's downfall: the story is given a "hackneyed treatment, even to the simple, singable music and lyrics by Howard Dietz and Arthur Schwartz."⁸ The characters are "conventional" though the acting for the most part is not, a point which Nadel spends considerable space discussing. The music and choreography also receive Nadel's critical attention, after which he nails down another of the musical's weaknesses, a lack of continuity. So, while Nadel generally gives a thumbs down to Jennie, he also bolsters "her" a bit by applauding the acting.



New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

October 18, 1963

Norman Nadel—The Theater

Poor 'Jennie,' Alas, Is Just an Ordinary Mary

Poor "Jennie." If only there were not such a wide gulf between what she has, and what she needs.

She has Mary Martin in the title role, which alone can stir happy expectations, vitalize a box office, and turn out a gala first-night crowd such as attended the opening of this new musical last night at the Majestic Theater.



She (it seems improper to refer to a show named "Jennie" as "it") also has an uproarious, recklessly melodramatic opening scene, in which a 1906 road company is playing "The Mountie Gets His Man" or "Chang Lu, King of the White Slavers." Beside a water-

fall, Miss Martin fights off two Chinese, throws a knife into wicked Chang Lu, and saves her doll-baby from a watery grave, even whilst George Wallace, as the Mountie, bursts his bonds, kills a bear, and clasps her hand as the curtain comes thundering down.

Taylor Story

No one expects a show to continue at that wild pace though it's an attractive idea. So the audience settles back to enjoy a less hectic and more realistic development of this story, about a show business couple, their two children, her Irish mother, and the young wife's eventual debut in the legitimate theater on Broadway. As "Jennie" is based, though loosely, on the early life of Loretta Taylor, this kind of plot progression can be anticipated.

Just such a story does emerge, and not without some charm, humor and tenderness. But it is a disappointing hackneyed treatment, even to the simple, singable music and lyrics by Howard Dietz and Arthur Schwartz.

The role of the irresponsible husband is conventional, which goes also for the children, their grandmother and most of the players in this turn-of-the-century troupe.

Ordinary Mary

"Jennie" even manages to make Miss Martin's role seem ordinary—part of the time, at least. Whether that is the fault of Arnold Schul-

man's playbook, Vincent J. Donatus's direction or Miss Martin's concept of the role, it does happen. It probably is a combination of those and other circumstances.

"Waitin' for the Evening Train," the first musical number, is a pleasant vaudeville routine gone by Wallace and Miss Martin. He's a broad-shouldered, ruggedly handsome man, with a resonant singing voice and just the right kind of flourish for the role of James O'Conner—irresponsible, and with more heart than sense. He is strong enough, as a personality, to keep the balance in a scene with as expert and endearing an actress as Miss Martin.

Another good casting is that of Robin Bailey as the English playwright who courts the play's beleaguered Jennie. He, too, can balance with Miss Martin, in his own genteel way. Of course, she is not only a fine actress, but a gentlewoman; she does not trample other performers in her scenes. All this is to the good of "Jennie."

Familiar Role

Even if Ethel Shurtl, as the Irish matriarch, is burdened with a painfully familiar role, she gives it a redeeming naturalness. She, Miss Martin and the two children, Connie Scott and Brian Chapin, play their scenes comfortably.

An ensemble Irish jig, introduced by Bailey and Miss Martin, is the most spirited and satisfying dance number in "Jennie," though "Sauce Diabla," which immediately precedes it, also is enjoyable.

"When You're Far Away From New York Town," "Born Again," "For Better Or Worse," "High Is Better Than Low" and "Before I Kiss the World Goodbye" are some of the songs that work passably in the show, but which hardly could be termed startlingly original.

Story at Fault

The great trouble is that scenes and songs avoid the kind of compact continuity which "Jennie" should have. George Jenkins' sets and Irene Sharaff's costumes carry the show from one situation to the next, but the story transitions themselves are abrupt. Perhaps we've been spoiled by those more polished musicals which flow swiftly and naturally from one scene to the next.

"Jennie" ends in a poignant scene, but even this leaves hearts strangely untouched. Far earlier in the evening, the audience has sensed the false note, and has withdrawn the warm rapport it had so eagerly brought into the theater.

Nadel, Norman. "Poor 'Jennie,' Alas, Is Just an Ordinary Mary." New York Theatre Critics' Reviews. 24 (1963), 237.

The scale of judgement for Entertaining Mr. Sloane (fig. 4) also is weighted heavily on the negative side, although, as with Jennie, Nadel promotes the play's attributes. Nadel's initial comparison of the play to a cesspool not only serves to make the review more pungent, but accurately defines the strong and weak aspects of the production. While the odor may be disgusting, a cesspool is constructed of hardy materials, characteristics which are analogous to the play. "Acting is fascinating, set is appropriately dismal, dialogue is bizarre. Only the subject matter and the characters are apt to unsettle the stomach, but actually, they are quite enough."⁹ This concise judgement clearly defines the proportion of good to bad in Entertaining Mr. Sloane, and the rest of the review expounds on these vices and virtues. A lengthy discussion of the plot illustrates the play's nasty smell, though Nadel commends the director, Alan Schneider, for his straightforward treatment of the story. Nadel also gives a pat on the back to members of the cast. By detailing the performances of some of the actors and actresses, Nadel gives weight to his previously stated opinion that while all else stunk, the acting was "fascinating." The last paragraph of the review further pinpoints the play's pitfalls, which adds appropriate balance to Nadel's proportioning of the critique.

Along with proportioning, there are other technical considerations which rank high on Nadel's list of critical priorities. One of these is continuity in writing.

Fig. 4. A review of Entertaining Mr. Sloane

New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

October 13, 1965

The Cast

LYCEUM THEATER

A new comedy in three acts by Joe Orton, production designed by William Riffman, staged by Alan Schneider, presented by Sloane Brown, Tanya Chesham and E. A. Gilbert; with the following cast:
Kath Sheila Hancock
Sloane Dudley Sutton
Kern George Turner
Ed Lee Montague

The Theater — Norman Nadel

'Entertaining Mr. Sloane'

"Entertaining Mr. Sloane" has the sprightly charm of a medieval English cesspool.

In pointing this out I have no wish to offend the cesspool people. British or domestic, who serve an honest function, which is perhaps more than can be

said for the play by Joe Orton which opened last night at the Lyceum.

Conscience also bids me add that as cesspools, or plays, go, this one is fashioned of strong materials. Acting is fascinating, set is appropriately dismal, dialogue is bizarre. Only the subject matter and the characters are apt to unsettle the stomach, but actually, they are quite enough. However, let me tell you about young Orton's play (a controversial success in London) on the remote chance that it might be (you'll forgive the expression) your dish of tea:

Sloane is the handsome,



young man who comes to look at a room in a desolate London house which is set in the middle of a rubbish heap. He is received carelessly by the 40-year-old landlady, who explains she is nude under her housedress, changes to a nightie and negligee and seduces him.

Before they consummate their passion on the sitting room sofa, however, the landlady's somewhat cracked old father stabs the lad in the leg with the crumple-toasting fork. This is not entirely inhospitable as it might seem. "The Dadda" had recognized Sloane as a murderer.

Also intervening between first overture and fulfillment in the opening act is a scene involving the boy and Ed, the landlady's brother, a successful businessman. This first exploratory verbal encounter between two homosexuals (Sloane, as events prove, is sexually adaptable) is as distasteful as it is honest.

What with pregnancy, jealousy and murder, one

could hardly say that nothing happens in the second act. It is; nonetheless, dreary, in that it merely emphasizes through repetition the unpleasant traits introduced earlier. The third act does come alive, and the play, true to its own form, concludes as a macabre, decaying kind of comedy.

A pungent play under any circumstances, its aroma comes forth that much stronger because of the heat which director Alan Schneider has applied to it. Schneider is right in treating it this way; to suppress it, or dilute it, would be unfair to the playwright. Whatever its faults or virtues, "Entertaining Mr. Sloane" has to be presented with such an emphasis.

What audiences will remember and most admire about Orton's play is the role of the landlady and the performance by Sheila Hancock. She slops about the stage, sometimes with her upper left front teeth in and sometimes with them out, an appalling and somehow

Opens

enchanted female derelict with a moron's mind and delusions of gentility. The nasal voice is superbly appropriate.

Lee Montague is oily, pompous and sly as brother Ed, whose disposition is as gummy as some aspects of the play. There is an aura of evil to the stupid and self-indulgent Sloane, in Dudley Sutton's portrayal. George Turner's fudle anger as The Dadda evokes more pity than humor, though the play manages to make even him repulsive.

Orton's characters fascinate us, but we don't really believe them. In overreaching for ways to offend an audience, he has blotted out credulity and acceptance. He has even made passages of his play morosely dull, and that is the worst offense of all.

Nadel, Norman. "'Entertaining Mr. Sloane' Opens." New York Theatre Critics' Reviews. 26 (1965), 316.

"One of the things I have to keep in mind is continuity. I hate a choppy piece. Whether it's a review, or whatever I'm writing, it begins by drawing the reader in, it involves the reader in the ideas I want to deal with, gives the reader information, it provides insights for the reader to think about. Every critique should have a kind of logic so that it covers what it needs to cover and it has a nice continuity and is contained pretty much within itself. It is the same set of criteria that are applied to writing a short story, or writing a play."

Nadel's reviews do indeed exhibit a great deal of continuity. The sentences and paragraphs in each critique flow logically one into the other forming well-integrated pieces of work. There is no excess baggage in these reviews, only finely tuned words and ideas. Each piece follows its own unique organizational pattern governed by the significance of the elements of the play that are being discussed.

For example, in Nadel's review of The Subject Was Roses (fig. 1) the playwright's expertise at taking a simple story and treating it with strength and subtlety is the most significant element. This focal point also is the critique's organizing principle. Though Nadel also discusses the acting in his commentary, he subordinates this point to his analysis of the play and the playwright's skill. Often, Nadel provides a brief recapitulation of the plot prior to reviewing the performances. This way he can develop the characters and their

roles in the plot while also commenting on the acting. Such is the case in The Subject Was Roses. This technique allows the organizing principal to be maintained because the combined acting-character discussion is used to further the analysis of the skillful playwrighting. Also, by unifying the plot synopsis with his commentary on the characters and acting, Nadel avoids writing in predictable patterns; dividing his review into independent blocks, each devoted to a different aspect of the production. A technique such as this, though it makes writing easier, destroys continuity and uniqueness of organization.

Though the focal point in Nadel's review of The Seagull (fig. 2) is different from that in The Subject Was Roses, it is still the organizing principle. One of Nadel's tenets in his approach to continuity is that a review should cover only what is necessary and nothing more. Necessary could be defined as what is most relevant or important to a particular play or production. This practice of Nadel's is deftly illuminated in his review of Chekhov's work in which acting is the focal point, the necessary element. After writing a definitive lead which establishes acting as his critical focus, Nadel clarifies the boundaries of his review: "Let me illustrate, not from the sweeping scenes and the climactic areas of this darkly luminous tragedy, but from the quieter, transitional moments."¹⁰ This statement sets up an organizational framework that facilitates a great deal of continuity. Thus, the critique

satisfies Nadel's principle that pieces should discuss only what is necessary and be self-contained.

Entertaining Mr. Sloane (fig. 4) also uses the focal point to dictate the organizational structure, but in addition relies on another technique to lend continuity to the review; the development of a prevailing analogy. The comparison of Mr. Sloane to a cesspool is introduced in the lead and throughout the critique there are references to the play's "aroma," its pungency, and the fact that the characters "unsettle the stomach." In essence, the analogy adds fluidity and unity to the words and ideas being expressed.

Continuity, however, is only part of what Nadel considers to be important in terms of the technical aspect of writing. The journalistic function of criticism, that of reporting, also is essential.

"We have to keep in mind that the critic, whether he is writing for a newspaper, a weekly magazine or an academic quarterly or whatever, must keep in mind certain basic rules of journalism. In the course of criticism you have to do a certain amount of reporting, even if it's only saying this is the name of the play and this is the playwright and it was written in 1897 and there was a riot in the theater the first time it was performed or something like that, and at least something of what it was about. So there is an element of reporting and being able to deal with these factual elements concisely and accurately. It's important that you leave

yourself room for the actual critical writing that must go with it. So, I put fairly high on my scale the journalistic function of criticism. You cannot hang your criticism in mid-air. You have to say who, what, when, where and so forth."

Nadel, in fact, often has expressed aggravation toward critics who work halfway through a review before reporting on the name of the play and playwright. Consequently, in all of Nadel's critiques the who, what, when and where are presented early, usually in the first paragraph. In each figure cited thus far, with the exception of The Seagull, this is the rule. In The Seagull the names of the play, playwright, acting company, and theater where the play was performed are given in the second paragraph. Brief plot synopses also are provided early in each of these reviews, excluding again The Seagull in which only portions of the plot are discussed. This, however, is consistent with Nadel's overall objective for this particular analysis.

The amount of available newspaper space that can be devoted to criticism is yet another journalistic reality with which the writer must contend.

"The working critic also has to keep space and time limitations in mind. Other things are happening in the world, and a publication or broadcaster cannot give more than a certain fraction of its coverage to the arts. Naturally, we don't think it is enough, but those of us who are or have been editors understand the situation."¹¹

"Another reality to deal with is considering what the performance is worth in terms of occupying the readers' time and interest. Frequently, you will decide to give a certain area of the review a very comprehensive kind of coverage at the neglect of other areas, and you regret this, but it's the sort of decision that must be made. So as you write you are editing because you only have so much space you can deal with."

All of the preparatory and writing techniques discussed thus far are basic to Nadel's approach to criticism, and his expertise in these areas has contributed a great deal to his success as a critic. Nadel would, in fact, never have made the leap from Columbus to New York without having mastered the technical requirements of writing. However, there are other aspects of Nadel's critical ability which have raised him not only to first-string, but first-rate status. One of these is his ebullient style, and this will be the focus of the next chapter.

Footnotes

Unless otherwise noted, all quoted material is taken from two personal interviews conducted with Norman Nadel on Feb. 22 and Feb. 27, 1983.

¹Norman Nadel, "Openings and Insights," Lecture Manuscript, pp. 11-13.

²Norman Nadel, "Frank Gilroy Emerges as New Writing Giant," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 25 (1964), 254.

³Norman Nadel, "Chekhov's Genius is Mated with the Cast it Deserves," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 25 (1964), 301.

⁴Norman Nadel, "Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 23 (1962), 165.

⁵Norman Nadel, "Diffusion of Focus Disturbs Edward Albee's 'Delicate Balance,'" Norman Nadel's personal stringbook, 2 Oct. 1966.

⁶Norman Nadel, "'Iguana' Unleashed at the Royale," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 22 (1961), 133.

⁷Norman Nadel, "Osborne Play is a Shocker," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 26 (1965), 240.

⁸Norman Nadel, "Poor 'Jennie,' Alas, Is Just an Ordinary Mary," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 24 (1963), 237.

⁹Norman Nadel, "'Entertaining Mr. Sloane' Opens," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 26 (1965) 316.

¹⁰Nadel, "Chekhov's Genius," 25 (1964), 301.

¹¹Nadel, "Openings," p. 9.

CHAPTER 3

STYLE

Style is a personal way of doing things. It is, in fact, as personal as whether or not someone hangs up his clothes at night or simply drops them on the nearest chair. In a more formal sense, style could be defined as the manner in which means have been adapted to ends.¹ For actors, artists, teachers, architects, and the rest in a long list of professionals, style can be the discriminating factor which separates their work from that produced by others in their respective fields. Style distinguishes work that is merely technically accurate from that which is excellent, original and moving. For a writer, style can mean the difference between being condemned to life on the hometown paper or making it to the major leagues. Though Norman Nadel's writing is technically accurate and profoundly insightful, it is his style which sets his work apart from that churned out by a multitude of critics. Style is not a technique that can be contrived, it is rather an intrinsic reflection of the writer's personality. Such is the case with Nadel. His direct, personal way of communicating with people, and his wry, refined sense of humor are mirrored in the reviews he has written during the past 20 years.

It is a difficult task to write about the theater for a general audience whose theater education ranges from academic to none at all. But it is even more difficult to communicate with this same audience in an intimate, direct manner. Yet, this is exactly what Nadel manages to do. His style is not didactic or professorial, it is conversational. Nadel does not declare, he shares. The conversational quality of Nadel's writing not only is one of his stylistic hallmarks, but an ideal which is very important to him.

"I don't think of the people out there as a mass. I think of them as a lot of individuals, and I tend to talk face to face with my readers, person to person. The fact that I do this has been reflected in my mail response. People say that when they read me it is as if I am in their living room, and this makes me happy. If I can establish an aura, an atmosphere of friendly conversation, I'm halfway home."²

Although Nadel reveres the conversational ideal in writing, he believes that it is equally important to meet the needs of his readers, regardless of their varying levels of knowledge about the theater.

"I know there are all kinds of readers. When you write for a news service or general circulation newspaper you are writing for some people who know a great deal about theater, and people who know nothing about theater and you have to try to encompass as many of them as you realistically can."³

Both of these qualities, the educational and the conversational, are exemplified in Nadel's work. Take, for example,

Nadel's critique of Any Wednesday (fig. 5). Much like conversation, there is a natural quality to the language in this review. Nadel does not rely on fifty dollar words and lofty speech to give his ideas credibility. Rather, he uses combinations of simple, yet descriptive words which give his prose a comfortable, easy feeling. Phrases such as ". . . its comedy is deliciously satisfying" and "The charm is largely in the fluttering hands of Sandy Dennis" are imbued with insight while also retaining the conversational style. Nadel also doesn't shy away from contractions and incomplete sentences, both characteristics of natural speech. The lead and the first sentence of the second paragraph illustrate his use of these often shunned practices: "Any Wednesday for a long time to come, the Music Box Theater is going to be full of happy people. Also the rest of the week. 'Any Wednesday' is there to stay. This doesn't necessarily mean last night's clearly successful and very enjoyable opening unveiled a magnum opus . . ." ⁴ In addition to Nadel's choice of words, there is yet another element of his writing style which contributes to its conversational quality, his use of first person pronouns. Instead of referring to himself in the abstract as "this critic," Nadel employs the pronoun "I." Likewise, Nadel also often utilizes "us" to indicate the audience. Because use of first person is natural in common speech, it consequently adds a very personal flavor to Nadel's critiques. Throughout the review of Any Wednesday, Nadel's

Fig. 5. A review of Any Wednesday.

New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

February 19, 1964

The Theater — Norman Nadel

Music Box Brim Full Of — 'Wednesday' Fun

Any Wednesday for a long time to come, the Music Box Theater is going to be full of happy people. Also the rest of the week.

"Any Wednesday" is there to stay.



This doesn't necessarily mean last night's clearly successful and very enjoyable opening unveiled a magnum opus; it did introduce us to Muriel Resnik, a witty and sophisticated playwright whom we're glad to have around.

"Any Wednesday" actually is a small comedy (not that plays are to be measured by weights and mass) which starts slowly, sometimes hesitates, and only occasionally provokes uncontrolled hilarity. Nevertheless, its charm doesn't falter, its comedy is deliciously satisfying, and it keeps the audience happily involved all the way.

The charm is largely in the fluttering hands of Sandy Dennis, as Ellen, the ex-first-grade teacher and author-illustrator of children's books, who, for the past two years, has been available any Wednesday night to John Cleves (Don Porter), a rich, ruthless, spoiled, affectionate and married businessman.

In return for this convention, he has made her apartment a company property (and tax-deductible), and, as the play starts, he hangs about her white neck a garish but also deductible diamond necklace.

It's understandable that the audience should wise up to the duplicity of the once-a-week lover well before his mistress catches on. Porter lets us see John Cleves for what he really is, and if we don't hiss, it's because we like Miss Dennis, have to admit his attractiveness.

But she is 30, single, domestically inclined and mighty nervous. She staunchly forces herself to believe her man can be trusted.

It is because she holds so resolutely to

her trust in him, despite all evidence to the contrary, that the play sustains its comedy so well. Even when she is obviously enjoying the attention and husbandly solicitude of a personable young bachelor from Akron (Gene Hackman), she keeps proclaiming her faith in John.

The fourth character, of course, must be John's wife, and Rosemary Murphy (with playwright Resnick) makes her so different from the mistress that both characters are enriched. In fact, one of the best features of Miss Resnik's play is that she's made her four characters individual and strong, yet kept them interdependent. It's a lovely interweaving of roles.

Miss Resnik is at her best in the climactic scene which unites the four in a free-association game. There they sit, clapping hands rhythmically and saying the first thing that comes into their minds, so that the moment of truth takes care of itself.

In mentioning Miss Dennis' way with charm, I don't mean it's lacking elsewhere. But she—trembly of voice, verging on tears (or submerged in them), making little-girl faces at and for herself, is irresistibly dear, and ever so funny.

Even Miss Murphy, who naturally holds audience sympathy in the role of the wife, must share that affectionate concern with Miss Dennis. Miss Murphy's babbling gallery is comic and yet slightly poignant—an expert and meaningful blend. Hackman is engagingly free of postures or mannerisms, and Porter's self-righteousness comes across with impact.

Not all directors will treat this comedy exactly as Henry Kaplan has fashioned it. However, his way—honest rather than arty—helps make "Any Wednesday" the hit it appears to be.

Nadel, Norman. "Music Box Brim Full of 'Wednesday' Fun." New York Theatre Critics' Reviews. 26 (1965), 316.

simple sentence structure and language create a sense of unaffected speech that rests easily in the mind of the reader.

However, in spite of the fact that Nadel's vocabulary won't send readers to the dictionary nor will his sentence structure boggle the mind, there is enough critical depth to the review to satisfy even the educated theatergoer. Nadel does not simply rehash the plot and characters, but takes care to analyze their structure and development to prove why the play is successful. This is aptly exhibited in the following two examples.

"Any Wednesday" actually is a small comedy (not that plays are to be measured by weights and mass) which starts slowly, sometimes hesitates, and only occasionally provokes uncontrolled hilarity. Nevertheless, its charm doesn't falter, its comedy is deliciously satisfying, and it keeps the audience happily involved all the way.

. . . In fact, one of the best features of Miss Resnik's play is that she's made her four characters individual and strong, yet kept them interdependent. It's a lovely interweaving of roles.⁵

The acting also receives due attention, as Nadel examines some of the individual performers' treatment of their characters. His commentary is intelligent and perceptive because it goes beyond simply stating that the acting was good or bad.

Even Miss Murphey, who naturally holds audience sympathy in the role of the wife, must share that affectionate concern with Miss Dennis. Miss Murphey's babbling gaiety is comic and yet slightly poignant--an expert and meaningful blend. Hackman is engagingly free of postures or mannerisms, and Porter's self-righteousness comes across with impact.⁶

So, while Nadel is able to maintain a natural, easy-going style, he also provides insight which is stated in terms any reader can understand.

Nadel's talent at making his dramatic ideas intelligible, lucid and conversational also is highlighted in the leading paragraphs of a review of two Eugene Ionesco plays, The New Tenant and Victims of Duty. In this critique, Nadel lays the groundwork for his commentary on the two plays by providing a preliminary explanation of the dramatic genre Absurdism.

In the Theater of the Absurd, man seldom stands much of a chance. He usually exists in a kind of Orwellian state, an unspecified dictatorship that is relentlessly devouring his soul. He is looking for something or someone, though he and the audience aren't always sure just what or whom. He is being punished, without knowing why. Everything familiar and comforting about his life has become strange and antagonistic.

Thus the playwright sows dismay in his audience, and the loyal fans of avant-garde theater usually wouldn't want it any different. They want a grim riddle, an enigma, a deviously obscure statement about life; that's what Theater of the Absurd gives them.⁷

Here Nadel takes an abstract concept, one so elusive in fact that a book has been written about it, and clarifies its essence in two paragraphs. What's more, he has done so in a palatable manner. As usual, Nadel makes use of simple sentences, contractions and familiar terms to create a conversational tone, yet he does not sacrifice quality of content by cutting back on the quantity of words. What could be more descriptive or perceptive than "He usually exists in a kind of Orwellian state, an unspecified dictatorship that is

relentlessly devouring his soul." And, in the first sentence, with even more common and direct wordage, Nadel slices through all the philosophical assumptions about the Theater of the Absurd and defines its very core. However, Nadel's succinct definition of Absurdism is not likely to offend the dramatic intellectual because it adds new clarity to the concept.

The previous example illustrates another of Nadel's stylistic talents, that of being able to compact a great many ideas into relatively few words. By taking a broad subject, processing it mentally and cleaning out the waste, Nadel lays bare its essence. His technique shows not just precision writing, but precision thinking, and other of Nadel's reviews testify to this ability. In Nadel's critique of Marathon 33, he precedes a detailed discussion of the production with an analysis of truth in theater.

In the theater (or, for that matter, out of it), truth is elusive. Sometimes it can be captured through realism by making a play and its people as scrupulously true-to-life as possible. But this doesn't always work. Plays have been as correct as a photograph, or a mirror-image, and still have seemed arid, lacking truth or life.

So the theater has turned to symbolism, allegory, caricature, satire, and that assortment of styles currently labeled avant-garde, to isolate the truths of life. The little group of practitioners of Aesthetic Realism in the city maintains that truth, in art, is achieved only through opposites.

None of these techniques or interpretations work all the time, but undoubtedly all of them have worked some of the time. Like realistic drama itself, these are tools, which must be used honestly if they are to fashion an honest piece of work.

These paragraphs concretely define realism, "a play and its people [are] as scrupulously true-to-life as possible," and Aesthetic Realism, "truth, in art, is achieved only through opposites." However, Nadel goes beyond mere definition. He also comments on why realism failed and the fact its failure led to the avant-garde approaches, all of which enables Nadel to state his case on how these styles should be used if they are to succeed as "tools" in dramatic production. Needless to say, these ideas could be expanded to fill a book, but Nadel condenses his point into three paragraphs.

Nadel's skill at expressing a quantity of information concisely is revealed not only through his discussion of genres, but in his criticism of productions. Within the space of ten paragraphs in his review of Purlie Victorious (fig. 5) Nadel defines the nature of the play, it lies "somewhere between folk comedy and social documentary," the quality of the production in general and of each act specifically, and in addition provides a brief plot synopsis with an analysis of its purpose; "It is merely a framework for a hearty, positively gleeful spoof of many stereotypes in white-Negro relations."⁹ But, that's not all. Nadel also pats director Howard Da Silva on the back and pays ample attention to the acting by examining the performances of each actor and actress and the characters they portrayed. Furthermore, Nadel finds room to criticize the uneven pacing of the production and to applaud the sharpness of the play's satire. At first glance, it would seem Nadel could only provide superficial coverage of

Fig. 6. A review of Purlie Victorious.

New York World-Telegram

and
The Sun

September 29, 1961

'Purlie' Bows At the Cort

By NOEMAN NADEL.

Somewhere between a folk comedy and a social document lies "Purlie Victorious," a new play written by and starring Ossie Davis. It opened last night at the Cort Theater, before an audience that wanted eagerly to like it.

Such an attitude might be expected at a first night, but this seemed special. "Ossie Davis, speak out for the Negro people and for all the people who believe in freedom." Nobody actually said it—not to me, anyway—but it was in the air. "And entertain us, please, Ossie." That was in the air, too.

Well, Mr. Davis and company have indeed spoken out, with eloquence and a great deal of humor. "Purlie victorious" has a triumphant first act, in terms of theater, and a triumphant third act, in terms of social message. Sandwiched between them is a serviceable second act.

Freedom of the Cotton Patch.

As Purlie Victorious Judson, Mr. Davis returns to the Georgia cotton country "to reclaim the ancient pulpit of Grandpa Kincaid and preach freedom in the cotton patch." He brings an Alabama servant girl, Lutie Belle Gussie Mae Jenkins, whom he intends to pass off as the heiress to a \$500 inheritance. With the money he'll buy back the barn that once served the Cotchipee County Negroes as a church.

No one—least of all the playwright-star—expects you to take the plot seriously. It is merely a framework for a hearty, positively gleeful spoof of many stereotypes in white-Negro relations. In fact, there's hardly a stereotype in speech, accent, behavior, attitude or character Mr. Davis has overlooked. That, more than anything else, accounts for

the bright humor of this play, its keenness and its timeliness. As a satirical weapon, "Purlie Victorious" is on target every minute.

Vigor of the play lies not only in its dialogue but in the playing. Director Howard Da Silva has exploited his spirited cast and the straight-forward script for good impact. The play doesn't maintain its initial power all evening, but it never is allowed to drag.

As Purlie, Mr. Davis uses that resonant voice of his, that confident and explicit acting style and what seems to be a militant enthusiasm for his social message—all with exciting effect. His Purlie is positive and persuasive; ultimate victory is as implicit in his outlook as it is in his name.

A Lifetime of Charm Exuded.

Mrs. Davis—professionally Ruby Dee—manages to exude more charm in her first 10 minutes on stage than some women could conjure up in a lifetime. A priceless scene is that in which Purlie is describing Lutie Belle—in her presence—to his aunt. Miss Dee's uncontainable smile of joy and embarrassment is luminous.

As the Uncle Tom to end all Uncle Toms, Godfrey M. Cambridge is uproarious. Sorrell Booke portrays Ol' Cap'n Cotchipee, the plantation owner, with every bit of bigotry that fact and fancy have bestowed on such a position. Alan Alda is right as young Cotchipee, who has gone wrong with all those ideas of integration and such. Helen Martin as Aunt Missy and Beah Richards as Ol' Cap'n's cook are other powers in the play. Cl Herzog and Roger Carmel complete the cast as sheriff and deputy.

Not often does a comedy toss out as many laughable and meaningful lines as this, especially in the first act, and you're not apt to see better comedy playing. Despite some unevenness of pace (never a serious problem), "Purlie Victorious" makes its jubilant point as comedy and comment.

Nadel, Norman. "'Purlie' Bows at the Cort." New York Theatre Critics' Reviews. 22 (1961), 257.

so many elements in so short a space, but this is not so. By constructing each thought carefully and precisely, Nadel manages to give a great deal of substance to his review.

Part of the reason Nadel is able to say so much with so little is related to the fact that he is direct in his judgments. Although he may qualify an opinion by saying that a production was successful in some areas and unsuccessful in others, his statement will nonetheless be unequivocal. A prime example of Nadel's frank style is found in his review of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf.

No one will depart unshaken.

I doubt if anyone did Saturday night, after the curtain fell on Edward Albee's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf" at the Billy Rose Theater. Out of a tumult of impressions, ranging from admiration to distaste, one reaction thrusts itself foremost:

This play--unnerving, shocking, hilarious and terrifying--is the sum of astounding virtuosity--in direction, writing and acting. It has the vigor and force of talent to command an audience, and perhaps to compensate for its faults.

Along the way, it must be noted that Albee's new work is obsessively vulgar, unnecessarily obscene, too drawn out, and not ideally resolved.¹⁰

Though Nadel expresses a qualified opinion in this lead, he states it in certain terms: "The play--unnerving, shocking, hilarious and terrifying--is the sum of astounding virtuosity --in direction, writing and acting." Nadel's choice of words is specific, and communicates precisely his impression of the play. Nadel is no less unambiguous in his judgement of the play's weaknesses: ". . . it must be noted that Albee's new

work is obsessively vulgar, unnecessarily obscene, too drawn out, and not ideally resolved." There is no mincing of words here, nor is the reader left saying, "but, how does he really feel?" As is consistent with Nadel's style, he directly specifies early in the critique the play's vices and virtues so there will be ample room left to analyze each point in detail. By accurately stating his response to a production, Nadel is able to put a limited space to optimum use.

Clearly articulating his opinion not only allows Nadel to get the greatest mileage out of an available space, but it reveals that he is unafraid to take a stand, an admirable quality which is necessary to the successful critic. Expressing a decisive judgement makes the critic vulnerable to attack by disagreeable readers, but Nadel at least gives his readers something with which to disagree. This definitely is the case with Nadel's review of Jack Gelber's The Apple. The lead alone provides a taste of the unqualified distaste Nadel felt after seeing the production.

In the theater, almost anything can be excused, except boredom. And Jack Gelber's "The Apple," which opened last night at the Living Theater, is a crashing bore.¹¹

Though this sentiment may have boiled the blood of disapproving readers, Nadel's point of view is icily clear and its conciseness left him plenty of room to support his decision, not to mention to torch the rest of the production. However, Nadel is not definitive only when voicing negative opinions. He can be equally emphatic in his positive judgements, as is the case in Nadel's review of Hello, Dolly!

Joy. Celebration, merrymaking and glad-some sounds. "Hello, Dolly!" has arrived-- a glorious jewel to top this, or any season of mirthful musical theater.¹²

In this critique, Nadel chooses a variety of descriptive words to affirm the musical's quality, and, moreover, goes so far as to claim that the production is the season's best. No matter how valid a critic's belief might be, making a pronouncement of this kind is a risk, and the fact that Nadel is unafraid to do so is proof of his critical fortitude.

Regardless of whether Nadel likes or dislikes a play, he will do so directly, and what's more, cleverly. Nadel also has a sharp sense of humor which makes an occasional, refreshing appearance in some of his reviews. However, Nadel's cleverness never comes out and smacks the reader in the head. He is subtle, and this makes his humor all the more appealing. Examples of Nadel's jocular style abound, and his review of Mummers and Men (fig. 7) provides one sparkling sample. Though this critique may not have tickled the cast and director, its wit, albeit caustic, is no less apparent. In the lead, Nadel creates a vivid, somewhat distasteful picture of the dreary theater and the hamburger-devouring spectator. The image itself is humorous, but also serves to build suspense, since Nadel's point is not immediately clear. When Nadel does finally make his point in the second paragraph it acts something like a punch line because it comes as a surprise. Hyperbole also plays a part here. Nadel's exaggerated scenario in the lead and his "breathless," "blubbering" response to it

Theater

'Mummers' At Playhouse

By NORMAN NADEL

IN THE back row of the Provincetown Playhouse last night, a young woman sat wolfing a hamburger. A slight intake of breath with each bite was enough to keep the juice from running down her chin, but it could not control the odor of grease and onion which hung in the fetid air like debris in a reluctant drain. That, along with the general bleakness and decay of the theater, the insufferably bad taste of its decor and the bland despair of its design, rounded out an impression of desolation almost epic in its hopelessness. It was as if off-Broadway was seeking—and had found—its nadir.



Norman Nadel

Yet I watched that brief intermission tableau with breathless attention and almost blubbing gratitude. It was such a refuge from the opening performance, on the Provincetown's stage, of David Lifson's new play, "Mummers

and Men."

I think this is the worst play in the world. I think last night's performance was the shabbiest in the history of the living theater—or of this season, anyway. Never did I expect to see anything so shoddy it would make "Garden of Sweets" look good. (Earlier this season "Garden of Sweets" did for the Broadway theater what "Mummers and Men" is doing for off-Broadway. It ran one night.)

Playwright Lifson has used summer theater in a New England town as the setting for his murder mystery (there is neither murder nor mystery until the last scene of the last act, which should give you an idea).

In it, a blacklisted script-writer, now director, has written a play about the shooting of an actor by an actress' jealous husband—who also is an actor. The actual participants in this true-life drama are brought together again to play their own parts on stage. (The shooting victim had survived, the first time.)

Granted that the dialogue is impossible, you'd think that director Herbert Ratner, out of pride, might have given the play some form and fluidity. No. I don't think he even showed up; or if he did, he shouldn't have.

At first, it appears that Marie Jordan, playing an apprentice, is the worst actress in the world, but eventually Marianna Courtney, as the star, surpasses her. Virginia Kiser, as a younger actress, also is in the running.

The three girls are even worse than the men, which is going some. May I except from the general ineptitude of this company Eric Tavares, who plays the stage manager, and Bill Lazarus, in the role of the director. And may I suggest that no matter how much they love theater or need the money, they get out of "Mummers and Men" immediately.

Nadel, Norman. "'Mummers' At Playhouse." Norman Nadel's personal stringbook. 27 March 1962.

conjure up entertaining images that border on the absurd. Likewise, to say that the play was the worst in the world, or that actress Marie Jordon is the worst in the world probably is stretching the truth a bit, but Nadel's use of superlatives makes a blatant point that also is humorous. However, it should be noted that Nadel's jocose style in this review is being used as a means of conveying his opinion. Unlike some critics, Nadel is not being funny simply for the sake of it. As in his more serious critiques, the expression of ideas is of paramount importance.

To the same end, Nadel employs his wit to create a colorful, yet valuable, image in his critique of We're Civilized?

Fifteen minutes after "we're Civilized?"-- a new musical--had begun in the Jan Hus Theater last night, some urbane gentleman should have risen to his feet and carefully thrown a herring onto the stage.

It would not have to be a herring, of course. A flounder might even be better. Imagine a glistening flounder flying through the air, hitting the stage with a plop and sliding to the feet of the bewildered native dancers. The music would peter out, the principals would cease their idiotics, and "We're Civilized?" would shudder to a halt. The audience would quietly file out, leaving the company to contemplate the flounder (or herring) and their own monumental inadequacy. Then the cast would lift the symbolic fish and present it to director Martin B. Cohen and playwright Alfred Aiken.¹³

What a picture. The lead practically glows with humor. Once again, Nadel has produced a scene, an unrealistic one in this case, and exaggerated it to almost unbelievable lengths, which makes it all the more delightful. Choice language also takes the stage here. "Urbane gentleman" is so much more descriptive

than "a member of the audience," and such precise wording sharpens the review's satirical edge. So intense is Nadel's concern with word selection, or rather fish selection, that he cannot decide whether a herring or flounder is most appropriate for the occasion, but his indecision actually adds to the lead's humorous quality. However, it isn't just meticulous description which makes this piece funny. Nadel's entire scenario is, of course, a superb play on the title We're Civilized?, a temperament he obviously wished the audience had not possessed that night. As usual, all this serves to relate a vital point, not just about audiences, but about the musical too.

Writing cleverly, however, does not necessarily mean writing humorously. Cleverness also implies a certain skillfulness, dexterity and creativeness, qualities which also are revealed in Nadel's work. For instance, Nadel's leading paragraphs in his review of Stop the World I Want to Get Off are, without being the least bit funny, quite adroit.

Let's say you've been painting. Not still lifes, abstracts or figures, but walls, ceiling, woodwork. You are so full of the smell of paint that you're no longer aware of it. Then you open a window, and suddenly the incoming fresh air smells spiced, strange, foreign. It's wonderfully invigorating, but it takes getting used to.

Anthony Newley opened a window for the musical theater last night, providing the wholesome vigor its been needing. Like clean air in a painty room, "Stop the World I Want to Get Off" also takes getting used to--not just because it's foreign (English) but because it is so unexpectedly fresh.¹⁴

This lead is as fresh as the air Nadel is writing about. Through lucid description, Nadel inspires the feeling of being "full of the smell of paint" and the refreshing quality of a clean breeze as it blows through an open window. This situation probably is familiar to most readers, and by contrasting it with the unfamiliar, the new musical, Nadel succeeds in conveying and clarifying his point. And that is the crux of the matter. As in his other reviews, Nadel employs creative use of language to express his ideas interestingly so they will be more compelling.

Nadel's style, then, is really the culmination of many interdependent elements. It reveals Nadel's ability to embellish his ideas with humor and beauty, to be educational as well as conversational, and direct as well as concise. Dissecting Nadel's stylistic techniques somewhat ruins the overall effect, though, because it is actually the relationship of these elements which earmark Nadel's personal, genuine approach to writing.

Style alone does not a critic make, however, Insight into the play and the production also are crucial ingredients in criticism, and as the last two chapters will show, where insight is concerned Nadel has all the bases covered.

Footnotes

- ¹Oscar G. Brockett, The Theatre: An Introduction (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1964), p. 46.
- ²Personal interview with Norman Nadel, 22 Feb. 1983.
- ³Nadel, interview, 22 Feb. 1983.
- ⁴Norman Nadel, "Music Box Brim Full of 'Wednesday' Fun," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 25 (1964), 342.
- ⁵Nadel, "Wednesday," 25 (1964), 342.
- ⁶Nadel, "Wednesday," 25 (1964), 342.
- ⁷Norman Nadel, "Absurdity is Triumphant," Norman Nadel's personal stringbook, 25 May 1964.
- ⁸Norman Nadel, "Play Brings Awareness of Truth," Norman Nadel's personal stringbook, 11 Jan. 1964.
- ⁹Norman Nadel, "'Purlie' Bows at the Cort," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 22 (1961), 257.
- ¹⁰Norman Nadel, "'Who's Afraid' at Billy Rose," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 23 (1962), 254.
- ¹¹Norman Nadel, "Jack Gelber Offers 'Apple,'" Norman Nadel's personal stringbook, 8 Dec. 1961.
- ¹²Norman Nadel, "'Hello, Dolly' is Jewel of a Musical," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 25 (1964), 387-388.
- ¹³Norman Nadel, "'Civilized?' at Jan Hus," Norman Nadel's personal stringbook, 9 Nov. 1962.
- ¹⁴Norman Nadel, "'Stop the World' Opens at the Shubert," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 23 (1962), 260-261.

CHAPTER 4

THE PLAY

Mastery of the technical aspects of writing, that is, the ability to organize and produce structurally correct sentences and the like, is necessary for a person seeking a literary profession. Likewise, if a writer intends to achieve any measure of success, he must develop a personal style which will set his work apart from that of other writers. However, regardless of its stylistic excellence, writing is merely a vehicle for the discussion of ideas, and especially in the critical profession, ideas are of paramount importance. Ultimately, it is the quality of a review's content, not its style or technical accuracy, which determines the quality of the critique. In the realm of dramatic criticism, content is synonymous with insight into the play and the production, and in Norman Nadel's work both of these areas are covered thoroughly. Whether Nadel is discussing a dramatic work or the production of it, he does so not only with great care, but with a purpose: to enhance a reader's understanding of what he may have seen or may be planning to see on the stage. However, Nadel's targeted readership goes beyond members of the audience. Since there is a constructive basis underlying most of Nadel's criticism, his insights

also are of value to playwrights, players and directors. Because of the careful attention Nadel devotes to plays and productions, the final chapters of this analysis will examine the elements of his reviews which focus on these two primary aspects of a theatrical work.

At the heart of a play is its author, and the playwright seldom is ignored in Nadel's reviews. Nadel does not treat dramatic works as though they are independent of their authors, but rather as an extension of them. A writer's personal background, as well as any special talents or techniques he may use in his playwriting are factors in the final product. Consequently, Nadel often provides information about the playwright to add depth to an audience's understanding of the play. This insight may take the form of commentary on the writer's approach, or, as in Nadel's review of Anton Chekhov's Ivanov, may reveal circumstances in the author's life which contributed to the creation of the drama.

The circumstances of Chekhov's life just before he wrote this play in 1887 explain its theme as well as some of its most glaring faults of characterization.

The young author had been ready to marry a Jewish girl, which posed its share of problems in intolerant Russia. However, she refused to give up her beliefs and he certainly wasn't going to relinquish his (Greek Orthodox), so the engagement was broken off in 1886. (I am indebted to M. K. Argus, writing in Saturday Review, for this hitherto well-kept secret of Chekhov's life).

The following year, he wrote this play which envisions life of a sensitive Russian married to a Jewess . . .

After presenting this factual background, Nadel goes on to illustrate through a discussion of the plot how Chekhov's

experiences influenced the play's theme and the development of the female characters. This "well-kept secret" does indeed introduce a fresh perspective on Ivanov, one which would benefit past or prospective audience members.

In addition to supplying factual material, Nadel more frequently provides information related to the playwright's strengths or techniques in writing, thus laying the groundwork for an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses in the play. For example, in Nadel's review of The Bald Soprano and The Lesson, he precedes his criticism of the plays with a discussion of Eugene Ionesco's "peculiar talents" as a writer.

These are the peculiar talents of Eugene Ionesco, whose "The Bald Soprano" and "The Lesson" are back in town as a double bill which opened last night at the Gate Theater:

He perceives most talk as a noisy kind of vacuum--an endless cascade of words in which little or nothing is said.

He sees the cliché--which accounts for most ordinary conversation--as the most devilish instrument for destroying communication.

He can write out of his subconscious more freely than most of us can express conscious thoughts. We tend to snap our subconscious into line; to make it emerge as something orderly, reasonable and on speaking terms with reality. Ionesco, on the other hand, has written that "Realism is dried up, its revelations are faded, it has become academic and pompous, it is a prison." It doesn't imprison him, however. His inventions soar above reality.²

This lead not only creates a critical basis for Nadel's subsequent analysis of the plays, but also helps audience members, especially those unused to Ionesco's unusual style, get a grip on these productions.

There are numerous samples in Nadel's work which reveal his consistent practice of pinpointing the creative strengths of a playwright. The following excerpts, taken from Nadel's reviews of Wait Until Dark, The Private Ear and The Public Eye, and A Delicate Balance, are just three of many which clarify his use of this technique.

Frederick Knott is too careful a playwright to let holes in a script go undetected. As a result, "Wait Until Dark" is properly packed with significant details--looks, inflections, movements.

His earlier thrillers, "Dial M for Murder" and "Write Me a Murder" are evidence of this same careful craftsmanship. Knott doesn't pad out his plots, or waste the audience's time with superficial chatter.³

"The Private Ear" and "The Public Eye" are the clever titles of a pair of New-York-bound one-act plays now at the Globe Theater, but they could describe two of the talents of the playwright.

In "Five Finger Exercise" Peter Shaffer showed that he has an ear for those subtle but revealing turns of speech in ordinary conversation, and an eye to perceive personal drama in lives that might seem conventional to others.⁴

. . . [Albee] possesses one of the most discerning minds in the American theater, he can and often does write stunning dialogue, and usually he senses the most valid structure of a play. All these assets are in evidence in "A Delicate Balance" though not consistently.⁵

In all of these reviews, Nadel's highlighting of the playwright's strengths sets up a point of departure for more detailed criticism of the play. It also enables Nadel to measure the author's final product against his talents.

Without a doubt, one of the most prominent features in Nadel's critiques is his analysis of a play's strong and weak elements. Though the amount of space Nadel devotes to this varies with the production, his perceptions are always precise and are designed to benefit both the playwright and the audience member who may be trying to define his or her reaction to a play. How much time Nadel spends evaluating the strengths and weaknesses in a drama usually depends on the significance of these factors in terms of the quality of the overall production. Edward Albee's A Delicate Balance is a case in point. So puzzled was Nadel by his initial response to it that he wrote a follow-up critique several days later in which he took the play apart piece by piece to discover what was missing. In this review (fig. 8), Nadel's analysis is thorough and detailed. The lead clearly articulates Nadel's motivation for dissecting Albee's work, while at the same time providing insight into the varied intellectual responses a person has to a good or bad play. Then, through a discussion of the plot, Nadel identifies the primary problems in the drama. The lack of a strong central statement and the fact that drinking becomes a dramatic crutch in the play even though it's not really relevant to the central theme are two of the production's flaws. After stating his views and carefully supporting them, Nadel concisely summarizes his discoveries in the last paragraph.

"A Delicate Balance" makes concessions to the routines of the stage, and is diverted from what should be its central idea. It does suggest the presence of elusive uncertainties and outright terrors in life, and

Diffusion of Focus Disturbs Edward Albee's 'Delicate Balance'

By NORMAN NADEL

When a play is going well—and only then—we assimilate it as a single, unified, emotional and intellectual experience, even though we ~~assess~~ ^{assess} ourselves mental asides to admire a detail of performance, the delivery of a line, or the line itself. When something is wrong, however, we tend to break the drama down into components to find out what is malfunctioning, and why. A car is a car when it's purring along the highway, but when it falters, it becomes a carburetor, the ignition wiring, the distributor points, a manifold gasket and sundry other parts, one or more of which is faulty.

It was a while after the curtain rose on Edward Albee's "A Delicate Balance," at the Martin Beck Theater, that I began to separate it into components, and evaluate it part by part, to isolate the reasons for my nagging discontent with what should have been a totally arresting drama.

The process isn't easy with Albee, because he possesses one of the most discerning minds in the American theater; he can and often does write stunning dialogue, and usually he senses the most valid structure of a play. All these assets are in evidence in "A Delicate Balance" though not consistently.

Anyway, through a quantitative analysis, I reached the conclusion that this is a play about drinking. Now I know perfectly well that it isn't—primarily, anyway—and yet, if you weigh its content, that's pretty much how it comes out. The bar is the altar; someone always is paying homage to it.

The principal drinker is Rosemary Murphy, as the sister of a wealthy suburban woman (Jessica Tandy) who lives in enduring discontent and sporadic affection with her husband (Hume Cronyn). Miss Murphy claims she is not an alcoholic, and proves it through her brandy logic, but she certainly is faithful to liquor.

Then Cronyn devotes quite a bit of attention to the bar, and there's some clever talk between him and his house guest, Henderson Forsythe, about before-breakfast drinking, as one of several similar exchanges.

There hasn't been a better stage alcoholic in years than the one Miss Murphy gives us, yet I wonder why Albee felt he must lavish so much attention—and talent—on a role that is so much a cliché of drawing room comedy. And I realized that if all the business about drinking were to be edited out of the play the result would look painfully thin.

A second, though more diffuse element of the play is the throbbing unhappiness of the family. Cronyn and

Miss Tandy represent a middle-aged couple who have learned to live with considerably less than joy, while living in all the material comfort they need. Here Albee does expose the nerves of resentment, without, however, locating the causes of this resentment.

There are hints. The wife's sister might have had an affair with the husband. The daughter (Marian Seldes) has just come home from her fourth unsuccessful marriage. There was a son who died many years before. There is the fact of the husband's re-

fusal to chance having another child, and his wife's resentment of that.

Here we have legitimate meat of a drama, except that it is never brought into focus as it should be, nor is it sufficiently related to what should be the central substance of Albee's statement. And there lies my principal complaint.

Early in the evening, a neighbor couple (Forsythe and Carmen Mathews) arrive. They were sitting at home, quietly and, suddenly, at the same moment, both were afraid. So they have come to the home of their best friends, in order to feel safe. They even announce the next day that they plan to stay—indeinitely.

And this becomes the element of the play we want to know most about. We all have known the nameless fears, the terrors without shape or identity, that unexpectedly invade our lives. Yet only obliquely does Albee return to that theme. Fear is never even the tangible presence in the play that it should be. I even had the feeling, or suspicion, that it might have figured more prominently in the script at one time, then edited out, in favor of the drinking gimmick that is always sure-fire on stage.

The drama's insights impinge on this element of fear,

without ever quite penetrating it. Cronyn's all-night bout with indecision, as to whether to order the guests out or not, reveals the unalterable kind of truth we hope for in the theater.

But too much of the time, "A Delicate Balance" makes concessions to the routines of the stage, and is diverted from what should be its central idea. It does suggest the presence of elusive uncertainties and outright terrors in life, and therein lies its principal value. Having made such suggestions, it wanders off, time and time again. And therein lies its weakness.

Nadel, Norman. "Diffusion of Focus Disturbs Edward Albee's 'Delicate Balance.'" Norman Nadel's personal stringbook. 2 Oct. 1966.

therein lies its principal value. Having made such suggestions, it wanders off, time and time again. And therein lies its weakness.⁶

Another shining example of Nadel's sharp analytical ability is found in his review of The Sign in Sidney Brunstein's Window by Lorraine Hansberry. In this critique, Nadel not only pinpoints the play's weaknesses but explains why they exist.

. . . [Hansberry] has not expressed herself well, despite a commendable number of well-worded lines which, by themselves, ring clearly enough. The play as a whole is labored and long, insufficiently focused, and unable to stir much sympathetic or empathic feeling in the audience. Last night, for all the misery on stage, there probably wasn't a wet eye in the house.

This is because Miss Hansberry, like many a well-intentioned playwright before her, has failed to define the difference between that which is significantly tragic and that which is merely sordid The author has clouded her own drama, through a number of plot involvements which tend to negate rather than strengthen each other.⁷

Hansberry, Nadel says, has a great deal to say about morality, dedication, self-deceit and other issues, but because she packs her drama with too many statements it lacks proper focus. She also has failed to create a play with which an audience can become involved, a point that Nadel spends considerable space proving through a discussion of the plot and characters. Throughout this piece there is a constructive tenor to Nadel's criticism, making his evaluation profitable for the playwright. He credits Hansberry for having a worthy motive, thus building her up, but disagrees with her manner of expression.

Nadel also finds fault with the manner in which Jean Anouilh reveals his ideas in The Rehearsal (fig. 9), and in

Fig. 9. A review of The Rehearsal.

New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

September 24, 1963

The Theater—Norman Nadel

'The Rehearsal': Lot of Style, Little Audience Involvement

Perhaps it is the strength—or weakness—of our human instinct that we want to care about people into whose lives we are thrust. Even if we are involved with them only temporarily, or fictionally, we want this involvement to be more than casual. Their joy must be ours, and their pain as well.



Last night at the Royale Theater, we reached out for that involvement, willing to go more than halfway, at the opening of Jean Anouilh's bitter comedy, "The Rehearsal." Unquestionably, we were watching a deftly fashioned, sophisticated play, generous with those concise, ruefully comic and often quite elegant lines that set Anouilh apart from ordinary playwrights.

But—intentionally, perhaps—Anouilh has not permitted us to care for the people in "The Rehearsal," to react empathically to their amusing and unhappy encounters. We can't even despise or scorn them with any real enthusiasm.

And because we are not involved with these characters—not sufficiently, at least—we are not sufficiently involved with the play.

In a French chateau, a disolute count, his countess and guests are rehearsing a performance of Marivaux' "The Double Inconstancy" for a ball the count is giving in a few days. They are in Louis XV costumes, appropriate to the Marivaux romance, when "The Rehearsal" begins. And so cleverly has Anouilh fashioned the initial dialogue that you're into the situation quite well before realizing the time is the present.

The count is the thorough bad that his upbringing and attitude couldn't help but produce. Even when he falls in love—not with his wife or present mistress, but with the 20-year-old Lucile—the

audience is hardly likely to rejoice, as at some deserved bounty. Nor is it apt to grieve when that love is cruelly thwarted.

In similar fashion, the others cancel out any honestly felt concern. The countess is self-seeking, arrogant. Her lover is a pompous hypocrite. The count's mistress is a vain and silly woman. His life-long friend is an alcoholic and, by his own description, a professional at seducing women.

Lucile, indeed, is so good it comes out her pores, but even she touches us only briefly.

Not Colorfully Wicked

It would be quite different if these people were colorfully wicked—such as the fascinating people Anouilh created in "Waltz of the Toreadors," for example. But the characters of "The Rehearsal" have lived too long with their own boredom to be able to avoid sharing it with an audience, even when the ennui of their lives is momentarily put aside.

Nevertheless, there is a variety of satisfactions in the instant of watching this play, even if it leaves your mind with alarming rapidity during intermissions. Coral Browne, as the countess, brings flourish, high style and amusing disdain to her role.

There is no questioning the count's vigorous pursuit of pleasure, his present lack of enjoyment, or the startling discovery of his own capacity to love, in Keith Michell's portrayal.

Of all these people, it is Alan Badel as Hero, the count's friend, who comes closest to drawing the audience into the play. In the last act he does. Counting over the good scenes, I realize that he is in most of them.

Refreshing Contrast

There is a refreshing contrast in Jennifer Hilary's performance as the briefly virginal Lucile. Miss Hilary is wary, as she attempts at

her virtue warrant, and overwhelming romantic in giving in, as the nature of her character dictates.

Edward Bishop is too much a caricature as the wife's lover (which could be both script and direction). Adrienne Corri as the count's mistress is not as incisive a person as the role invites her to be.

"The Rehearsal" probably would achieve a greater audience empathy—possibly even enough—with more polished direction than Peter Goe has provided. Too much of the time you are conscious of an uncomfortable symmetry in the arrangements of people on stage—and this isn't excused by the fact that part of the time "The Rehearsal" is imitating and satirizing the studied figures of the Marivaux play being rehearsed.

Where direction, script and set all work beautifully in scenes such as Badel's recollections of the past with Michell; and Badel's expert, ruthless, merciless seduction of Lucile, who so totally loves the count. In them is the Anouilh who writes brilliant, snarling, bitter comedy. And in them is the acting we go to theater to see.

Nadel, Norman. "'The Rehearsal': Lot of Style, Little Audience Involvement." New York Theatre Critics' Reviews. 24 (1963), 286.

this case, Nadel's insights might be particularly useful to theatergoers who are grappling with their feelings about the play. In the opening paragraphs of this review, Nadel emphasizes the need for characters in a drama to arouse emotional audience involvement. He then makes note of Anouilh's attributes as a playwright which leads into the statement that though there are strengths in this play, Anouilh's attempt to distance the audience from the characters dissolves potential interest in the drama. Once Nadel establishes The Rehearsal's primary flaw, he supports his opinion by revealing the individual nature of the characters and by comparing them to the "colorfully wicked" people Anouilh created in Waltz of the Toreadors. This comparison asserts that Anouilh has the ability to achieve audience empathy through his work, but failed to do so in this instance.

Although the previous examples may seem to indicate otherwise, Nadel does not focus only on exposing the weaknesses of poor plays. Albeit a faulty work usually demands greater critical analysis, as Nadel pointed out in his review of A Delicate Balance, there is nevertheless a great deal to be learned from discovering why a good play works. Consequently, Nadel will occasionally channel his energy into uncovering the elements which contribute to a successful drama. An exemplary illustration of Nadel's ability to identify the virtues of a play is found in his dissection of A Severed Head (fig. 10) by J. B. Priestly and Iris Murdoch. After lauding both the playwrighting and the production, Nadel defines some few weaknesses in

The Theater—Norman Nadel

Bristol Old Vic Company

BRISTOL, England, May 29.—It's worth the trip up from London (about 115 miles) just to see the Theatre Royal, built in 1766 from Sir Christopher Wren's design, beautifully maintained and still a fine, functioning playhouse, even by modern standards. To watch the Bristol Old Vic company in action is a second and equal reward.



Norman Nadel

tended anywhere in at least the past year.

And the play! It's worth crossing the Atlantic to see "A Severed Head," by J. B. Priestley and Iris Murdoch, out of the Murdoch novel of the same name. This is an absolutely stunning event, in terms of both playwriting and production. Even when it drops below its own incredible level, "A Severed Head" is far above any new play I've at-

I'll venture to bet that if it had been in New York this season, it would have won the Drama Critics Circle Award in a walk.

Second Act

Not in several years has any playwright (or pair of them) turned out such a second act. Perhaps it is inevitable that the third act should seem anti-climactic, although it has its share of surprises. The difficulty is that the play's involvements pass beyond credulity at that point, but at the moment I can't suggest a better way to resolve it.

It certainly is a strange play, swinging like Poe's razor-edged pendulum from hilarious comedy to chill terror and back. At times it evokes the mood of "The Cocktail Party," even though it is little like the T. S. Eliot play. It is an ironic enigma, and a model of clarity. And it is the marital mixup to end all marital mixups.

"A Severed Head" begins conventionally enough with an errant husband (Robert Hardy) visiting his young mistress (Monica Evans)—a theater commonplace if ever there was one. Soon after, the action on Graham Barlow's excellent four-way set reveals that the wife (Heather Chasen) is having an affair with her psychoanalyst (theater stereotype No. 2).

Familiar Elements

Not content with these two hurdles, the playwrights permit a few more familiar elements to get the audience's guard down. What keeps this early part from being banal is that it is done so exceedingly well. You

know darned well that something is up, but you're not sure what.

And then it begins. First, with the unexpected attitude of the psychoanalyst (Paul Eddington) and the wife toward the husband. Then the husband's pose of virtue while his affair is still secret.

Disturbance and intrigue mount with the eerie presence of the psychoanalyst's half-sister, an anthropologist (Sheila Burrell). The husband's brother (Christopher Benjamin) and sister (Barbara Leigh-Hunt) take their places.

Form Appears

So it builds, from the relative simplicity of a somewhat self-righteous and cowardly wine merchant taking a coffee break in the bed of his young girlfriend.

The form it assumes as the play gains in mass and complexity is that of an inverted pyramid balanced on its point.

In alternately grim and outrageously comic terms, it charts the change in the husband as he is thrust from one appalling situation into another. It challenges the suspect virtue of truth, ridicules civilized behavior and flays modern morality.

Because the pyramid is kept perfectly but precariously balanced, the audience is kept in a state of tension. Only at the final curtain do you realize the form is really two pyramids, base to base, narrowing to another point on top. Even then, it is still balanced. The play's strange ending promises nothing solid, or secure, or eternal. Which is a good way to end this play.

Severed heads—real and symbolic—abound. The brother is a sculptor whose head of the wife causes the husband to wonder if she exists without her body. The anthropologist severs the head of a kabuki doll with the expert sweep of a samurai sword in another strongly symbolic scene. A box of human hair comes through the mail. I suppose this could be called heady fare.

"A Severed Head" opens in July in London. After that, if we're lucky, it will show upon a New York stage. Not only does Broadway need this play; we also should bring its director, Val May, to America—if necessary, by force.

Nadel, Norman. "Bristol Old Vic Company is Royal Treat." Norman Nadel's personal stringbook. 29 May 1963.

the third act, though these blemishes apparently did not scar an otherwise flawless production. Nadel was so intrigued by this play that he devotes most of the review to unearthing the structural facets of the drama which collectively produced such an impressive result. After comparing A Severed Head to Poe's "razor-edged pendulum," Nadel dives head-long into his analysis. He begins by unravelling the play's plot while simultaneously revealing its complex structure which is primarily built around ingenious surprises. This evaluation works to support Nadel's theory that the play's structure first appears to be like a perfectly balanced inverted pyramid, but in the end takes on the form of "two pyramids, base to base, narrowing to another point on top."⁸ This deftly constructed analogy, in addition to the detailed plot analysis, is evidence of Nadel's painstaking effort to impart the strengths of this production.

Another example of Nadel's expertise at identifying a play's strong points is provided by his review of Friedrich Duerrenmatt's The Physicists. Like A Severed Head, the drama's structure is its greatest asset.

. . . As in a skillfully constructed suspense play (which this is), each bit of information that clears up one situation serves to create a new mystery. Thus the play grows in fascinating complications, confounding its audience, even while it is progressively clarifying itself.⁹

As in his other critiques, Nadel provides this information to aid audience understanding, and, as is consistent with the

norm, he validates his findings through an examination of the play's plot.

Routing out and bringing to light the strengths and weaknesses of a drama actually is only part of Nadel's approach to reviewing. Closely allied with this technique is Nadel's practice of suggesting ways a play can be improved. Inherent in Nadel's philosophy of criticism is his belief that the critic should write constructively, or, in a sense, act as a "play doctor." The fact that Nadel gives advice on ways a dramatic work can be revised is proof that he converts his beliefs into action. Excerpts from three reviews, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf, Kean, and The Mound Builders, illustrate Nadel's corrective brand of criticism.

Alan Schneider long has impressed me as a director who could make "Chicken Little" into an international stage hit. "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?", with its acetylene torch dialogue, its adult, brainy comedy, and its merciless probing of the marrow of human agony, gives him a glorious opportunity which he has exploited masterfully.

If he and Albee could clip about 10 minutes out of each of the first two acts (some of the repetitious comedy perhaps), and rephrase some uncomfortable and almost banal moments in the third, they would have quite a play indeed.¹⁰

"Kean" is set back by a few sequences that just don't come off--that in which Lady Elena and the prince are in their baths (separately, of course) is one. The story line seems overextended at some points and forgotten at others. To tighten up this musical play by 15 minutes would bring it into sharper focus, and the final scenes would be redirected to advantage.¹¹

. . . anyone who could see beyond some painfully conspicuous flaws in plot structure, dialogue, resolution, acting and direction, could also see that "The Mound Builders" is potentially a more powerful and substantial drama than the same playwright's [Lanford Wilson] long-running, award-winning "Hot 1 Baltimore."

The conditional "potentially" must be included because as it stands, the new play cries out for the removal of unessential dialogue, tightening up of direction and action, and for sharper focus¹²

In all of these reviews, Nadel's suggestions are interjected after an analysis of the play as a whole, and taken in that context, his proposals are even more substantial than they appear here. Although Nadel does not indicate exactly which lines should be cut or rephrased, or precisely how a play could be focused more tightly (lack of space does not allow him this luxury), his comments are direct enough to give a playwright or director a credible course of action.

Just as Nadel's recommendations for how a play can be improved are directed at theater practitioners, many elements in his reviews are intended primarily for theatergoers. For instance, material on the personal background of the playwright, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, falls into this category. In addition, there are three other types of information which Nadel provides essentially for the audience: an interpretation of the meaning of a play or the author's intent; historical references related to a drama; and advice on for whom a particular play may be most suitable.

An analysis of a drama's meaning or the author's purpose in writing it is valuable to an audience member because it elevates his or her understanding of theatrical work as a whole. There are numerous reviews which reveal Nadel's practice of laying bare the thematic essence of a play or the playwright's intent. Among them are the passages taken from the following four critiques; The Investigation, The Last Analysis, Romulus, and Oh What a Lovely War.

Weiss' clear intent is to let the facts of the Frankfurt trials, which began in January, 1964 and ended in August, 1965, speak for themselves

Weiss has intentionally set aside the function of playwright to assume the function of reporter. In that the play thrusts necessary information before our eyes, and forces us to take a stand, at least privately, about humanity and monstrous inhumanity, he has accomplished his purpose.¹³

"The Last Analysis" falters as a philosophy, founders as farce, and fails as a play. But it never quite loses the sad courage or vestigial dignity of an impassioned and often intelligent attempt to reveal man as he really is.

The man--or men--whom playwright Saul Bellow seeks to reveal are those public figures in non-intellectual pursuits who sink into orgies of self-analysis in middle life.¹⁴

Along with weaving a wicked satire on history, "Romulus" touches sensitively on the anguish of life in a turbulent world. The emperor tells a loyal-to-the-death young soldier: "You were born too late to change the awful past and too soon to make a noble future." Such is living in limbo, at the end of an era.¹⁵

We have had more wars since then, but never one more stupid, more wasteful or badly managed than World War I. Miss Littlewood's account of it in "Oh What a Lovely

War," is designed to prove that war is not noble, but needless, and that ordinary people are the victims of governmental and military error, conceit and callousness.¹⁶

In all of these reviews, Nadel's interpretations are stated in simple terms; to do otherwise would defeat his purpose. Also, Nadel articulates the play's message or writer's intentions concisely so that they will be easier to grasp. He doesn't try to dig out obscure meanings which might not actually exist or only serve to cloud the matter in the long run, but rather seeks to expose that which is most plausible and realistic.

Revealing the historical context from which a play comes also helps Nadel achieve his objective of increasing the audience's understanding of a drama. Though the background information Nadel includes in a critique varies with the production, the selection of such material always is based on what is most relevant to a play and what will best meet audience need. For example, when Nadel reviewed A Case of Libel he published its literary source to give an audience a point of reference for further exploration of the play.

. . . one way to top a fictional courtroom drama is to base it on truth, which is usually more interesting anyway. That is what Henry Denker has done in "A Case of Libel," which opened last night at the Long-acre Theater. It is drawn from Louis Nizer's account of his distinguished career in law, "My Life in Court," and specifically from the first chapter, which is titled: "Reputation--The Libel Case, of Quentin Reynolds vs. Westbrook Pegler."¹⁷

Nadel also reveals the historical context of the drama in his critique of The Phantom Lady by Calderon de la Barca. Although the information takes a slightly different form than that which Nadel included in his review of A Case of Libel, it serves a similar function; that of enlightening the audience.

"The Phantom Lady" contrasts sharply with the prevailing tragic, or religious, tone of most Spanish theater of the time, including the major segment of Calderon's own work. Its comedy is sometimes sophisticated, usually flippant and occasionally almost slapstick. Yet it is built on the rigid, double-standard morality of the period, which actually was more apt to promote anguish than laughter.¹⁸

Despite its length, this excerpt is packed with valuable insight. Nadel clarifies the precise comic qualities of the play, and through comparison, establishes the predominant nature of the dramatic works written as part of the Spanish Golden Age. Additionally, Nadel defines the basic attitudinal bent of those who lived in this period. This material not only enhances an audience's perception of this particular play, but of any play written by Calderon, or for that matter, any drama produced during this era of Spanish theater.

A final example which illustrates Nadel's practice of painting an historical backdrop for a play comes from his review of The Trojan Women. In this critique, Nadel relates the factual events which led to the creation of this tragedy by Euripides. This background information illuminates the meaning of the drama and enlarges its significance for the audience.

Only the year before [the play was written], Euripides had seen his noble Athens cruelly slaughter all the adult males of the small island of Melos, simply because Melos wanted to remain neutral. The women and children were enslaved.

So in the spring of 415 B.C., Euripides offered "The Trojan Women," a parallel of the Melos tragedy. Thus the Athenians could assess war not as victors (their own disastrous foray against Syracuse was soon to come) but through the suffering of the women of the vanquished.¹⁹

Along with providing a brief historical lesson, it should be noted that Nadel also has articulated Euripides' purpose for writing the play. In doing so, Nadel not only has validated but enhanced the importance of the drama, while at the same time showing that the lessons to be learned from the tragedy are relevant to the present. Though the technology for killing may be more advanced, today's wars still leave behind those survivors who must suffer the loss of their loved ones.

The audience is clearly at the forefront of Nadel's mind when he provides thematic interpretations or historical information in a review, and to the same, if not a greater extent this is true when he recommends for whom a play is most suitable. Realistically speaking, even the best of productions will not appeal to the tastes of all people. A play which titillates some theatergoers may simultaneously confound or disgust others, and if Nadel believes a production might incite this type of audience response he will point it out in his critiques. Such was the case when Nadel reviewed The Homecoming and Inadmissible Evidence, two plays which prompted him to caution unwary or potentially unappreciative audience members about seeing these productions.

This doesn't mean that everybody is going to enjoy "The Homecoming." On the contrary, I suspect its greatest appeal will be to the adventurers among theatergoers, and of them, only those with a taste for enigmas. Many people will be outraged at having been "put on," or exasperated by Pinter's blithe abandonment of either logic or reality. Even those of us who found last night's experience stimulating had to wait patiently through maddeningly deliberate conversations that descended into tedium.²⁰

Not everybody is going to like "Inadmissible Evidence," especially those people who go to the theater for jolly fun. It is drama designed only for adult adults, and even they'll debate far into the night.

Playwright Osborne has his main character say things that will shock you to your heels; be prepared for this, or stay home²¹

In these reviews Nadel proffers his advice for the same purpose, but his reasons for doing so are different for each play. Nadel forewarns theatergoers in his critique of The Homecoming because he apparently believes that the drama's intellectual content may frustrate or aggravate some audiences. However, in his review of Inadmissible Evidence, Nadel's monitory passage serves much the same function as a movie rating since it is based on the fact that the abrasive language and sexual material in the play may offend some people. Furthermore, it should be noted that Nadel's recommendations are not meant as an indictment of these plays, because his critical opinion of both is essentially positive. He includes such admonishments merely to help theatergoers make a decision about whether or not to attend these productions.

Analyzing a playwright's talents, the meaning of a play, and its strengths and weaknesses are basic practices in Nadel's

approach to criticism. However, there is another type of production, the musical, which demands an additional form of critical attention. Since music is an integral part of the musical play, Nadel makes a point of evaluating this aspect of the performance in his reviews. And because of his extensive background in music, which includes a college degree as well as experience as both an instrumentalist and conductor, Nadel is well-qualified to make this kind of assessment.

Music in a production actually encompasses a variety of elements, such as the melodies, lyrics and orchestration. When Nadel critiques a musical, he places emphasis on those facets which are most significant or will most enhance the audience's understanding of what they heard in the theater. For example, in his review of Man of La Mancha, Nadel predominantly focuses on the style of the music and the unusual orchestral arrangement.

. . . "Man of La Mancha" mates theater and music with excitement and invention. In its general aspect, the show is more like Leonard Bernstein's "Candide" than it is like the conventional musical.

Composer Mitch Leigh uses a split orchestra, half on each side of the stage, with arrangements which bring to mind a modern chamber ensemble rather than the usual pit band. The rhythms are essentially Spanish though the melodies have a kind of contemporary lyricism. While Leigh never goes far out structurally or harmonically, he does refresh the score with, for example, major intervals against a minor setting in Miss Diener's "It's All the Same," and a haunting phrase reminiscent of Hanson's "Romantic Symphony" in "The Unreachable Star."²²

In this review, Nadel's comparison of the show to Candide gives the audience a familiar point of reference. In addition, his classification of the musical styles represented in the production contributes to the audience's understanding of the melodies and rhythms. Nadel's insights are not only of value to the audience, however. His analysis also benefits Mitch Leigh because it provides the composer with expert feedback on the quality of his work.

Nadel's evaluation of the music in Mame serves a similar purpose, though he focuses on different elements than those which he brought to light in his critique of Man of La Mancha. In this excerpt, Nadel makes a generalized statement about the quality of the music, and follows it with a description of the features or effects of each song.

[For Mame] composer-lyricist Jerry Herman has prepared an assortment of songs which will please hundreds of thousands, who will be charmed by their singability and their essential familiarity. The few of us who hoped for something less mundane, musically, still have to admit that his score fits the show and its 1920's-30's period.

"It's Today" isn't original, but it's loud and emphatic. "Open a New Window" achieves its upbeat effect through its simple scale. "The Man in the Moon" amusingly pokes fun at the old-time musicals (even older-time than "Mame"), and it's a cheery production number, too. This describes what happens when Vera gives Mame a role in her show.

"My Best Girl" already is on its way to the kind of hit status which can make a weak show and enhance a strong one such as this. Vera and Mame's "Bosom Buddies" has a rousing comedy effect. "Mame," the title tune, re-works some successful ingredients of "Hello, Dolly."²³

Here, Nadel's criticism gives the composer-lyricist some valuable insight into the impact of his creations, while elevating the audience's perceptions into the quality of the music. What's more, his comparison of the title song "Mame" to "Hello Dolly" illuminates the audience's understanding of the influences which may have contributed to the development of this composition.

In Nadel's review of Evita, his comments also enlighten the audience to the stylistic influences behind the musical score. Additionally, he provides background information on the previous work of the composer and lyricist to create a basis for his positive judgement of their current production.

In the case of "Evita," the greatest strength, apart from the life of Argentina's dyed-blond tyrant herself, lies in the music and lyrics by the English team of Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice. Their "Jesus Christ Superstar" in 1969, which not all of us admired but which was a hit, made it clear enough that their approach to the musical stage was very much their own, and in "Evita" they have passed beyond and above that earlier success.

Music which combines the driving urgency of rock with the syrupy sentimentality of bad Latin-American romantic popular songs, and even with the spirituality of the Catholic mass, tells as much about Eva Peron and her era as does the plot itself.²⁴

In all of these critiques, Nadel's analysis is directed at both members of the audience and theater practitioners. Yet, -espite his knowledge, Nadel does not couch his insights in language which is obscure to all but professional musicians. By stating his assessment in terms which most likely are familiar to theatergoers, or by comparing the musical numbers

from the current show to ones from a better-known production, he makes his ideas accessible to a general readership.

After examining the varied techniques that Nadel uses when analyzing a play, it becomes apparent that at the crux of Nadel's approach is his concern for meeting the needs of his readers, primarily those who attend the theater, and secondarily those who work in the theater. Also apparent is Nadel's tremendous caring and compassion for dramatic art which reveals itself in his constructive style of criticism. Though Nadel may take great pains to dissect the weaknesses of a play, he does so to promote the quality of theater, not to tear it down, and this desire to encourage the maintenance of high standards is a result of his love for the art form. Plays and playwrights are not the only recipients of Nadel's careful attention, however. He expends the same intense critical energy when scrutinizing facets of production, and the way in which Nadel goes about this is the focus of the final chapter.

Footnotes

¹Norman Nadel, "Ivanov," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 27 (1966), 309.

²Norman Nadel, "Ionesco's Twin Bill is a Double-Hitter," Norman Nadel's personal stringbook, 18 Sept. 1963.

³Norman Nadel, "'Wait Until Dark' is Tense Thriller," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 27 (1966), 378.

⁴Norman Nadel, "'Eye,' 'Ear' of the Globe," Norman Nadel's personal stringbook, 1 June 1963.

⁵Norman Nadel, "Diffusion of Focus Disturbs Edward Albee's 'Delicate Balance,'" Norman Nadel's personal stringbook, 2 Oct. 1966.

⁶Nadel, "Diffusion," 2 Oct. 1966.

⁷Norman Nadel, "Brustein is Unfocused; So is Play," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 25 (1964), 191.

⁸Norman Nadel, "Bristol Old Vic Company is Royal Treat," Norman Nadel's personal stringbook, 29 May 1963.

⁹Norman Nadel, "'Physicists' is Truly Theater Science," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 25 (1964), 194-195.

¹⁰Norman Nadel, "'Who's Afraid' at Billy Rose," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 23 (1962), 254.

¹¹Norman Nadel, "'Kean' Debuts at Broadway," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 22 (1961), 181.

¹²Norman Nadel, "The Mound Builders," Norman Nadel's personal stringbook, 8 Feb. 1975.

¹³Norman Nadel, "'Investigation': More History Than Play," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 27 (1966), 281.

¹⁴Norman Nadel, "'Analysis' is Vivid but Slips as Farce," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 25 (1964), 207.

¹⁵Norman Nadel, "'Romulus' at Music Box," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 23 (1962), 381.

¹⁶Norman Nadel, "London Gives us a Rare Musical," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 25 (1964), 210-211.

¹⁷Norman Nadel, "'A Case of Libel' is Suspenseful," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 24 (1963), 247.

¹⁸Norman Nadel, "Two Men of Madrid Bring Back a Bit of Spain," Norman Nadel's personal stringbook, 8 March 1965.

¹⁹Norman Nadel, "Miss Ebert is Magnificent in her Towering Tragedy," Norman Nadel's personal stringbook, 24 Dec. 1963.

²⁰Norman Nadel, "'Homecoming' Unfathomable," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 28 (1967), 396.

²¹Norman Nadel, "Osborne Play is a Shocker," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 26 (1965), 253-254.

²²Norman Nadel, "'La Mancha': Dream of a Musical," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 26 (1965), 253-254.

²³Norman Nadel, "Mame," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 27 (1966), 303.

²⁴Norman Nadel, "Evita," Norman Nadel's personal stringbook, 22 Sept. 1979.

CHAPTER 5

THE PRODUCTION

"The play is the thing . . . " Or so Hamlet said. But a play would be nothing more than voiceless words on paper without actors to express them, directors to shape their expression, and a myriad of other talented people, including costume, lighting and set designers, all of whom work to bring a drama off of the page and onto the stage. Though Norman Nadel believes in the importance of the play, he also recognizes the significance of a cast and supporting crew who are responsible for breathing life into a drama. Consequently, Nadel places critical emphasis on the performance aspect of a dramatic work, and he is no less stringent in his evaluation of the production than he is in his analysis of the play. Similarly, Nadel follows a constructive approach in his criticism of the performance so that his insights will benefit those who created the theatrical event as well as those who observed it.

When considering those who contribute to the production of a play, the actors and actresses usually come to mind first because they are the visible elements of the production, the people with whom the audience comes in contact while attending the theater. Aside from being highly visible, the players also exert a considerable influence in terms of the success

or failure of a play, and because of this Nadel always allots critical space for a discussion of the acting. Like his analysis into the other aspects of a production, Nadel's insights into the performances are direct and specific, leaving little room for doubt about the nature of his opinion. The amount of detail Nadel provides on the acting depends on its significance to the overall production, but regardless of this, he avoids making sweeping generalizations and maintains a constructive approach in his criticism. Nadel's corrective style, as well as his ability to pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses in a performance, are clearly revealed in his review of Wait Until Dark, a suspense drama written by Frederick Knott.

Even though Lee Remick isn't playing the blind girl nearly well enough yet, she understands the role in its outline and in its potential. If the subtle beginnings of terror were more skillfully revealed, and if she were to articulate her growing fear, her mounting suspicion and her emerging self-reliance more as crescendos, the performance could glow. As it is, she seems to move rather abruptly from one state of mind to the next. The role needs a more positive sense of development than either she or director Arthur Penn has given it.

By contrast, Robert Duvall sets the audience on guard the first moment he appears, as a bald tramp with an ancient rug clutched in his arms. You don't turn your back on such a man, that's the instinctive reaction and it's the right one.

With each successive appearance, and in several more guises, he becomes more and more the loadstone of terror. He is the man whom the blind girl must fear, he is the ultimate adversary. It is the best role, and by far the best performance.

Mitchell Ryan and Val Bisoglio are the two younger criminals seeking a doll which they believe is hidden in the girl's apartment. Attractive and slightly amusing, they fill

out the variety of attitudes which benefits the play. Julie Herron warms up to her role as the little child who lives upstairs, and James Copgdon ably portrays the blind girl's husband.¹

This critique exposes Nadel's tremendous capacity for understanding the nature of a character and his talent for assessing the positive and negative aspects of a performance. Nadel's capability to compare what was with what should have been lends authority and credibility to his assertions, while giving the audience a clear concept of the quality of the acting. Especially in respect to Remick's portrayal of the blind girl, Nadel's perceptions are precise enough to serve as a guide for improving her characterization. In his discussion of Duvall's performance, Nadel describes the character and his impact through the use of examples. These help to clarify and validate Nadel's positive evaluation because they provide the audience with a point of reference. Since they fill the two most prominent roles, Duvall and Remick receive the most attention in this review. Yet Nadel has not ignored the rest of the cast, as he does provide specific, though brief, feedback on the supporting performances.

Nadel's ability to define how a character should be developed in contrast with how the role actually was portrayed also is illustrated in his analysis of Lou Antonio's performance of Doctor Faustus from the play of the same name. In this review, Nadel criticizes the work of the rest of the cast, but because of the depth and detail in his commentary on Faustus, this segment is the most noteworthy.

Even though Lou Antonio speaks Doctor Faustus with admirable clarity, his delivery lacks the subtlety and the seasoning this major role requires. Faustus must be a presence, a force, even if he is a despicable one. He must be massive in his own eyes, at least, as he exercises his dark power to bring forth Alexander, or Helen of Troy, or work enchantments to entertain his friends. His gradual discovery of the emptiness of such a life does come through in Antonio's performance, but without the depths and insights required. Antonio's posture, as well as his repetition of the same few grimaces, and the accenting of his sentences, all work against the brooding authority, the world-anguish which Faustus must convey.²

As in his critique of Wait Until Dark, Nadel's constructive criticisms here are integrated with his discussion of the strengths and weaknesses in Antonio's portrayal. After complimenting the actor for his clarity in presentation, Nadel outlines the character traits that Faustus should possess, and then explains why Antonio failed to hit the target. He also identifies specific faults in the actor's speech and mannerisms. This detail is beneficial to the audience as well as Antonio because it is something concrete to which they can relate.

Though Nadel's analysis of the acting in the previous critiques is precise, the amount of space he could devote to such an evaluation was limited by the fact that there were other elements in these productions which were of greater significance. However, in Nadel's critique of Hamlet (fig. 11) the acting takes center stage because it was the dominant aspect of this presentation. After discussing the principal difficulties presented by the oft-acted role of Hamlet, Nadel



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The Theater — Norman Nadel

Ah, Sweet Prince— Burton's Great

The actor who plays "Hamlet" lives with more ghosts than Shakespeare wrote into all his plays. Between him and the audience walk well-defined shadows of Hamlets remembered and Hamlets imagined. Anyone who has seen the play before, or who has read it, has at least one mental picture of the Prince of Denmark.



So a measure of an actor's achievement in the role is how well he can exorcise these ghosts—how well he can obliterate, at least for the time being, the recollection of any Hamlet but the one he has become.

Last night in the Lunt-Fontanne Theater, Richard Burton swept mind and memory clean of all other Hamlets. In a performance so lucid and sensible that people will speak of it for years. What a problem he has posed for Hamlets to come.

To begin, Burton is physically right. He appears trim and fit, in contrast with photos in the past year which revealed a slightly flabby actor. The planes of his face are well-defined, showing strength and maturity. Yet there is just enough softness of contour to identify the quality of youth. This combination is right for the age and circumstance of Hamlet. The attractiveness of such a man—obvious to other men and apparently overwhelming to women—cannot be discounted.

No dreamy introspection veils the Burton eyes. You can almost see the shafts of searching sight that emanate from them, as he penetrates the black connivance of his murderous uncle or the ponderous plotting of Polonius.

His eyes move swiftly, as

does Burton himself. He never permits the role to become milky or diffused. Even in the moments of indecision or dismay which Hamlet endures, you can see his mind—not floundering or going numb, but already searching out, testing and taking aim toward a new course of action.

He is the quicksilver Hamlet, as I believe Shakespeare intended this man to be. The changes of mood are sudden and total. The posture of madness has a Mephistophelian eagerness, that ties in logically with the tingling humor so often evident in this Hamlet's personality.

And the voice! Ah, chil-

dren and gray-beards, the voice! Granted that Shakespeare has given everyone in "Hamlet" a selection of the most exquisite dramatic speech in the English language, and the Danish prince more than anyone else. Burton honors it with unbounded excellences of timbre range and expression.

Beyond all this, Burton's Hamlet is consistent—and this is not easy to achieve with a man whose behavior embraces comedy, craftiness and murder. You are always seeing Hamlet—not Burton—and a Hamlet whose power of personality mounts steadily as the play pursues its ever-astonishing course.

It's obviously unfair to delay this long in mentioning the rest of the company, or to give the impression that "Hamlet" is a one-man show. In cold fact, however, the Hamlet role is the one that most commands attention, and if it weren't, something would be wrong.

Nevertheless, the ultimate triumph, last night as always, was Shakespeare's. That points immediately to Sir John Gielgud, whose production and direction make a clear design of the drama's many threads.

At first the appearance of players in rehearsal clothing is irritating. I cannot accept the theory that costuming detracts from the words of the play; this rehearsal run-through gimmick is more of a distraction. However, you

The Cast

LUNT-FONTANNE THEATER

A revival of the tragedy by William Shakespeare, designed by Ben Edwards, lighting by Jean Rosenthal, clothes by Jane Greenwood, staged by John Gielgud, produced in association with Fremman, presented by Alexander H. Cohen with the following cast:

Bernardo Robert Burr
Francisco Michael Ebert
Marcellus Bernard Hughes
Horatio Robert Mill
Claudius Alfred Drake
Voltemand Philip Coolidge
Cornelius Hugh Alexander
Laertes John Cullum
Polonius Hume Cronyn
Hamlet Richard Burton
Gertrude Eileen Herlie
Ophelia Linda March
Ghost The Voice of John Gielgud
Reynolds Dillen Evans
Rosencrantz Clement Fowler
Guildenstern William Redfield
Player King George Voskovec
Player Proteus John Hetherington
Player Queen Christopher Calkin
Lucanor Geoff Garland
Fortinbras Michael Ebert
A Gentleman Richard Sterne
First Gravedigger George Rose
Second Gravedigger Hugh Alexander
Priest Bernard Hughes
Osric Dillen Evans
English Ambassador Hugh Alexander

do get used to it in time, and eventually it doesn't matter—which is another measure of the director's and the company's accomplishment.

John Cullum is a dynamic Laertes, whose rage and anguish at his father's murder and his sister's drowning are a wave of heat from the stage. The duel scene (Burton and Cullum) is outstanding.

Hume Cronyn's Polonius seems almost precious, at first, with his high, rasping voice and mincing manner, but he convinces you that such a Polonius is not only valid but fascinating. While senior actresses have searched out more dark secrets in the role of Ophelia, few have been more suitable in appearance or general demeanor than Linda March. Her mad scenes are wistful and poignant.

As king and queen, Alfred Drake and Eileen Herlie bring their roles the flourish we expect from two such distinguished players. George Rose gives us one of the best gravediggers in recent memory. Robert Mill is a good Horatio, and Clement Fowler and William Redfield convey the duplicity of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. George Voskovec as leader of the players is another asset of this most exceptional "Hamlet."

Nadel, Norman. "Ah, Sweet Prince--Burton's Great." New York Theatre Critics' Reviews. 25 (1964), 287.

skillfully illuminates the nuances in Richard Burton's superlative portrayal of the Prince of Denmark. With bountiful detail, Nadel describes the physical and emotional qualities which Burton brought to the character. Burton's face and stature, the use of his eyes and voice, and his consistent characterization are a few of the quintessential elements which contributed to this actor's peerless performance. Nadel's analysis does not end with Hamlet, however. In the latter part of the review, he examines in less detail, but not with less insight, the performances of some of the supporting actors and actresses, with a primary focus on Laertes, Polonius and Ophelia. Once again, this critique clearly reveals Nadel's strong concept of character. But unlike his other reviews, there is an absence of constructive criticism here essentially because from Nadel's point of view there was little in this production which needed improvement.

When reviewing the acting in a conventional drama, the critic usually focuses on such elements as character development, style of performance and so forth. Yet when dealing with a musical play, the critic also must consider the singing ability of the performers, in addition to the acting, if he is to present a complete analysis of the production. When Nadel evaluates vocal performances, he usually pays the most attention to singers who are either exceptional, and therefore deserving of some detailed praise, or those who are less than proficient, and thus require some instructional criticism. Otherwise, Nadel does not place a great deal of emphasis on

the singing, and will merely indicate the quality of a performance with a few simple, but precise words.

An example of Nadel's constructive approach for assessing an actor or actress' singing ability is found in his review of the musical I Do! I Do! In this critique, Nadel offers advice to Mary Martin on how she can alter her mature vocal quality so that it will be more compatible with the youthful character she portrays.

. . . Mary Martin will have the gift of youthfulness as long as she lives. As the new bride, she is girlishly fresh-faced. The hint of maturity, at this point, is in her singing voice. If she would place it higher in her throat for the first few numbers, and if composer Schmidt would raise her part about a third in those early songs, the impression³ of tender youth would even be more persuasive.

In this passage, Nadel directs his criticisms at both Mary Martin and the composer, yet his suggestions to each are specific enough to be used as tools for improving the actress' performance. Nadel's insight into the discrepancy between Martin's vocal quality and the youthful nature of her character also is valuable for audience members because it sharpens their perceptions into this element of the production.

Nadel will not, however, only criticize singing that's in need of improvement. In cases where an actor or actress turns out an exceptional vocal performance, Nadel will pinpoint the qualities which contributed to its excellence. Nadel's reviews of No Strings and She Loves Me reveal his practice of providing a positive assessment of a performer's singing ability.

. . . The accuracy, clarity and superb articulation of her [Diahann Carroll's] singing convey the thunder of passion in her spirit. "The Sweetest Sounds" is the first of her triumphs, and the fiery declaration of independence, "Loads of Love" is another.⁴

The expression, "sings her heart out," certainly applies to Miss [Barbara] Cook, who has both the heart and voice to do it. Her clear soprano is not only one of the finest vocal instruments in the contemporary musical theater, but it conveys all the vitality, brightness and strength of her feminine young personality, which is plenty.⁵

In these excerpts, Nadel describes the vocal qualities of each actress and also comments on the suitability of these qualities for the roles they portrayed. This insight is intended not only to compliment Diahann Carroll and Barbara Cook, but to enhance the audience's appreciation of their singing.

Actors and actresses indeed exert a very great and important influence on a performance. But it is not through their efforts alone that a production comes into being. Though they never appear on stage, there are other participants whose work is a vital part of any dramatic event, and the director is not the least of these. His handiwork is evident in many aspects of a performance, from the interpretation of the play and characters to the staging of the actors and actresses. It is the critic's duty then to recognize the contributions of the director so that the audience will have the clearest possible assessment of the production.

In Nadel's reviews the director never is ignored. Depending on the quality of his work, the director may receive as much attention in Nadel's critiques as do the performers. For

example, in Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright the direction was so significant that Nadel placed his criticism of it in the lead of his review.

Joshua Logan probably could direct a play with one hand tied behind his back, which is the way he should have done "Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright." If there is such a term as over-directed, it applies to the new drama by Peter S. Feibleman which opened Saturday evening at the Booth Theater.

In Logan's defense, let it be understood that he was nobly motivated. He has tried, in his own vastly ingenious way, to whip up an urgency about this play that simply doesn't exist. He has attempted to make it seem both substantial and valid.⁶

In this critique, Nadel has succeeded in defining the major fault in Logan's approach though he justifies it by explaining the director's motivation. When an audience sees a play it is their tendency to presume that the strengths and weaknesses in the production are the result of the acting, because it is the work of the actors and actresses which appear directly before them on the stage. Yet in Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright, this clearly was not the case as Nadel reveals that the problems in this performance lay primarily in the play, and secondarily in the direction. Though Nadel's evaluation is stated in rather general terms, for example, he does not say exactly how the play was "over-directed," his comments still benefit the audience by educating them to the fact that there is more to a production than meets the eye.

With similar intentions, but in more specific language, Nadel analyzes Lee Strasberg's direction of The Three Sisters.

Through the use of examples, Nadel exposes the director's brush-strokes which collectively gave shape to this excellent version of Anton Chekhov's classic drama.

I don't know which is the better way to watch it--to let your mind and emotions be totally occupied by Chekhov's exquisite, poignant drama or to hold a fraction of your awareness aside to also note the countless details of ingenuity and stunning craftsmanship in the production.

There are times when you want to applaud something as seemingly simple as the entrance of a frustrated scholar (Gerald Hiken) wheeling a baby carriage across the grounds of the home that has become a prison of debt and frustration to him. He crosses the stage, and leaves it, without having spoken. Yet the moment of entrance, the tempo of movement; the posture, the surrounding silence, are so eloquent, so meticulously right; that you want to reward someone for the experience.

That someone must be the director, Lee Strasberg, and not just because he can time an entrance, cast a role in foresighted fashion, sense the cadence of a scene or measure so precisely the duration, in stage value, of a momentary emotion.

You'd have trouble assembling a more diverse or more defiantly individual assortment of acting talents than those in The Actors Studio. It would seem impossible to exploit the distinctive qualities of each personality, and at the same time weave them harmoniously into the fabric of an exceedingly complex play.

Yet this is exactly what Strasberg has done at the Morosco. As a result, "The Three Sisters" conveys an abundance of meaning and feeling beyond anything you might expect from a reading or from most productions of this classic.

Here, Nadel makes it quite clear that Strasberg primarily is responsible for the superb quality of the ensemble acting and the nuances in staging which illuminated the performance. Though his focus is on highlighting the strengths in Strasberg's directorial approach, Nadel indirectly reveals in his analysis

that the director exerts a tremendous influence over a production through his casting choices and his guidance of the actors and actresses. Realizing this, an audience gains a new and valuable perspective from which to view this or any production.

The audience also receives fresh insight into the director's influence from Nadel's evaluation of Jean-Paul Sartre's The Condemned of Altona.

Even though a critic is not supposed to pre-judge, I had worried that director Herbert Blau might overwhelm "The Condemned of Altona" with theatrical device and manipulation. He has not. Instead he has kept it free of distractions, and maintained a sharp focus on its people and ideas. He has given the stage to Sartre, who certainly deserves it in this instance, and has disciplined himself and his company toward articulating all that the playwright has to convey.

Only here and there does Blau try to go one better. There's mention in the play of a girl, in chains and weighing only 80 pounds; at the Beaumont she's down to 70. The speed of a Porsche is increased rather arbitrarily from 112 to 170 miles per hour.⁸

Nadel's familiarity with the play is apparent in this review, and his knowledge accentuates the authority of his opinion. He praises Blau for his straightforward treatment of the text, his uncomplicated staging and his disciplining of the cast. Though he does not use examples in this portion of his commentary, his analysis is precise enough to give the audience a clear concept of the director's technique. In the last paragraph of this excerpt, Nadel alerts the audience to some specific alterations in the text, which, were it not for Nadel's keen ear, might have gone unnoticed. By pointing out the fact

that Blau was responsible for the changes, Nadel further informs the audience of the wide-ranging control a director has over a play.

Though he remains behind the scenes, the director indeed is a person of considerable authority in the production of a play. But there are other unseen participants, such as costume, scenic and lighting designers, whose work also is of vital importance. These people often are the unsung heroes of the theater because they never appear on stage and do not carry as weighty an influence as the director. Yet, the contributions of the costumer, set and lighting designers are of great value, so consequently, Nadel makes a concerted effort to acknowledge their work in his criticism.

Limited space prohibits Nadel from lavishing the sets, lighting and costumes with large quantities of critical attention. However, if any of these elements makes a significant impression, Nadel will recognize it in his reviews. Generally speaking, Nadel will comment on the technical elements in a production only when his response to them is positive, and he usually consolidates his discussion into two or three paragraphs. An example of this is found in Nadel's review of Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard. Nadel was so enchanted by the unique and inventive style of Santo Loquasto's setting that he devoted considerable energy to describing it for his readers.

Even more striking than Serban's strange interpretation, however, is the visual wonder of Santo Loquasto's settings. The dominant impression is white--floors, grass, furniture covers, cherry blossoms, of course.

Behind the children's room, where the first act is played, the orchard itself appears, diffused by a white scrim. Later, the scrim is raised to reveal the orchard as a symbol both of the play's present and past.

The second act, also white, is in the open, and for the third, a ballroom fashioned like a gilded cage perches in the middle of a white drawing room. The last act is again the children's room, but whiter, emptier, and eloquent of impending absence.⁹

Nadel's intention here is to create a mental image that is as vivid as the set itself. Through a selective choice of descriptive detail Nadel also shows how the setting works to reinforce the meaning and symbolism of the play. By discussing the symbolic qualities of the scenery, Nadel imbues his description with insight and enhances the audience's understanding of the setting.

This technique of integrating description with a discussion of the purpose of the sets, lights or costumes is revealed in other of Nadel's reviews, including one he wrote on the play Wings by Arthur Kopit.

The setting designed by Andrew Jackness consists essentially of three rows across the stage of pivoting black, transparent screens. Early in the play, Emily is downstage, with the doctors and nurses well upstage, separated and slightly diffused by the three rows of screens. As the hospital people penetrate her awareness they move closer, or all the way to her. When she is much improved, and being helped by a therapist, sometimes with other stroke patients present, all are in front of the screens.

There is nothing gimmicky about this; most of the audience won't even think about it. But the setting works to make the play that much more ordered, more meaningful. In similar fashion, Tom Schraeder's lighting becomes another kind of guiding voice, guiding mood as well as specifics of the drama.¹⁰

In this critique, Nadel describes the setting and its purpose essentially for the audience's benefit. He praises both the lighting and scenic designers for ably contributing to the meaning of the play through their masterful, but subtle use of these scenic elements. So subtle is the effect of their work, though, that Nadel points out "most of the audience won't even think about it." However, through his description, Nadel induces the audience to give the setting some thought and thus increases their appreciation of it.

The costumes, as well as the setting, grabbed Nadel's attention in a production of Bertolt Brecht's Arturo Ui. In his review of this play, Nadel describes and comments on the dramatic effects of these elements, while also briefly explaining their purpose.

Rouben-Ter Arutunian has done all the sets in the manner of charcoal-drawing cutouts, so that every person on stage is sharply delineated. The costumes (like the lights) almost smack you blind. Most of the men wear short jackets with wide, wide lapels, and trousers that flap about the legs like the old-time beach pajamas. They are satirical exaggerations of actual styles, and wonderfully effective.¹¹

All of the previously cited examples illustrate Nadel's approach to criticizing the production elements of a play, and exemplify his capacity to articulate his opinions while at the same time keeping the readers' needs in sharp focus. But they reveal something else too, and that is Nadel's tremendous caring and compassion for the theater. If the acting or directing deserves some negative criticism, Nadel will

provide it, but he will do so constructively. Likewise, if any aspect of a production merits praise, Nadel will give that too, gladly. Compassion, then, is the overriding quality which colors all of Nadel's dramatic criticism, and it is his compassion which makes him a valuable and sensitive critic.

Footnotes

¹Norman Nadel, "'Wait Until Dark' Is a Tense Thriller," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 27 (1966), 378.

²Norman Nadel, "The Devil has His Phoenix in 'Faustus' Off-Broadway," Norman Nadel's personal stringbook, 6 Oct. 1964.

³Norman Nadel, "'I Do! I Do!' a Hit," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 27 (1966), 219.

⁴Norman Nadel, "'No Strings' Opens at 54th," Norman Nadel's personal stringbook, 16 March 1962.

⁵Norman Nadel, "'She Loves Me' Opens at O'Neill Theater," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 24 (1963), 331.

⁶Norman Nadel, "Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 23 (1962), 165.

⁷Norman Nadel, "Actors Studio Superb in Chekhov Finale," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 25 (1964), 239-40.

⁸Norman Nadel, "'Condemned' Sums up Man's Guilt," Norman Nadel's personal stringbook, 4 Feb. 1966.

⁹Norman Nadel, "The Cherry Orchard," Norman Nadel's personal stringbook, 16 March 1977.

¹⁰Norman Nadel, "Wings," Norman Nadel's personal stringbook, 30 Jan. 1979.

¹¹Norman Nadel, "'Arturo Ui' is Not the Best of Brecht," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, 24 (1963), 206.

CONCLUSION

Analysis of a complex subject, such as Nadel's criticism, is beneficial because it facilitates an examination of the subject's components and how they work together to produce the end result. But analysis also has an unfortunate side effect: though it may enhance appreciation of the topic's complexity, it also tends to obscure the beauty of the collective final product. This situation applies to Nadel's criticism.

In the previous chapters, Nadel's techniques have been dissected in detail. His critiques have been broken down into their technical and stylistic components, and the content of his reviews has been discussed in terms of his treatment of the play and of the production. This classification is valuable because it clarifies Nadel's approach to evaluating a theatrical performance and writing a review, yet it creates the false impression that these elements work independently of each other, and this precisely is not the case. Just as flour, milk, sugar, eggs and so forth must be mixed together to create a cake, so it is with Nadel's critiques. Each of his techniques is an ingredient in a critical recipe, and it is only when they are integrated that a review takes shape. For example, a single paragraph in one of Nadel's reviews may be technically correct, proportioned to reflect the positive and negative qualities of

a play, humorous, conversational and packed with insight. Although all of these elements were discussed as individual entities, they really are intricately interrelated.

Furthermore, it is Nadel's mastery of the technical aspects of writing which enables him to convey complicated and profound perceptions in a simple, conversational manner. And it is his conservative use of words which permits Nadel to encompass a liberal quantity of ideas in each review. Likewise, the constructive tenor of Nadel's criticism is reflected not only in his selective word choice but the way in which he arranges them into structurally correct sentences and paragraphs. Nadel employs all of these techniques as a means to an end, and that is to meet the needs of his readers, be they theatergoers or professionals; and it is his conversational, friendly style which makes even the most difficult concept or negative opinion palatable, easier to accept, and thus more widely read.

So, it becomes abundantly clear that the true beauty of Nadel's approach lies not in the individual ingredients, or techniques, though they are singularly attractive, but in the way these elements come together to produce a tightly integrated critique.

However, the predominant characteristic in Nadel's criticism is not a technique at all. It cannot be defined, pigeonholed or analyzed, yet it colors every facet of this man's work. This characteristic is Nadel's tremendous passion for

dramatic art. His affection for the theater is the force which motivates him to write so meticulously, insightfully and constructively. It is this caring which moved Norman Nadel to cast himself in the role of theater critic.

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THE DRAMATIC CRITICISM OF NORMAN NADEL

by

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John English, author of Criticizing the Critics, writes that Norman Nadel is one of the few reviewers who cares enough about the theater to try and make it better. This attitude indeed is evident in the volumes of this veteran critic's work. Nadel has devoted over 40 years to the practice of criticism, and for most of the last 20, he has been employed as a first-string drama critic in New York. Nadel's reviews reveal compassion and caring for the theater and the desire to encourage the maintenance of high theatrical standards. His writing is direct, insightful, and most importantly, constructive.

With the intention of analyzing Nadel's approach to writing dramatic criticism, this thesis examines a representative sample of his reviews taken from the period during which Nadel worked in New York. Such considerations as Nadel's philosophy of criticism, his writing style, and his treatment of the play and the production have been taken into account. The first chapter is a hitherto unpublished interview with Nadel which explores his attitudes about the critic's role, and reveals his personal viewpoint on his critical technique. Furthermore, it sets forth some practical guidelines for writing criticism that could benefit the novice critic.