

# LETTERS

## THE EDITOR:

Michael Kirby's response [Letters, T34] to my comments about him [T32] contains, I am surprised to note, several retractions of the position he elaborated in his original article on the New Theatre [T30]. With apologies for my ungraciousness, I must declare these retractions unacceptable. They are empty vessels of argumentation.

For example, Mr. Kirby now embraces Samuel Beckett whose style of workmanship, not to mention ideologic persuasions, I could not have imagined admissible to Kirby's credos. However, that Kirby, in his letter, insists upon the huge indebtedness of Beckett to the Dadaists depletes such approval of all credibility. When a neighbor borrows a cup of sugar, this is hardly an event of significant nurturance.

But let us come quickly to the heart of the controversy between Kirby and me. Kirby poses the question that in supporting the New Theatre does he really have to be *against* the dramatists involved in what he calls my Great Playwrights approach, e.g., Pirandello, Genet, Beckett. Yes, I am afraid so. For wherever an aesthetic solidifies into a creed and collects a coterie, it becomes a movement, and with movements, whatever is neglected is, in fact, opposed. Kirby and his people are simply preoccupied with the possibilities of a variety of resurrected Surrealism. I have studied the so-called Happenings issue of TDR—whether Kirby believes it or not—and I was able to gain no assurance that Realism, as I defined it in my article, is of any further interest to the New Theatre movement. Moreover, there were instances of frank hostility toward Realism.

Now I am not opposed to movements. The New Critics, with all their indiscretions, insured certain valuable eventualities for literature. Impressionism was also a movement. So was Abstract Expressionism. My point about the New Theatre is that the practice and values this movement specifies are seductions into a tyranny of the social here-and-now. As I tried to indicate, the New Theatre is not cultural but social; that is, not art but

propaganda. It advocates a theatre of disposability, putting me in mind of pop-bottles, television specials, and paper dresses. And this is merely one of its essential congruities with the general activity of contemporary society. When I attend theatre, I should like an experience of a different order from my familiar experience of, say, pouring restored orange juice in the morning and scrambling eggs, while listening to the news over my transistor radio, or going off with my children to an amusement park in a Hertz rental.

I expect Mr. Kirby will protest long about here that I really don't understand Cage's four minutes, some odd seconds of silence, Young's butterflies and all that. To which I must say life is finite, Mr. Kirby, and the difference between us is the difference in the lesson we draw from this irrefutable axiom. You say therefore do this; I say do that. In the end, are we not arguing over ways of life?

"But come, now, Kaplan, you are indeed a staid creature. Time marches on, after all. You and those playwrights and old theatres. Now, really." Yes, and I happen to be also a New Yorker and can tell you from a perusal of the real-estate scene here that the line between progress and merry destruction is often not a thin one at all.

One thing more—I have never mentioned Strindberg anywhere. If you, Mr. Kirby, really understood me, you could not have ascribed to me any crucial interest in the likes of him.

Donald M. Kaplan  
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## THE EDITOR:

On page 77 of T34 the Angus McBean photograph reproduced shows Laurence Olivier as Sir Toby and *Jahm Abbott* as Malvolio. Guinness, *not pictured*, played Sir Andrew; your caption was in error.

Gerald Kean  
Westport, Conn.