

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS



Dear Met

Here is the suggested reply
from Horace to those
who complained about "Look Back
in Anger."

I had hoped for some
admission that the direction was
not entirely in good taste - had
it been I think some of the
criticism would have been
averted

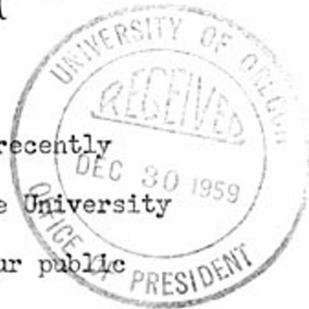
BoV

Pres A. Dean

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OK

cc Hornum, Starlin
Clark



Dear _____:

It is disturbing to receive a letter such as the one you recently addressed to me expressing your criticism and opposition to the University Theatre play Look Back in Anger. We are always conscious of our public in the selection of our schedule of plays and make a serious attempt to present a wide variety of dramatic material representative of both the current theatre and that of the past. It is inevitable, however, in choosing plays for a varied audience of differing backgrounds and tastes that some selections will be made which will not meet with unanimous approval.

To guard against individual error on matters of taste in the choice of dramas, the University Theatre requires all plays to be reviewed by a board consisting of ten faculty members and a representative cross section of students. As an aid in evaluating material under discussion this group has at their disposal the collected opinions of the leading dramatic critics of today. In considering Look Back in Anger these people had such evidence as the following in judging the merits of the play:

The London Evening Standard (as a result of viewing the play) created a special award, naming John Osborne the most promising playwright of the year.

The New York Post--Richard Watts, Drama critic. "LOOK BACK IN ANGER... is an absorbing and powerful drama, forcefully and beautifully written, filled with stinging wit and almost ferocious scorn."

The New York Times--Brook Atkinson, Drama Critic. "John Osborne has written the most vivid British Play of the decade...(he) is a fiery writer with a sharp point of view and a sense of theatre."

The New York Daily News. John Chapman, Drama Critic. "It is the most virile and exciting play to come out of London in a long, long time--- something to set the wits tingling."

The London Observer. Kenneth Tynan, Drama Critic. "LOOK BACK IN ANGER presents the post-war youth as it really is...All the qualities are there, qualities one had despaired of ever seeing on the stage...It is the best young play of its decade."

The NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN, John McClain, Drama Critic. "There is no question about the author's talent with our language, with his gift of phrase making, or with the robust sense of humor. This is a well-constructed play..."

The London New Statesman and Nation, John Raymond, Drama Critic. "It has been Mr. Osborne's privilege and good fortune to write the play of his generation."

The New York Herald Tribune, Walter Kerr, Drama Critic. "...he has succeeded in raising an image of actual, breathing men and women whose sour, stubborn, but waspish witty vitality will simply not be denied... The play isn't pleasant. It solves nothing. But Mr. Osborne is first of all a writer---a real one."

Theatre Arts ..."there is a real fascination in watching such a monster in action, perverse though the feeling may be. There is even more magnetism about the play. For it undoubtedly has qualities transcending the mere brass-knuckles school of writing. The fact that it has been

produced in many languages is testimony to its ability to move a wide audience, if not to compassion, at least to identification with this protagonist, even though he is a peculiarly English creation--for Lord knows, the play does not pander to quick popularity."

The staff of the University Theatre feels, therefore, that there is evidence in the basic writing of the play and in the opinion of recognized critics that this is one of the representative plays of our time. It is not a pleasant play but quality does not have pleasantry as one of its essential attributes. The play is an honest and reasonably accurate portrait of a very disagreeable young man. It is impossible to delineate a disagreeable character in the theatre without using disagreeable evidence. As a consequence, the play, and Jimmy Porter in particular, is vile, profane and irritating. This is deliberate and those who would hope to inject prettiness or pleasantry would destroy the play entirely.

This does not indicate that the actor, the director, the University Theatre or the University of Oregon administration wish to defend Jimmy Porter. In fact they join in the condemnation of him as a tortured young man who has violated the social code and is subject to the usual retribution. This is a calculated and highly desirable audience response. One of the greatest services the theatre can perform is the clear revelation of avarice, immorality, crudity, dishonesty, selfishness and bestiality. Such revelation does not imply approval. In revealing the nature of Macbeth, we do not approve of his acts--in describing political decay in All the King's Men, we do not advocate it.

A ~~great~~ university has the responsibility of exploring the world about it and ^{making} ~~to make~~ evaluations of that world. The explorations reveal both pleasant and unpleasant conditions. The evaluations are best made--not by a dogmatic listing of good and evil, beauty and ugliness, sacred or profane but by the creation of a favorable climate under which a thinking man may form his own conclusions from evidence honestly presented. In medicine a cancerous cell is described in order that it may be eliminated--in sociology the unpleasant fact of juvenile delinquency is aired in order that it shall be corrected--the place of Fascism is revealed in history and the horror of Hitler and the concentration camps is a part of that story---

The University theatre which is worthy of that name reflects the catholic tastes of the informed and intelligent people of which it is composed. Such people are expected to differentiate between evidence and conclusion. Look Back in Anger presents as evidence a group of understandably hopeless and disagreeable people in a disagreeable situation. No thinking person could be "inspired" to copy the lives of these people after seeing them on the stage.

In presenting such material the University Theatre is obligated to treat it with honesty, high artistry, taste and discrimination. With Look Back in Anger the theatre staff sincerely attempted to do this. A considerable number of our audience has indicated we were successful in this attempt. We regret that for others the play seemed an unfortunate and unpleasant choice. ---

The following list of plays represent the offering of the University for the past two seasons. ~~The list would hardly support a criticism describing a continual decline in the quality of the selections.~~

TEAHOUSE OF THE AUGUST MOON--HEDDA GABLER--I HAVE BEEN HERE
BEFORE--THE SHORT HOUR--WAY OF THE WORLD--MIRROR FOR THE SKY--

ANNABELLE BROOM--GEORGE WASHINGTON SLEPT HERE--IMPORTANCE OF
BEING ERNEST--BELL BOOK AND CANDLE--ARMS AND THE MAN--INHERIT
THE WIND--STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE--LAND OF THE DRAGON--^{ve} SEN YEAR
ITCH--THE TEMPEST--DAWN'S EARLY LIGHT.

In this list will be found plays both pleasant and unpleasant
when judged from differing and highly individual points of view.
They were chosen to
As ~~group~~ they represent a cross section of some of the best in
drama: American and Foreign--modern and period--comedy and tragedy--
diverting or thought provoking. ~~There is little evidence in this~~
~~list that the University Theatre has favored in recent years plays~~
~~of doubtful quality.~~ In including instruction in theatre subjects
and presentation of plays as a part of the curriculum of the University
we subscribe to the belief that the theatre is a potent cultural and
educational factor in our time. It can only be a force for good if
it is probing, critical, and honest.

selections I hope that in some measure this will explain the practice in
the choice of University Theatre plays and the reasons for including
material both pleasant and unpleasant to represent the dramatic world
of both the past and present. We appreciate your criticism and concern
and we trust that your reaction to Look Back in Anger will not legislate
against your patronage of other University Theatre productions which
are more in keeping with your dramatic tastes.

Cordially,

O. M. Wilson, President

*I confess that individual
selections have made me uneasy, but the total program has
seemed to me to conform
to a sound
educational
theater
theory.*