

A Contraction of the second se

BROADWAY POSTSCRIPT

Seven's His Destination

FTER too long a vacation, Thornton Wilder has returned to the American theatre through the Off-Broadway entrance. His "Plays for Bleecker Street" consist of three new short pieces written with the Circle-inthe-Square Theatre in mind, which is to say that they are unambitiously simple exercises for friendly audiences.

"Infancy," the first of two from a projected cycle of seven based upon the seven ages of man, features two grown-up actors playing babies in perambulators. We are to understand that their talk is intelligible to the audience and to each other, but not to their nursemaids. And from their straining interchanges we get a sense of infancy as a time of frantic receptivity to the nature of the world. And it is Mr. Wilder's lament that adults deliberately exert every effort to slow down their learning process and even subvert it by feeding them unimportant information which will exhaust them into quietude. While the satire on the adults is not very effective, the unbabylike baby talk is entertaining and penetrates momentarily what may be the painful truth of infancy.

Although "Childhood," from the same cycle, is also a glimpsing thing, it has more shape and complication. In this episode, we meet three children torn between their urge to have the freedom and adventure they believe they might have if their parents should suddenly die, and their need for the security and comfort a family provides. Somewhat like Emily in "Our Town," one of the parents asks to be an invisible witness to his children's fantasy game. It turns out to be a bus ride by three new orphans during which their sought-after adventures become more and more frightening, increasing their need to appreciate their parents, with, of course, strong reservations. "Papa wasn't perfeck, but he would never have done a mortgage," says one of them lovally. By the end of the play the children have abandoned their excursion to return home. But their invisible father has heard himself devastatingly assessed as "a very fine man who tried, only . . . he didn't ever say anything very inneresting."

Mr. Wilder seems to have no great hope that relations between children and adults will ever be much different, but he staked out in this charade an area in which we are aware of both the mirages of more ideal relationships and our pitifully poor chances of ever reaching them.

The final play, "Someone from Assissi," is one of a second projected cycle of seven on the deadly sins. It is subtitled "Lust" and creates an imaginary incident in the life of St. Francis. It implies that a crazy woman, named Mona Lucrezia, has been driven mad by an adulterous love affair with St. Francis, undertaken before he became a monk. It is further suggested that, like the protagonist of "Ross," St. Francis could resist his carnal desires only by completely avoiding sources of temptation, and that his strong self-discipline was made necessary by the fear of his own weakness. In the play the monk meets Mona by chance, and in one startlingly lucid speech she states the contradictions of sanctity to him by saying, "It is fear that has driven love out of the world and only a man without fear can bring it back.

What Mr. Wilder may be driving at is that it is the degree of courage and wisdom exercised by men, as they voluntarily face the results of the unhappiness they have caused others, that alone brings the beatific joy carnal love can only temporarily imitate.

Under Mr. Quintero's direction, the three playlets abound with life and emotion, and the action is frequently absorbing. Nevertheless, the possibility exists that these impulsive little playlets, written specially for this stage and this style of presentation, might have fared better on the old-fashioned proscenium stage Mr. Wilder has rejected. For Mr. Wilder seems not to be the sort of writer who is satisfied with achieving the evocative and ever-deepening explorations of human emotional crises that constitute theatre-in-theround's most fruitful area of work. Rather, he appears to enjoy making a variety of points deftly and to bound away from one to the next as freely as possible. And although this requires a nonrepresentational fluidity, a sceneryless proscenium stage can give him both this fluidity and the specificity of focus particularly helpful to plays that are primarily reflective demonstrations. "Plavs for Bleecker Street" seem just that. They break no new ground, and have no great insistency. They are gamboling Thornton Wilder creations that will delight you in direct proportion to your capacity to enjoy the remarkable man and mind behind them.

-HENRY HEWES.

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BOOKED FOR TRAVEL

Our Man in the Ozone—1. Through the Suburbs



Rome-"a city that rarely fails to cheer."

B^Y THE time I was ready to ride out to Idlewild the other night, a place I use the way some people use a revolving door, I had been at work for some ten days on a flight plan that would put me in orbit on a path about five miles above the earth. There would be occasional touchdowns on the way, and these I tried to arrange at places that had not been previously reported here by your agent. Or at least recently.

Getting out of Europe and into Asia, where I have been particularly eager to report from Angkor Wat, Taipei, and Macao, is like trying to get out of New York in a hurry. You end up rolling through the same suburbs on the same highway. So it was that I reported in at TWA's temporary terminal-that stone bird of a departure station which Saarinen designed before he died will not open until April-and waited for the plane that would become Flight No. 800, bound for Paris and Rome, to extricate itself from the snows of Chicago. Alas, that mess in which Chicago aviation has gotten itself ensnarled— O'Hare Field is a monstrous tangle of traffic at best—becomes a hopeless knot in bad weather. There wasn't enough gate space cleared of snow at O'Hare to get a passenger on or off a plane, so the million-dollar propless 600-mile-anhour marvel was held at Kansas City until someone manned the shovels at Chicago.

It didn't seem like less of an irony when the pilot, Captain George Duvall, once he had gotten his mitts on the Boeing in New York and headed it for Paris, announced a flight of five hours and forty-five minutes, or about one hour less than schedule. We roared off down the east coast of Long Island and headed up toward Nova Scotia, feeling for the winds that were anticipated at better than 100 miles an hour.

In that everlasting *concours* to provide a more glittering first-class service, TWA, which in years gone by had not been noted for it, has lately developed

a regular sybarite's express. Several days before departure I had found myself in telephone conversation with an earnest young man who beseeched me for my preference for dinner the night of the flight, rattling off half a dozen choices any one of which would have tempted César Ritz. But the menu, which began with caviar and turtle soup with sherry, also included, for such ascetics as me who think airline food is too rich, a short-order selection of hamburgers, hot dogs, and milk shakes. Heavens, what else would you want if you're to be nailed to a chair for half of a waking day? And besides, who can resist the impertinence of ordering the hamburger after having begun with a ladle of Beluga, and a deck of dry toast, and a small vase of vodka?

Once the passengers were inextricably hemmed in by tables, glassware, and other necessities for gorging one's way across the Atlantic, the steward moved up and down the aisles snapping Polaroid photographs which were later pasted into a souvenir folder and presented as mementos. I'm not sure the businessmen care, but then most businessmen are being dispatched between continents these days in tourist quarters. To remove further tedium (why didn't they think of all these divertissements back when it took sixteen piston hours to cross the bloody sea?) passengers are invited to participate in a navigation game. Given the mileage (3,175) and the true air speed (543), and an estimation of the winds at anywhere from plus fifty-five miles per hour to plus 157 mph, one is asked to figure the arrival over landfall at Brest. In case anyone was less than totally engrossed in this problem, Captain Duvall shortly embarked, over the loudspeaker, on a rather moving travelogue about Sable Island, which was fifty miles off our course at the moment. It is a place, he was saying, that harbors tribes of wild horses descended from one of the 400 ships that have foundered on its shoals. Domestic stallions, sent in to start a cross-breed, were kicked to death. Hay bales dropped by the Royal Canadian Air Force during some lean months were kicked apart and blown to the wind by these proud horses.

Captain Duvall made it all sound so intriguing and dramatic that I was moved to seek him out later on. He gives his lectures off the cuff, culling the material from magazines. He can perform with equal eloquence on the Aegean Islands and Greenland, and in fact promised us a few words on Mont St. Michel and Chartres, over which we would soon be flying. With the tables cleared, the travelogue done, and the