

collective mind, as she put it. But at least prose is for everybody. Poetry is not.

New poems are sometimes new half a century later, as is the case with my own "The Groundhog," or "The Fury of Aerial Bombardment." Both are old but have lasted. Take a look at Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's *Oxford Book of English Verse*. Flip back to the last half-inch of pages, where you'll find a vast collection of poems by somebody called Anonymous. Mr. Anonymous, about two thousand years old, or at least a thousand, wrote some of the newest poems in that book.

On Saturday, March 26, 1988, at Thomas Center, Gainesville, a plaque was unveiled commemorating Robert Frost, who had lived here part time, in the winter, for 15 years or more starting in the early 30's. He had given readings at the university, and his wife died here. In his citation President Reitz said in part, "He has shown us that it is possible to be both subtle and plain, both original and traditional, both direct and richly textured, both engaging and serious."

In my *Collected Poems: 1930-1986* there is one entitled "Worldly Failure," which reads as follows:

I looked into the eyes of
Robert Frost
Once, and they were
unnaturally deep.
Set far back in the skull, as far
back in the earth.
An oblique glance made them
look even deeper.

He stood inside the door on
Brewster Street,
Looking out. I proffered him
an invitation.
We went on talking for an hour
and a half.
To accept or not to accept
was his question.

Whether he wanted to meet
another poet;
He erred in sensing some
intangibile slight.
Hard for him to make a
democratic leap.
To be a natural poet you have
to be unnaturally deep.

While he was talking he was
looking out,
But stayed in, sagacity
better indoors.
He became a metaphor for
inner devastation,
Too scared to accept
my invitation.

There is a story behind the poem. At the time Frost was living on Brewster Street near Lake View Avenue in Cambridge, where my mother-in-law lives. My wife, Betty, and I were living at 10 Hilliard Place. On Betty's suggestion I went over to see Frost and invited him to dinner on Saturday night to meet a British poet friend of ours. He said he would be glad to come. We talked outside his door for a long time. Betty had told me to show him a review, I think now it was a British one, of a current book of mine, which was positive but not all praise, to see what he thought of it. Upon perusing this Frost said he never read reviews of his own work, and paid no attention to them.

On Thursday Frost phoned to say he could not come on Saturday as he had been called out of town, or some such excuse.

Later we found out that the lady who took care of Frost, Kay Morrison, had informed him that the poet in question coming for dinner Saturday night was Kathleen Raine, one of the best English poets, a contemporary of mine from 1927 to 1929 at Cambridge. Frost remembered at once that Raine had written a review of his poetry in the *London Times Literary Supplement* that was not 100 percent praise. It was positive, but maybe only 90 percent. So Frost refused to dine with her at our house. He could not stand any critic saying anything against his poetry, even if only slightly dispraising.

Here is a stanza from "Vignettes" in my book *The Long Reach* (1984):

The day after the inauguration
of President Kennedy
We went to a cocktail party at
the Coxes,
Neighbors in Georgetown near
34th Street.
The Hindemiths were there,
I had not known composers,
The talk was all of the
new America.
Robert Frost was there. I went

up to him eagerly, saying,
"I hear you talked with the
President this morning,
What did he say?" Instant reply,
"I did all the talking."

This is a direct, true statement, no subterfuges, no ambiguity. Is this better than the complexities, artifice, and aesthetic distance in the other poem? Is the reality of poetry aided or lessened by comparison with actual facts behind a poem? If you love the poetry should you care about the biography?

Richard Eberhart is the author most recently of Collected Poems, reviewed in the January Chronicles. He lives in Maine.

STAGE

Break a Leg by Katherine Dalton

In 1963, when Tyrone Guthrie produced his first season at the new Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, the States did not have much in the way of regional theater. In a country whose two most famous actors are, respectively, a President and a presidential assassin, Ronald Reagan and John Wilkes Booth—two actors who, in other words, became famous for something other than their art—it seems inevitable that a British director would found what is one of our premier theaters. (At least we are not alone. Guthrie founded Canada's *de facto* national theater, the Stratford Festival Theater in London, Ontario, as well.)

It was 25 years ago last May that the new Guthrie opened with *Hamlet*, and its 25th season these past nine months included a production of *Hamlet* as well, directed by Artistic Director Garland Wright. *Hamlet* is such a difficult play not only because of the language, and the length, but because its main character, the man who must carry the show, is not always attractive. Wright purposefully chose to play *Hamlet* very young, choosing the American actor Zjelko Ivanek for the lead. Ivanek is in his early 30's but is slight enough to pass for a teenager. It is a sound



Joe Giametti

Zeljko Ivanek as the Prince of Denmark at the Guthrie Theater.

concept, but Ivanek was not up to bringing it off. There needs to be something appealing about Hamlet, an air that offsets his sometimes petty rage, or a handsomeness at least, to help make up for the petulance that is so often his outlet for grief. This version of the play had some strengths—notably the play within the play, which was well done as a sort of Noh drama—but a bandy-legged Hamlet, a very weak Gertrude, and an overly naive Ophelia (a common mistake) undermined some better characterizations, most notably Laertes (played by Curzon Dobell, whose work with Stratford director Robin Phillips shows).

But a director deserves acknowledgment for what he tries to do as well as for what he achieves. Wright saw Hamlet as very young and to a great extent overwhelmed by events; in fact the most interesting thing Wright had to say about his reading of the play touched on just this point. He had thought, going into it, that the main trouble he was going to have with *Hamlet* was that “it’s a deeply introspective play and we’re not living in a society that’s introspective. So I wasn’t sure it would speak loudly enough. But

oddly enough, as we worked I found *Hamlet* is not as introspective as I’d assumed. Reading it on the page you think it’s a play about thinking in the face of acting or doing, and substituting that for doing. As a matter of fact, *Hamlet* is not about postponing action so much as there is so much else on Hamlet’s mind. There’s a lot going on for a young person, living with a crisis day to day.”

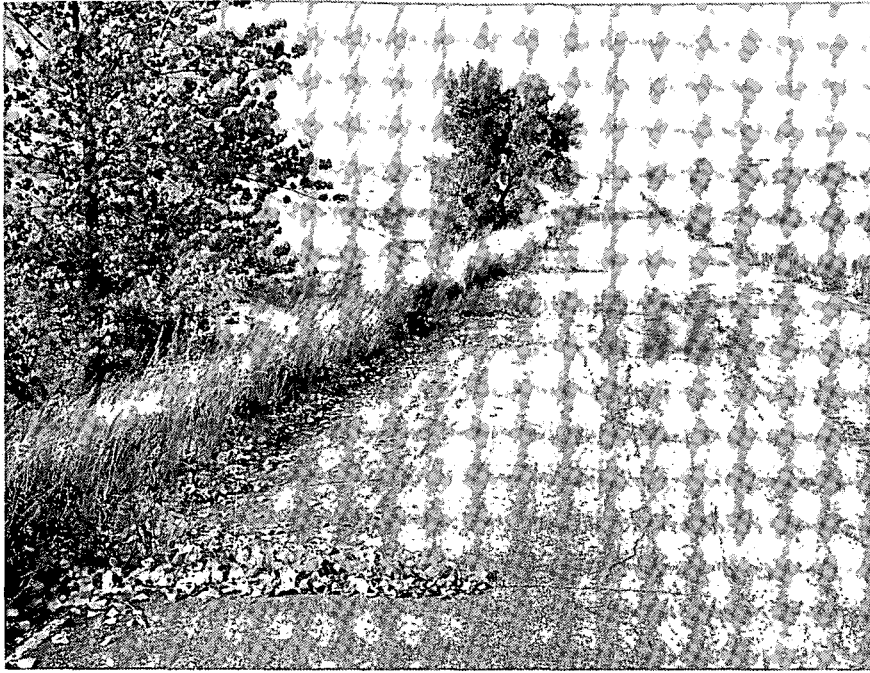
Lucian Pintilie’s version of Ibsen’s *The Wild Duck* was stronger as a performance, primarily because of Rebecca Ellens as Hedvig and Richard Ooms as Old Ekdal, both of whom were wonderful (Wright singled out Ooms’ performance as one of the season’s breakthroughs, but most of the cast was quite good, including Christopher McCann as Gregers Werle, Keith Jochim as Relling, and Charles Seibert—from television’s *Trapper John, M.D.*—as Hjalmar Ekdal). Pintilie brought out all the humor in the play, which is extremely funny in parts, especially in the final scene, leading up to Hedvig’s self-sacrificial suicide. (Since Pintilie had previously directed this play, and Miss Ellens, at the Arena Stage in Washington, DC, the Guthrie

cannot quite claim this as its own production.)

But some of the best news out of the Guthrie is its plans for development. Wright is trying to knead more money into the company, hiring voice coach Elizabeth Smith (the Guthrie is larger than most Broadway houses and unmiked) and raising the artists’ salaries. In 1987 he instituted the Guthrie Lab, essentially a workshop for the actors and directors. The fundraising goal for the next few years is \$25 million, and that’s for an endowment fund; Wright admits it’s a lot, “revolutionary,” as he puts it, “in a field that’s never thought of itself as on an equal scale with museums and orchestras.” He’s making quite a good point: no one would be surprised by such a number at, say, the Metropolitan Opera in New York. “Actors,” Wright says, “have historically been gypsies, and most cultures have not only allowed that but encouraged that. Ultimately it has an effect on how good we find ourselves being.” That the Guthrie’s executive director, Edward A. Martenson, formerly ran the theater program at NEA can only help, though one of the things the Guthrie should be proudest of is the amount of local support: 80 percent of the summer audience and 90 percent of the winter are local people from the twin cities, and over 90 percent of those who give money to support the Guthrie are likewise local.

The season closes this month with Howard Brenton and David Hare’s drama *à clef Pravda*, a British play based on the life of Rupert Murdoch, rounding out a season that included *The Glass Menagerie*, *The Imaginary Invalid*, a new adaptation of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (none of which, unfortunately, I saw). Next year’s season starts in June. As of our press date half the fundraising goal has been met in pledges, a good sign; perhaps an even better sign is what Wright said when asked if he missed New York. He lived and worked very happily there, he says, on and off-Broadway, for 17 years. But he does not miss it: “Not for one second.” Our best hope for any strong regional theater is in just that kind of rancorless prejudice.

Katherine Dalton is managing editor of *Chronicles*.



ART

The West in Photographs

Opening February 19 at the Philadelphia Museum of Art is an exhibition of photographs of the West by Robert Adams. Born in New Jersey, Adams now lives outside of Denver and has spent most of his life out West. The 225 photographs in the exhibition were taken between 1965 and 1986; shown here is a photograph of Nebraska State Highway 2 (left) and another of the Missouri River in Clay County, South Dakota (below). The show runs through April 23 and then travels to Washington and Fort Worth.

