

**The Editors:**

I was engrossed by the provocative article, "Who Killed Laius?", though I must confess to having enjoyed it more in its original version several years ago when it was first published under the title of "The Macbeth Murder Mystery." We are indebted to you for this post-humous piece, though you must realize that "Karl Harshbarger" is a pretty transparent pseudonym for James Thurber.

*Albert Cohn*

**HOMOSEXUALITY****The Editors:**

The growing recognition of the desperate sickness of American society has been accompanied, naturally enough, by a growing recognition of the desperate sickness of the American theatre. But recognition of sickness demands diagnosis; this in its turn requires unblinking analysis, but the necessity is met instead

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**LEE FREESON**

P. O. Box 922

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by hysteria, anxiety, and blind flight accompanied by the desperate attempt to shift attention and blame onto the nearest acceptable scapegoat.

Just as the present ills of the culture are being blamed on the Communist and fellow-travelers, the ills of the theatre have come more and more to be blamed on an insidious infiltration of homosexuals, an accusation in which even Howard Taubman has joined. To accept such an accusation uncritically is bigotry, but to dismiss it out of hand is blindness, for homosexuality has come to play an extremely important role in every aspect of contemporary American theatre. Is this influence genuinely detrimental to the theatre, and if so, how? Is it the *cause* of the ills of the theatre?

Donald M. Kaplan, in his essay, "Homosexuality and American Theatre," (T27) quite rightly demonstrates that the question is far deeper than one of mere correlation of overt actions, and that the ill is characteristic of current American theatre in general, not just a subgroup within it. Unfortunately, his argument proves in the end to be the current theatre is governed by a single prevailing ideology, which is homosexual ("For all the difference it makes those responsible for the emotional and intellectual climate of current theatre might as well be overtly homosexual") it is an ideology, he suggests, which "perpetuates the fraud of rebellion without revolution," and he sets out to show via the psychoanalytic vocabulary how this "homosexual theatre can succeed with a heterosexual audience."

The essay is replete with psychoanalytic jargon, phraseology, and criteria, as well as extensive quotation from such as Marcuse, Fenichel, and Camus; its very weight tends to overwhelm and bemuse the lay reader. Yet far from lending scientific support to the thesis that it is, if not homosexuals, then certainly homosexuality that is crippling our

theatre, the essay's conclusions are not even borne out by the evidence presented. It thus represents the most impressive effort to date to brand and condemn a theatrical scapegoat.

The essay discusses the nature of homosexuality and its roots in infantile gratification, and shows the similarity between the homosexual syndrome and the actor's (both of them due to faulty childhood identification and the incompleteness or postponement of the transference from the "pregenital" or "infantile" phase of sexuality to the second, "genital," mature, heterosexual stage). It argues in addition that what Camus calls the Dandy, the "evangelistic he-man," and the man who continually pursues other men's wives, are all examples of latent homosexuality. He finds that "the content of homosexuality [whether overt or latent] is immature defiance, its form is decadent realism, and its failure sentimentality . . . regardless of anything else, wherever this content, form, and failure conspire we are dealing with homosexuality." QED, the current theatre—and he specifically indicts Miller, Williams, Inge, Albee, Kazan, Chayevsky, and N. Richard Nash as examples—is purveying a homosexual ideology, the "central prepossession" of which is "the playboy notion that a stiff erection settles all issues ever worth settling between people."

It is evident, however, that, on the evidence presented in the essay itself, no such case in fact exists. The content, form, and failure of homosexuality are indeed what he says they are, but they are also the content, form, and failure of the society at large. Dr. Kaplan, it turns out, has been at some pains to attribute solely to the homosexual such characteristics again and again. A few examples will suffice.

Dr. Kaplan lists the various methods of homosexual gratification and con-

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cludes: "The inability of the homosexual to deal sexually with a partner who is not to a very significant degree a narcissistic extension, rather than a separate person, prevents the homosexual from going beyond an autoerotic, infantile experience." Substitution of the phrase "contemporary American adult" for "homosexual" changes the valence of the statement considerably. Again: "The [adult pervert's] ejaculation is achieved under the guidance of merely one or another component of the infantile phase of the total sexual model"; but if "genitality," the "adult" phase, is by definition heterosexual, then the sentence means nothing more than that overt homosexuals do not have heterosexual intercourse with one another, a statement of fact and not value. He defines the Dandy by quoting Camus as follows: "[He] finds himself delivered, over to the fleeting moment, to the passing days, and to wasted sensibility." But Camus actually

wrote: "Up to now, man derived coherence from his Creator. But from the moment that he consecrates rupture with Him, he finds himself delivered over [etc.]." Camus was speaking of contemporary man, not the Dandy, who, in contradistinction, "creates a unity for himself by the very violence of his refusal." Then by the simple insertion of the bracket "He," Dr. Kaplan has made Camus's description of the situation of contemporary man into a description of the Dandy alone.

The essay demonstrates that the Dandy, the wife-chaser, the "he-man the homosexual, and the actor, are persons who for one reason or another remain in the stage of infantile, narcissistic, and essentially passive gratification. But it is a reversal of terms to conclude that the theatre is homosexual rather, the essay itself suggests that the reverse is true, that the culture at large is moving more and more toward such an assertion of the demands of the "pleasure ego" against the "reality ego." And *that* is the point: the infantile nature of cultural gratification as reflected in the theatre, and there, among other ways, through the influence of homosexuality.

A "homosexual" theatre and "heterosexual" audience cannot be squared with Dr. Kaplan's own insistence that overt sexual behavior is a good as a reliable index. His statement that the audience desires only to be "apathetically titillated" and "reassured by the "illusion" that "identity, freedom, and salvation can be achieved through libidinal performance" would lead him, one would think, to question the sexuality of the audience: believing as it evidently does, in the "heterosexual ideology," it too must be either overtly or covertly homosexual—unless the "homosexual ideology" is actually one example of a much deeper and more

pervasive *infantile* ideology. But Dr. Kaplan leaves the audience unexamined. To examine the audience would be to change the accusation, something he is not prepared to do, for it would mean admitting that genuine heterosexuals have also been driven to the belief that a "stiff erection settles everything worth settling between people." He admits that the infantile equation between pleasure and reality "unfolds in the remarks of all analytic patients," but you will not find this reflected in his conclusions.

It is a bad mistake in judgment, not to mention a lapse in taste, to suggest that the problem with *After the Fall* is that Arthur Miller is a latent homosexual. If one characteristic is behavior without responsibility, what is Dr. Kaplan to make of Miller's infuriatingly bad play *Incident at Vichy*, which *requires* responsibility of us? Much more germane is the criticism that Miller has become increasingly egocentric and baldly rhetorical, and that his plays are more and more in the nature of concessions to the drama rather than contributions to it. Dr. Kaplan is right, of course, that most directors and playwrights—and almost all actors—dream of making Broadway rather than creating a viable theatre. But because they are overt or latent homosexuals? Or because they accept the corruption of a theatre given over lock, stock, and barrel to packaging and commercialization? . . .

*Norman Hartweg*  
(*Arthur of The Pit, T28*)

#### In reply:

I appreciate Mr. Hartweg's letter for the opportunity to reiterate my position on certain questions he raises. Since I find myself in general agreement with Mr. Hartweg, I must conclude ruefully that my sense was not always as clear as I had hoped.

For example, Mr. Hartweg charges

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