

## WORDS LIKE WEAPONS:

## THE AMERICAN POLITICAL THEATRE OF THE 1930's

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The American theatre, as is well known, has not had a development which runs parallel through history to that of the novel or poetry. American plays were practically unimportant until the present century. Since the times of Royall Tyler's *The Contrast*, little or very little was written and/or produced on the American stage which could be compared to the plays that were being written at the time in Europe. A number of factors, among which bigotry was not the least important, hindered seriously the development of American drama until Eugene O'Neill and the Provincetown Players began experimenting with new forms during the second decade of the twentieth century in the avant-garde little theatres of Greenwich Village and the wharves of Provincetown. These experimental plays, that began with the cycle of dramas that O'Neill wrote about the sea –*Bound East for Cardiff*, *The Moon of the Caribees...* etc.– led the way for a movement in the American theatre that would spread rapidly among younger playwrights: off-Broadway.

O'Neill can be considered the first of them, along with Susan Glaspell, Robert Edmond Jones and a George Cram Cook who dedicated their time and efforts to experiment as opposed to commercialism. Once it was made clear to theatre managers that these plays could be profitable, the stages of the commercial theatres were opened to them, O'Neill moved his plays uptown and became the leading voice in American drama. His interest in Naturalistic drama, his innovations in stage setting and in the new ideas related to social movements, psychology and science made a deep impact on Broadway. It can be said that after his first plays opened, the American stage changed entirely. Melodrama, which had been the basis for his father's success, gave way to Naturalistic and Realistic theatre and problem plays, while off-Broadway became the experimenting ground for a series of playwrights who found the Village audiences the ideal public for their new plays.

This current –the underground theatre– did not disappear once O'Neill moved on to Broadway. New forms and literary movements continued to be tested there, sometimes failing and a few others becoming big «hits» and running for a few months. This experimental «fever» lasted throughout the 1920's. In 1929 the Depression put an end to that «period of parties'» and when unemployment, bankruptcy and hunger swept the country from coast to coast, almost overnight thirteen million people were left unemployed and those who were not lucky enough to find a job found themselves queuing up in breadlines.

Thus the mood of the times changed suddenly due to a series of events that had been largely unseen in the American political scene. Strikes, marches and pickets

became the counterpart of the affluence that for a long time had been the marked characteristic of the American Dream. A few intellectuals had been warning Americans that social inequality would become the immediate consequence of their political system, among which John Reed was for some time the best known left-wing spokesman. Now it seemed it was time to listen to their voices.

Drama, as part of the larger field of literature, is bound to reflect the social and political problems that are the issues of the times in which a literary work is actually born. Accordingly the drama of the twenties began to take into account all those opinions that during the previous decade had been crying out in the void, since what was being discussed had suddenly become now almost a matter of daily survival, something much more specific: «People in the twenties had been urged to be “human”. Now, when millions of people were reduced by poverty and unemployment to an animal level of existence it was assumed that they were human and they were urged to act<sup>2</sup>». The fact that in 1929 21 % of American families had incomes of less than \$ 1.000 a year, more than 42% of less than \$ 1.500 and 71% of less than the \$ 2.500 that was then considered necessary to live decently could not be disregarded, especially when the 36.000 richest families had an income equivalent to that of the twelve million families who earned less than 1.500 a year<sup>3</sup>.

The average American began to take radical politics much more seriously and the label of «leftism» was used «in a vaguely complimentary sense by proponents of liberalism. (It) was the banner under which one fought for human decency and social reforms soon to be incorporated in the law of the land without commitment to the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat<sup>4</sup>».

Therefore, the political theatre of the thirties could not leave aside the crucial issues that suddenly were everybody's concern. The Depression coincided with the expansion of the theories about the aims of the theatre developed in the Soviet Union, where all media were being focused on political issues in order to channel the people's political awareness. In this way, not only acting methods, especially those derived from Stanislavski –for a long time considered the last word in the field– but also the long-term targets implicit in the practice of the Soviet theatre were adopted by their American colleagues as long as they could be applied to their different social contexts. Since the economic framework that defined American home policy seemed to be ripe for some sort or other of radical change –«the ruling class had only retrogressive policies to offer<sup>5</sup>»– the professional writers and theatre artists turned left almost for self-preservation.

The successful naturalistic plays of the preceding decade, of which, O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* was the most representative example, had very little to offer to the politically engaged playwright. Since the dramatists of the 1930's were out to change the world a new form of drama was needed. Not only Naturalism, but Realism as well did not seem adequate by themselves to the engaged playwright: they

<sup>1</sup> Clurman, Harold, *The Fervent Years*, Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovitch, New York, 1975 (1945), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Gascoigne, Bamber, *Twentieth Century Drama*, Barnes and Noble Inc., New York, 1962, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard, Heinz. «A Theatre for Lefty: USA in the 1930's» in *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. 1, n.º 4, Oct.-Dec. 1971, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> Himmelstein, Morgan. *Theatre Was a Weapon* (introduction by John Gassner), Rutgers UP, New Brunswick, N.J., 1963, p. IX.

<sup>5</sup> Taylor, Karen Malpede. *Peoples' Theatre in America*, Drama Books Specialists, New York, 1972, p. 61.

were considered to be old-fashioned. The discussions that Bertolt Brecht was having with other European playwrights concerning the aims of the theatre were likewise transplanted to the United States.

For Brecht the theatre had become «an affair for philosophers, but only for such philosophers as wished not just to explain the world but also to change it<sup>6</sup>». In the same line, Naturalism to him «was an assimilation of art to science (whose) artistic aspects were clearly harmed by its instructive side<sup>7</sup>». But considering the theatre as a basically instructive form of art, Brecht saw Erwin Piscator's theories as a conflict between instruction and entertainment, «a cold douche for those whose sympathies were becoming involved<sup>8</sup>» in the message of the play. Instruction and entertainment therefore should convey such social meaning «that eventually enables the theatre to project a picture of the world by artistic means: models of men's life together such as could help the spectator to understand his social environment and both rationally and emotionally to master it<sup>9</sup>».

So the basis for the epic theatre was set. Given the social conditions that the Depression caused in the United States, no other form could be more adequate for the engaged playwright to convey his message of social reform, even though it was evident that it had to be adapted for American audiences so that its aim reached them. However at a time that seemed to be the most appropriate moment to achieve a great success, Brecht's own plays, *The Threepenny Opera* and *The Mother*, failed. According to Brecht himself, the attempt to «acquaint New York workers with a non-Aristotelian drama which made use of a new epic kind of theatre (required) especial kinds of political knowledge and artistic capacity such as are unnecessary for the production of plays of familiar type<sup>11</sup>». As a matter of fact, successful plays of the moment were those which dealt with current problems and placed them in an American environment, concerning those social problems which could be quickly understood by American audiences. All this made Brecht's alienation theories a too remote element to be easily apprehended by the same audience that could enjoy and understand without further problems Elmer Rice's *Street Scene*.

Therefore the new dramatic groups that took over the American stage, although keeping Brecht's theories in mind, adapted or borrowed others which might be of help to develop people's social and political awareness as well.

Besides epic drama, several other resources for dramatic literature were used. Among them, the «*agit-prop*» play, borrowed from the Russian theatre of the Revolution when the Soviet Communist Party's Agitation and Propaganda Department was very active. This device was at this time enthusiastically put into practice in Germany as opposed to the reactionary policy of the established bourgeois theatres. It was largely used by Brecht but in most productions that were successful in the United States, «*agit-prop*» plays were unquestionably American as far as their content was concerned and therefore very close to their audiences' daily problems.

<sup>6</sup> Willett, John (ed.), *Brecht on Theatre*, Hill and Wang, New York, 1964, p. 72.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 6, p. 132.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 6, p. 132.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 6, p. 133.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 6, p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 6, p. 81.

Realistic plays were not totally abandoned. As Stanley Burnshaw argued in 1935, «the realistic play (can) be powerful revolutionary drama, the agit-prop play... (can) be powerful revolutionary drama... One form does not exclude the other and there is no question of “choice”. Our theatre needs both kinds of plays and will need a great many new kinds as yet uncreated<sup>12</sup>».

One of these new forms was the *Living Newspaper*. Arthur Arent, director of *Triple-A Plowed Under*, the longest running play staged in this new mode, wrote as recently as 1971 that only the previous year he had learned that «there had been anything like a living Newspaper before ours. Then... it turned out that there had been not one but several predecessors... They range from Soviet Russia... to Vassar College, from the political cabarets of the Left Bank cellar theatres to the al fresco varieties put together by Chu Teh’s propaganda division in Red China<sup>13</sup>». The Living Newspaper consisted of a mere dramatization of a social issue, composed to a greater or lesser extent of a series of news events and focused on a certain aspect which worked as a connecting line by means of the representation of the effect of these events on those people to whom the problem was of basic importance. It was staged through several short scenes, some really flat, some reflecting the human warmth of the average man and sometimes incorporating non-theatrical media, e.g., a loudspeaker, as an actual character of the play. The real importance of the Living Newspaper was the fact that it soon became a device identified as one of the roots of the American theatre of the Thirties, and especially with the work of the Federal Theatre.

The American dramatic tradition had carried through time a form that undoubtedly was specifically American: the *Minstrel Show*. Clifford Odets used it in *Waiting for Lefty* though it was adapted for the very determined purpose of his play. A few years later Orson Welles included it for his production of *The Cradle Will Rock* in 1938, which he dedicated to Brecht.

All these various forms –agit-prop, living newspaper, realistic plays and minstrel shows– became amalgamated after a few years and gave the theatre of the thirties its very distinctive appearance.

So far about form. Concerning the content of the plays, Bamber Gascoigne writes that the committed American playwrights of this period were basically interested in three main topics: 1) the problems raised by the depression, 2) the rise of Fascism in Europe and 3) the possibility of a new war<sup>14</sup>.

1) *Plays about the depression*: It has already been mentioned that the economic crash which occurred in 1929 left the whole country immersed in a desperate social situation. The basic human needs, especially food and shelter, were frequently difficult to satisfy. The word «relief» became a usual term in the American vocabulary. Thus it was only natural that the committed theatre had to deal with these basic problems and the way to overcome them. Walter Rideout in his analysis of the proletarian novel<sup>15</sup> finds four main currents in its development:

<sup>12</sup> McDermott, Douglas. «The Theatre Nobody Knows: Workers’ Theatre in America, 1926-1942» in *Theatre Survey*, Vol. 6, n.º 1, May 1965, p. 65.

<sup>13</sup> Arent, Arthur. «The Technique of the Living Newspapers» in *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. 1, n.º 4, Oct.-Dec. 1971, p. 57.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem 2, p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> Rabkin, Gerald. *Drama and Commitment*, Indiana UP, Bloomington, Ind., 1964, p. 35.

- a) problems connected with strikes
- b) the development of individual class consciousness and its conversion to Socialism
- c) the problems of the «bottom-dogs»
- d) the decay of the middle-class

According to Gerald Rabkin, «American drama of the thirties uses each of these categories save the third because the picaresque structure of the bottom-dog novel was too episodic to lend itself to dramatic adaptation<sup>16</sup>». The remaining currents, once they were adapted for the theatre, dealt directly with those problems related to the depression: Elmer Rice's *We, the People*, John Howard Lawson's *Marching Song*, John Wexley's *They Shall Not Die*—where race as a distinctive note for oppression is laid out— as well as the most famous of them all, Clifford Odets' *Waiting for Lefty*.

2) *The rise of Fascism*: One year after the production of Brecht's *Die Mutter* in Germany, Adolf Hitler was elected chancellor. The Reichstag burnt down on February 27, 1933. A day later Germany's best known playwright went into exile to Scandinavia. Only three years later the Spanish Popular Front government found its country divided and in arms when part of the Army, led by General Franco, rose against the Republican government. Aid to Loyalist forces became one of the issues of American engaged intellectuals and many well-known writers and playwrights took an active part to collect funds for the Spanish Republic. Meanwhile Japan's policies in the North Pacific began to be looked upon with some alarm on the part of the Administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt. At home plays like Elmer Rice's *Judgement Day*, S.N. Berhrman's *Rain from Heaven* and Clifford Odets' *Till the Day I Die* were on their way to fight Fascism in America so that it could be suppressed before it became an actual menace for democracy.

3) *The possibility of a new war*: The entry of the United States in World War I had been contested at home by a large number of American intellectuals for whom *The Masses* had been a means to express their discontent. By the end of the thirties the international panorama was far from being optimistic. Not only had Fascism become a determining factor in both Germany and Italy but in Spain as well it seemed that Franco's possibilities of winning the war were turning out to be increasingly dramatic while the democratic countries were doing nothing to help the divided Republican army. Stalin's home policy in the U.S.S.R. had changed the American liberals' opinions on Communism into a wider conception of Popular Front ideology. In this situation, a new war seemed to everybody a futile repetition of the 1914-18 massacre. Under these circumstances Robert E. Sherwood wrote *Idiot's Delight* in 1936. Paul Green's *Johnny Johnson* opened that same year, that even saw one more pacifist play: Irvin Shaw's *Bury the Dead* which was by far the most bitter of them all.

Interest and preoccupation with politics spread of course to actors and directors as well. Most of them belonged or were related to the groups that had been working in the little theatres of Greenwich Village during the twenties. Accordingly, their interest in experimentation united with their political and social concern and consequently the American theatre witnessed an invasion of dozens of groups dedicated to stage

<sup>16</sup> *Theatre Quarterly*, 15, p.35.

plays with political purposes. Both dramatic form and content offered them a virgin field for experimentation.

According to Rabkin, their intention was «to confront the audiences directly with specific social issues and political alternatives<sup>17</sup>». This confrontation took place in different ways, each related to the ultimate aims of each group. Since Communism had become a crucial issue for radical intellectuals, after the outcome of the October Revolution, many plays of the period openly «hoped to make radicals out of the audience and further than that (they) hoped to make Communist sympathisers out of the radicals<sup>18</sup>». Initially audiences had to be attracted to the theatre and in order to do so playwrights had to present them with current problems. Some groups were made up by professionals –many of whom are still active in the American stage or the picture industry– and out of their initiative developed a series of amateur groups which shared the former’s preoccupation with social problems. Stages were frequently improvised in factories or in streets in order to call the workers’ attention or make audiences out of those people in bread-lines.

In general it can be said there were three different types of dramatic groups:

- 1) Workers’ groups
- 2) Independent amateur groups
- 3) Professional groups.

1) *Workers’ groups*: They originated innumerable productions, considered by Douglas McDermott «the theatre nobody knows»<sup>19</sup>, which can be described as having three main characteristics:

a) They were political: these groups were «more militant and uncompromising in the solutions they applied to the social situation. Usually they advocated the destruction of capitalism and the substitution of a communistic society in its place<sup>20</sup>».

b) They were an artistic and popular success: they created a new theatrical style, a combination of «politically committed dramas, stylized productions and collective organizations»<sup>21</sup> that had an enormous influence on other groups. Their innumerable productions were based on plays written by themselves which have been collected in a series of manuscripts, most of them unpublished or kept by private institutions. Unfortunately many of them have not been recorded or have been lost.

No matter how large their influence on the American theatre of the period was, it is evident that, due to a series of factors, they were a political failure.

c) They were spread all over the country: these groups were nationally organized and most of them affiliated with the League of Workers’ Theatres that later became the New Theatre League. John Howard Lawson –who was himself a Communist– John Dos Passos and Mike Gold along with other radical writers founded the Workers’ Drama League in 1926 which would become a nation-wide organization six years later.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 15, pp. 30-31.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 5, p. 70.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 12, p. 65.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 12, p. 66.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 15, p. 96.

Very similar in its aims was the Theatre Union whose first production took place in the Autumn of 1944 with *Peace on Earth*. Its production was supported by workers' organizations that helped them financially by buying blocks of tickets. The Theatre Union staged Brecht's *The Mother* at the Civic Repertory Theatre in New York in 1935. It was directed by Victor Wolfson and designed by Mordecai Gorelik –one of the best stage designers of the period– but it failed. The Theatre Union was less concerned with the creation of a theatrical style than with the presentation of plays «which had at their core a coherent political view. Its purpose was to produce plays about the working class written from the point of view of the working class<sup>22</sup>».

Charles Mumford Walker, a member of the Theatre Union, declares that they were moved by two ideas: «we were playwrights and we wanted our own plays –which were leftist– produced. We believed deeply that the trade unions were the rock bottom base for any kind of future society<sup>23</sup>».

The Workers' Laboratory Theatre and the Labor Stage worked along the same line. The latter was sponsored by the International Ladies' Garment Workers once the American Federation of Labour voted in 1935 to back labour drama. Its production of the musical *Pins and Needles* had the longest run on Broadway –more than three years– and was the record for that kind of show.

Apart from the dramatic groups performing in English there were a number of ethnic groups: Arlef (Jewish) which staged productions in Yiddish, the Elöre Dramatic Club (Hungarian) and the Prolet-bühne (German). Each of them had a very defined audience according to their different ethnic backgrounds.

2) *Independent amateur groups*: They were made up of young amateur actors that, as in the case of Theatre Collective, aimed at reaching the working class with their message. Their class-consciousness directed them to work for the working class despite their middle-class background as was the case of innumerable theatre professionals of the thirties. To this category also belonged the *Theatre of Action* whose *Newsboy* was a great success in 1934. The play depicted the interests at work inside the world of large newspapers which favoured capitalism.

One of the characteristics of independent amateur groups was the fact that actors gave up looking for a job with the professional companies and along with a few colleagues and enthusiastic theatre lovers, set up different groups where they «all lived together and cooked, each person cooking one day a week<sup>24</sup>».

According to Elia Kazan –who worked with the Theatre of Action for some weeks, its audience was made up of «left groups, intellectuals like myself who aspired to be proletarian. It was not like Germany: the workers did not come to attend our plays –they were at the movies<sup>25</sup>».

3) *Professional groups*: The most outstanding of them were the Group Theatre and the Federal Theatre Project. The Group Theatre was set up by well-known names like Lee Strasberg, Harold Clurman and Cheryl Crawford in 1931. It turned

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 15, p. 45.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 5, p. 68.

<sup>24</sup> Ciment, Michel, *Kazan on Kazan*, Viking Press, NY, 1971, p. 20.

<sup>25</sup> *Theatre Quarterly*, 24, pp. 21-22.

out to be something more lasting than an experiment in the theatre. As Clurman himself writes, «from consideration of acting and plays (we) were plunged into a chaos of life questions, with the desire and hope of making possible some new order and integration... (it was) an experiment in living<sup>26</sup>». Its conception was similar to that which had animated Eugene O'Neill and the Provincetown Players twenty years earlier.

Professionals like Mordecai Gorelik, Elia Kazan, Franchot Tone, Lou and Stella Adler, John Garfield and Clifford Odets grew artistically as part of the Group Theatre. They neither shared any political views nor intended to change the world and most of them came from respectable middle-class families. «None of us was directly involved in the crash of 1929<sup>27</sup>» declares Harold Clurman in *The Fervent Years*. Their purpose as a group was merely artistic: they were «seeking a conscious audience to follow the program of a theatre that would grow with the years and make a permanent contribution to social-cultural life in the manner of certain theatres abroad<sup>28</sup>». Nevertheless it was Clifford Odets' *Awake and Sing* and *Waiting for Lefty*, their most radical productions, that gave the group artistic recognition and success. Their influence on other groups was fundamental: Gorelik established the Theatre Collective, where Kazan also worked, while Clifford Odets taught at the Theatre Union. When the group failed, Robert Ardrey wrote that it was destined to fail «because its premise went against the American grain. The group aimed to cultivate the individual through a collective discipline and a collective approach to the individual's problems and America's culture is fundamentally individualistic<sup>29</sup>».

The Federal Theatre Project was set up by the Work Progress Administration –an Agency of the Federal Government– as part of its relief program. It aimed to employ professional theatre people in new companies which would give free productions and tour the country.

The F.T.P. would have centres all over the United States: «New York, Los Angeles, possibly Boston, possibly New Orleans, each one a production center for a professional company, each a retraining center for the actors who would undoubtedly be of varying ability and from various backgrounds; each a service, research and playwriting center for its own region<sup>30</sup>» since the Work Progress Administration was also interested in preserving «the skills of the worker and hence his self-respect<sup>31</sup>». According to Actor's Equity –the largest theatrical syndicate– before the F.T.P. was set up there were 5.000 unemployed workers with theatre skills in New York alone. The estimated figure for unemployed workers with theatre skills was between 20.000 and 30.000. Thus one of the requirements of the functioning of the F.T.P. –whose head was Hallie Flanagan Davis– was on the one hand that it had to take on any actor who was actually on relief and on the other hand it could not lay anybody off. Its productions ranked over twelve hundred plays, ranging from «an extensive classical cycle, an extensive religious cycle, American modern plays, “living-newspapers” and dance drama, vaudeville, musical comedy, marionette plays, pageants and circuses<sup>32</sup>».

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 1, p. 42.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 1, p. 50.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 1, p. 63.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 1, p. 287.

<sup>30</sup> Davis, Hallie Flanagan. *Arena, A History of the Federal Theatre*, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, NY, 1940, p. 21.

<sup>31</sup> *Theatre Quarterly*. 30, p. 17.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 5, p. 164.



Living Newspapers were frequently used for they needed not only actors but a number of technicians to stage them which meant that quite a lot of people who were on relief could be given a job in this way. Hallie Flanagan states in her book *Arena: A History of the Federal Theatre* that at least «a hundred reporters and playwrights were on the Living Newspaper staff which was set up at a city daily<sup>33</sup>».

Unfortunately, by the end of the 1930's this «spiritual activity»<sup>34</sup> that had marked the decade was slowly fading. The reasons were varied: basically the fact was that socially and politically things were getting better at home while disillusion with Communism and Popular Front ideology had brought about disagreement and controversy among intellectuals and some of them had given up their former engagement with radical politics. One must also take into account the fact that the House Committee on Un-American Activities –headed by Senator Martin Dies from Texas– began its investigations about intellectuals and artists' political ideology. The Federal Theatre especially suffered the zeal of witch-hunters and soon was jeopardized. It was finally killed off by a vote of Congress in June 1939.

Gerald Rabkin in *Drama and Commitment* writes that «proletarian genre disappeared for although it was still acknowledged that art was a weapon there was no longer agreement about what the weapon had to be directed against<sup>35</sup>». It is certainly true that radical politics in the United States seem to have a rather unsteady tradition.

One tends to agree with John Gassner's opinion that «if Marxism was an element in the more or less committed thinking of the sympathisers of the Left, it was frequently parroted rather than understood by them<sup>36</sup>». It is well known the ideological change which both Dos Passos and Steinbeck went through in the Forties and Fifties. Elia Kazan betrayed his former companions when he appeared before H.U.A.C. in the early Fifties and gave names to the Committee then headed by Senator Joseph McCarthy because he «despised the men at the top (of the Communist Party) because there was no doubt that there was a vast police state among the Left element in Hollywood and Broadway<sup>37</sup>».

The entry of the United States in World War II together with the death of President Roosevelt, who had been the driving force for relief and social reform from the White House, was the determining last factor which would eventually put an end to the development of the American political theatre. The increasing power of the activities of the House Committee on Un-American Activities solidified into an open witch-hunt in the late Forties forcing most radical intellectuals to go underground or through rather difficult times. The political aims of the theatre of the Thirties thus failed. However its influence as an innovating trend stayed. Hollywood served as refuge for many theatre people –playwrights, actors, designers and directors– no matter how difficult things turned out to be for some of them. Among those who moved to California were Clifford Odets, John Garfield, Harold Clurman, Elia Kazan and many others.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 5, p. 147.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 1, p. 289.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 15, p. 37.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 4, p. XII.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 24, p. 84.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 3, p. 56.

As far as the theatre is concerned, the innovating movement never disappeared. Off-Broadway remained as a field for experimentation all through the Forties and Fifties even though its voice was practically unheard. In the Village warehouses people like Julian Beck and Judith Malina and the poets Kenneth Rexroth and Williams Carlos Williams among others continued work in the Village warehouses by the Group two decades earlier. The epic theatre, as Brecht had advocated it, ceased to exist, but experiment and anti-commercialism kept alive the light of innovation which would in turn give birth to a series of new plays by young dramatists which would result in the awakening of the marginal theatre during the Sixties.

