

These are, obviously, major reservations. They accumulate toward the image of a career divided midway by some essential darkening of mood and purpose. Much in the late Leavis exhibits a quality of inhumane unreality (the Richmond lecture being merely a flagrant instance). The depth of insight is increasingly marred by cruel contempt. There has been no criticism since Rymer's less magnanimous.

It is this which makes any "placing" of Leavis's work difficult and premature. Great critics are rarer than great poets or novelists (though their gift is more distant from the springs of life). In English, Johnson and

Coleridge and Matthew Arnold are of the first order. In the excellence of both Dryden and Saintsbury there is an unsteadiness of focus, a touch of the amateur. Among moderns, T. S. Eliot and Edmund Wilson are of this proud company. What of Leavis? One's instinct calls for immediate assent. There is in the sum of his labours a power, a cogency that looms large above what has been polemic and harshly arrogant in the circumstance. If some doubt persists, it is simply because criticism must be, by Leavis's own definition, both central and humane. In his achievement the centrality is manifest; the humanity has often been tragically absent.

Once More, The Round

What's greater, Pebble or Pond?
What can be known? The unknown.
My true self runs toward a hill
More! O more! visible.

Now I adore my life
With the bird, the abiding leaf,
With the fish, the questing snail,
And the eye altering all;
And I dance with William Blake
For love, for Love's sake;

And everything comes to One,
As we dance on, dance on, dance on.

Theodore Roethke

THEATRE

On the Passing of Matches

By Nigel Dennis

A CAREFUL READING of Max Frisch's *Biedermann and the Fire-Raisers*, which appeared with its tail docked last winter at the Royal Court, excites reflections on topics ranging from the burning of Troy and the Reichstag to Left-wing orthodoxy and the education of children. As the play is a sort of pastoral homily for wrongdoers and might be named Frisch's *Epistle to the Germans*, it excites also the mischievous delight that one is bound to feel when a Swiss takes a German aside and begs him not to worship a golden calf; but this pleasure is purely humorous and has no place in a discussion which should be conducted throughout with a mind purged of malice and a heart wide open to all that is beneficent in the international Bourse of intellectual exchange. This open attitude is essential to-day because almost all the national safety-curtains have been wound up into the flies and it is really exhilarating to see most of the theatrical world as a huge stretch of completely open country into which any playwright can walk and do his stuff without trailing the tail of his nationality behind him. Nations still exist, of course, but their dramatic tastes are admirably unpredictable: a cry from the heart in Cape Cod can wring a Swede's breast as easily as a Left Bank outburst can stun an Iclander. A Swiss prophet like Dürrenmatt may set out to capture Germans, only to find that he has hooked Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, in whose hands his sermon becomes a fascinating cat's cradle of international woolwork. We all know what actors and directors can do in the way of contorting plays into strange, unexpected shapes. But nations have the same power of general translation: prompted, unlike our stars, by innocence and honesty, they spot what matters to them in a foreign work and give it, more often than not, an intriguing, enjoyable bias. The result is an entirely kaleidoscopic theatre—a sort of sieving and filtering theatre in which any given work

may command attention in any form in any country. It is, on the whole, a most happy picture of internationalism and highly favourable to the arts.

To this internationalism there is added sometimes a rich profusion of historical influences, so that we have the feeling on seeing certain plays that the past is being drawn into the present much as if it were yet another friendly nation, rather than a piece of time. We find this in the Orphic tastes of Mr. Tennessee Williams and the deliberate classicism of Mr. T. S. Eliot and Thornton Wilder; but there is no doubt that Brecht must take first place as the assembler and digester of times and places. However coarse and corrupt the ideology may be, it is a great artistic feat to be able to get, say, Germany, Shakespeare, and China on one skewer, and to do so comfortably and happily without any of the nervous strain that is apt to mark a playwright when he imposes old forms on new things. By comparison, Brecht's friend Max Frisch is narrower; and yet the same spirit of combinations is comfortably at work, marrying colloquial German to Aeschylean parody and interrupting the ceremony with a loud cry from *Faust*. We have had many Greek-type choruses since the Greeks, and very stiff and hard to take they have been; but a Greek chorus composed of a dead-pan German fire-brigade makes us sorry that the Policeman's Chorus in *The Pirates of Penzance* was not part of a play dealing with an earnest problem of penal reform. So we see that our international theatre of time and place has yet another new dimension: it can mix the Aeschylean strain with the lightest operetta and, conjoining parody and solemnity, preach an entirely laughable sermon.

These are the artistic virtues of our international theatre and we can see easily enough how much sport and experiment they provide. It is only when we study the ideas in a play