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Just Looking, Thanks

MARYA MANNES

LONDON

THE PUBLIC at the Picasso show and the audience at Harold Pinter's *The Caretakers* had much in common: they were fascinated, bewildered, lost. A few—the knowledgeable few who expected to be excited—were excited. Only a minority was openly contemptuous or bored. One elderly lady standing before a collage at the Tate Gallery said, "Well, if it's a dishcloth, it's a very good rendition of a dishcloth, because it is a dishcloth." A clump of small schoolboys on a guided tour detached themselves from their dazed and shuffling fellows to stand in the Turner Room and watch a man wax the floor with a rotary brush. But anger or outrage were largely confined to private conversation, where the burden of reaction was, "His early periods are marvelous, but I'll be damned if I'll go along with his later ones. What a waste of his genius!"

But it is very old-fashioned to be wistful about Picasso's Pink and Blue periods and very square to be repelled by his Bone or Two-Headed stages. I myself found it an overwhelming show, as full of paintings that I coveted as of those I have no desire to see again. Because Picasso did what he had to do and did it with unparalleled virtuosity and fury does not mean that one has to like or even admire all his manifestations, or, having read Roland Penrose's excellent preface to the show, to go along with interpretations such as this one: "It seems probable," writes Mr. Penrose, "... that it ["Woman Dressing Her Hair"] reflects Picasso's dismay and anger at the arrival of German troops on the Atlantic coast where he was staying. . . . The narrow insolent look in the eyes, the distended belly, the aggressive swing of the breasts suggesting the form of a swastika and the horror of the squat legs finishing in enormous ill-formed feet makes this terrifying female a most disquieting image associated with catastrophic events."

Doubtless Mr. Pinter's disquieting and compelling play is also in the shadow of catastrophic events, although the connection is just as tenuous. If the Beaux-Arts and the Royal Academy made Picasso inevitable and essential, so have Frederick Lonsdale and Noël Coward and even Terence Rattigan made Harold Pinter inevitable. The airless mold of realism, of the so familiar that it is no longer felt, has to be broken. But I keep wondering why people like Samuel Beckett and Pinter have to break it the same way, with the same symbols.

FOR in *The Caretakers*, as in *Godot*, everyone is waiting for something. Pinter's play (wonderfully acted by Alan Bates, Peter Woodthorpe, and Donald Pleasence) concerns two brothers and a tramp invited to share the basement room in the house one of them owns. It should go without saying that the room is bleak and cluttered, that the tramp is old and smelly and voluble, that one brother has been in mental hospitals, that the other is a black-jacketed spiv (or is he?), and that the point of the three acts is their inability to communicate with each other. The point is also that the old tramp is always waiting to go to Sidcup to get his working papers (and never does), that the strange brother is always waiting to build a shed in the yard, and that the younger brother is always waiting to decorate his house. Pinter's talent lies as much in his silences as in his talk: his timing is masterly, his dialogue hypnotic in its repetition either of absurd clichés or plain human confusion. Like Beckett, he can be funny in the way good old vaudeville and burlesque writers were funny. Like Beckett, too, he acknowledges no obligation to his public: their comprehension is not sought, their lack of it not mourned. The only "action" in *The Caretakers* comes at the end, when the quiet brother orders the tramp out because he smells and disturbs his sleep. That the tramp weeps, that

they are all lost, is, I imagine, supposed to make us sad, aware of human vulnerability in the face of the world's cruelty. I find it hard to see such universality either in *The Caretakers* or in Picasso's "Cat Eating a Bird." But, like the audience, I feel compelled to look for it.

LACK of communication between human beings is perhaps the major tragedy of our time, but it is not confined to the dispossessed or disinherited, or to dumps and basements. That it can be just as tragic in drawing rooms is brilliantly if unevenly demonstrated in Robert Bolt's *The Tiger and the Horse*, where in the library of the Master of the College, the breakage of communication between a distinguished astronomer-philosopher and his wife, between his daughter and her lover, builds to a shattering climax. That these are cultivated people speaking good language in no way dilutes the trouble.

Bolt, in fact, is a current boon to the English stage, for his other play now running in London, *A Man for All Seasons*—the man being Sir Thomas More—is not only a passionate defense of conscience but of the majesty and clarity of language, and his writing is a joy to hear.

Like Mr. Pinter, Mr. Bolt is profoundly fortunate in his actors. Paul Scofield, as the doomed chancellor of Henry VIII, manages to make this austere, incorruptible scholar a figure of great tenderness, whose martyrdom—as the author would have it—is less an act of history than a living choice. And in *The Tiger and the Horse*, Sir Michael Redgrave's contribution, good as it is in the Master's part, lies mainly in throwing the play to his big, handsome, talented daughter, Vanessa Redgrave, and to Catherine Lacey, superb as his lonely wife.

I am not quite so happy about the acting in the two major popular hits, *Ross* and *A Passage to India*. *Ross*, of course, is Terence Rattigan's play about T. E. Lawrence, written with the playwright's customary theatrical craftsmanship, consistently interesting, sometimes gripping, only partially illuminating: in the end the man eludes him (and us) as he has others. But although all who knew Lawrence of Arabia agree on one

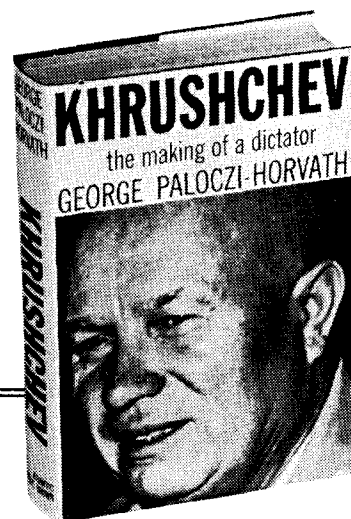
facet at least—that he was as much of a show-off as an introvert—it struck me throughout that Sir Alec Guinness postured too much, either staring ahead woodenly or sweeping around in Arab robes like a bad shiek-impersonator. In dialogue with the excellent General Allenby of Brewster Mason, Guinness was his old self: subtle, brisk, cerebral, humorous. But he surely hammed with the Arabs. And speaking of Arabs, I find nice clean tip-tilted English features painted taupe not very convincing. Surely two Semites could have been found for T. E.'s bodyguards?

A Passage to India suffers from hamming too, particularly by Norman Wooland as the liberal Mr. Fielding and by Dilys Hamlett as the neurotic Miss Quested. Santha Rama Rau's adaptation of E. M. Forster's classic is direct, economical, and highly perceptive, reaching its emotional peak in the first act, where confrontation of East and West is brilliantly balanced. Here too, the young Pakistani actor Zia Mohyeddin as Dr. Aziz is at his best—ebullient, eager, proud, vulnerable, naïve. But as the play progressed, both British and Indians became symbols more than beings; and although interest never faltered, compassion waned.

For the British, however, *A Passage to India* must be an emotional experience of the first order. Five years ago it might have been strongly resisted. Now it seems to provide them with both expiation of guilt and with pride. They can watch the colossal stupidities of their sahibs with the detachment of time, the comfort that Mr. Fieldings did exist, and the knowledge that their withdrawal from India was performed with wisdom and dignity.

OUT IN Shepherd's Bush, the BBC has built a television palace that may well be a factory model of mass communications for years to come. It is a circular building that covers nearly twice the area of St. Paul's Cathedral and is capable of producing about 1,500 hours of programs a year, nearly half of the present BBC requirements.

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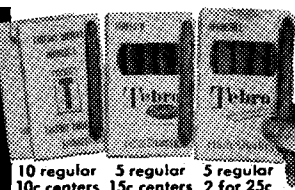
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mosaic mural by John Piper and all sorts of colors and textures in wall and floor surfaces.

The main circular building houses the offices, a lower surrounding ring contains the seven huge studios, and beyond those is still another band for loading and shifting. Technically, it is awesome, from the vast grids of studio lights operated from a central switchboard to the carpeted and colorful control rooms with instrument-panel boards like those of nuclear submarines.

Unfortunately only in this proud achievement is the statue of the sun god Helios perched high on the fountain in the center of the courtyard and thus inescapably in daily view. He is a very golden young man in a supple and markedly unvirile attitude, and it may be further evidence of his ascendancy in society that far below him, crouching damply under the fountain's lip, is a woman's figure.

THERE IS the suspicion among directors and producers familiar with the deprivations and discomforts of early television that increased material and technological aids can inhibit rather than serve the imagination. They are a little afraid of all this new splendor.

I do not think that the better ones need to be. Eight hours spent watching ITA and BBC alternately, from 1 P.M. to 9 P.M. on a weekday, have further convinced me that the makers of British television, especially BBC, have a greater sense of responsibility toward their audience and a higher regard for the human being than we do.

They care, for one thing, what their children see. If I had small ones, I would be delighted to sit them before BBC's "Watch with Mother" to see the innocent—if sometimes cloying—adventures of a puppet family called Woodentops or to learn about animals or flowers, or to follow a charming drawing-story of a little Indian boy and his elephant. No kicks here, just gentleness and a little learning; and in between lovely girl announcers with soft voices whom we might do well to substitute for the cheap young barkers on our side of the water. Later in the afternoon, young boys and girls can follow a nautical con-

test in ITA's "Crow's Nest" and try to identify ship silhouettes, or meet sea captains; or they can join BBC's "Sketch Class" and watch a delightful elderly artist draw good pictures while he tells how and why he does it, and then look at the entries chosen from previous contests, accompanied by his comments, critical or appreciative. They could also watch their own "Sportsview"; nearly every day the news is brought to the young in special form.

That most young people probably turned that afternoon to "The Range Riders," a C-grade U.S. Western, in no way deters the BBC from its primary concept in programming for children: to assist in making them civilized, kind, and enlightened adults, without bringing them prematurely into an adult world. We make them consumers.

I will grant you that watching a golf tournament of masters (pros) in drenching rain for two hours is not my cup of tea, but I learned a lot about golf. I enjoyed the relaxed and solicitous commentary, and I was consistently entertained by the saturated and indomitable British spectators. Perhaps I enjoyed it most for a single negative reason: nothing



ing interrupted it. Even more, it was live television of an actual event, a kind of programming the British believe in and we practice far too little.

LATER THAT EVENING, I watched William Clark hewing to the point with Hammarskjöld and Lodge on ITA's "Right to Reply"; BBC's excellent nightly potpourri of people, ideas, and happenings, "Tonight"; Hans and Lotte Haas exploring crabs in Malaya; and, expecting the worst, ITA's top-rated serial, "Emergency—Ward 10." I thought it would be the usual hospital nonsense, but I found instead

a well-written sophisticated drama with believable characters and quite a lot of solid medical information, intravenously injected. I ended my vigil with ITA's "This Week," a combination interview-discussion-commentary geared to topical subjects, one of them being the effects of "Tell Laura I Love Her" on car-crazy teen-agers.

What quizzes and variety I did see were lamentable: when the British deliberately set out to entertain, their dentures show. I wish also that BBC were not quite so time-conscious in its spot interviews. It will spend twenty happy minutes with a sheep dog but cut a distinguished Antarctic explorer off in three, just when he's warming up. I also wish that both services made less use of the prompter and more of spontaneous talk. What is written down makes for smoothness but it lacks fillip. Some "Open End"ing is in order.

Still, I would invite anyone with the fortitude to make this comparison of an average afternoon and evening's viewing in Britain and in the United States: it might well spur the demand for an alternative service at home. When we are good, we are very, very good, but the operative word is "when." When the British can see, weekly and in prime time, shows like BBC's "Panorama," "Monitor," "Tonight," and "Face to Face"; regular Shakespeare in "An Age of Kings," the magnificent documentaries of Denis Mitchell on Africa ("Winds of Change"), and the six-part series on crime by Christopher Mayhew in regular sequence; when ITA follows with a four-part study of the United States, again in prime time, our calendar—and our diet—looks pretty thin.

I miss our commentators: the British newscasters, shorn of opinion, are sound but not stimulating. They could use the astringency and humor of a David Brinkley. I miss undisciplined talk like "Open End" and madmen like Alexander King and sophisticated natural comics like Steve Allen. The British don't grow them, or if they do, tether them. I can't think of anything else I miss: certainly not violence or the commercials. And I don't blame BBC for planning far fewer Hollywood imports this winter.

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THE REPORTER Puzzle

Acrostickler No. 17

by HENRY ALLEN

DIRECTIONS

- 1) Each crossword definition contains two clues. One is a conventional synonym; the other a pun, anagram, or play on words.
- 2) Letters from the acrostic should be transferred to the corresponding squares in the crossword, and vice versa.
- 3) The initial letters of the correct words in the acrostic will, when read down, spell out the name of a prominent person.

- A 7 14 101 198 51 67 28 149
To throw off a burden.
- B 214 135 182 87 139 23 2 166
African starling.
- C 217 18 39 77
"Upon this _____ I spake / She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd" Othello, I, iii.
- D 83 21 180 203 119 107
Execution by drowning.
- E 189 103 60 37 46 196 4 143
Mistress of invective.
- F 9 115 157 194 The mark of _____ (alt. sp.)
- G 121 16 133 171 208 55 219 91
Series of poems by Vergil.
- H 44 125 32 93 Deposed Iraqi leader.
- I 210 187 95 30 212 205 137
Describing certain curls.
- J 69 224 105 159 Jane Austen novel.
- K 222 175 111 131 201 79 25
Travelling salesman.
- L 147 123 89 12 "And all I ask is a merry _____ from a laughing fellow rover."
John Masfield, Sea-Fever.

ACROSS

1. Sounds like slaves who were kind of bored.
11. Shortly near like for a printer's devil.
20. Kitchen ware can score OK.
31. O, for direction by Monteverdi!
41. Desires of old and nears anew.
48. Language used in ritual at inquest.
54. Sure direction for many.
61. Pays court and sees girls.
72. It was red for General Randolph Pate.
81. No deported persons in short but Waldon and others.
91. Not on list, but an excellent cheese, just the same.
99. A new element that'll yet triumph tho' not hep.

1	2 B	3	4 E	5		7 A		9 F		11	12 L	13	14 A	15
16 G		18 C		20	21 D	22	23 B	24	25 K	26		28 A		30 I
31	32 H	33	34	35		37 E		39 C		41	42	43	44 H	45
46 E		48	49	50	51 A	52		54	55 G	56	57	58		60 E
61	62	63	64			67 A		69 J		72	73	74		75
	77 C		79 K		81	82	83 D	84	85		87 B		89 L	
91 G	92	93 H	94	95 I	96	97		99	100	101 A	102	103 E	104	105 J
	107 D				111 K			115 F					119 D	
121 G	122	123 L	124	125 H	126	127		129	130	131 K	132	133 G	134	135 B
	137 I		139 B		141	142	143 E	144	145		147 L		149 A	
151	152	153	154			157 F		159 J		162	163	164	165	
166 B		168	169	170	171 G	172		174	175 K	176	177	178		180 D
181	182 B	183	184	185		187 I		189 E		191	192	193	194 F	195
196 E		198 A		200	201 K	202	203 D	204	205 I	206		208 G		210 I
211	212 I	213	214 B	215		217 C		219 G		221	222 K	223	224 J	225

121. Time certain of being rubbed out.
129. Uncompounded, but mixes around abbreviated page and book.
141. To give out ends softly.
151. Beginner in petty robbery.
162. Promise in a boat house.
168. Slang for a groat.
174. I'm with a famous name in automobiles, but cold when in France.
181. It's more nearly correct to taper off.
191. You eat in an Italian city.
200. Palm, as I see it, suitable for on African antelope.
211. Have a fitting in a city in N.C.
221. Swelling the members for a meed.
9. Need not now known. Why?
11. Sire, 'tis Southey's river flowing rapidly into the Elbe.
13. Battleground for troops that are OK.
15. Charlotte's ballet?
34. Stand and more than rest.
42. Flower that rates a change.
62. Try a lute completely.
74. Careful! There's an up trend here.
81. Afterthought holds our streams.
85. I'm sober where I'd sat before.
124. Twice ten rose about ten times ten.
127. Memorial in tape around hip.
129. Catch a bit.
132. Puriform can make one dopy.
151. Characteristic of IRA in a doublet.
153. Ends up as 99 across begins but rather seedy.
163. 501 age when dipped in river near 191 across.
165. Nay, he's a nocturnal carnivore.
170. Gringo, stay! When you call me that, smile!
176. Does this river do as it sounds.

DOWN

1. Singular kine on board barges.
3. If you want dessert after tea you must take a flier with the gun.
5. Mac in his cottage.
7. A colleague of the Acrostician

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