

## A Friend Recalls Odets

# 'He Had An Inner Unrest...'

By W. H. SCARBOROUGH

When Clifford Odets died last week at 57, he had undergone as many transitions as the actor who plays three roles in a one-act play.

He was best known as one of the fiery young men of American drama in the thirties, and as such he is best remembered. His was the voice of protest heard loudest on the American stage, that registered its objections to the state of things most succinctly.

He wrote in an era when there was much to protest—the great depression with its starving of the spirit and the body, of social injustice. His was the counterpoint to the inner plights of Eugene O'Neill. Together they sang a fugue of distress, anger and despair about an America that had had its optimism cut clean out.

He had, before he was thirty, the satisfaction of seeing three successful plays running simultaneously on Broadway—"Waiting for Lefty," "Till the Day I Die" and "Awake and Sing." They were to be followed by at least five more, each of which in its own way would make history in the drama of the Nation and provide the Tennessee Williamses and the Arthur Millers—especially the William Inges—the techniques on which to begin the drama of the present. Echoes of him are heard in Edward Albee, the coming young man of the future.

He had an ear for capturing authentic dialogue and making it sing on the stage. His plays became not merely believable but almost confused with reality. This was understandable. He had been born into hardship and oppression. He had also cut his teeth on drama as an actor in the Group Theatre, which was to produce more than one major playwright and one major actor. He knew how a line would sound on the stage, how it should be played.

As he grew older his plays reflected changing times and a maturing playwright. But as the forties wore on into the fifties he began taking a new tack. No longer were his works quite the American parallel of Germany's Bertholt Brecht. He was exploring something new with plays such as "The Big Knife" and "The Flowering Peach." They

could not be understood in terms of the early Odets. The critics attacked savagely or defended passionately, yet few seemed to comprehend what was taking place. At any rate, Clifford Odets wrote his last play in 1954, and appeared permanently to have turned to Hollywood and TV.

The man beneath the protest and the skillful craft was not, however, reflected in his stage pieces. Periodically he would escape the involvements in various ways. One of them was to come to Chapel Hill, where he had friends. Here he would stroll the campus, browse the library, argue with students and participate freely in discussion of Chapel Hill's then-burgeoning activity in drama. One of his best friends, Paul Green, recalls him, not as a playwright, but as a man capable of profound influence on his environment—a man of compassion and warmth who may well have written best when there was something to protest against, but who could lose his quarrel with the world very quickly under terms of truce.

"He had in him an inner unrest, an inner unhappiness, which made him want to reach out, to do things, to change things. Cliff used to get mad on these left-wing things, and when he did, he wrote his best plays," Mr. Green reflected last week.

"When a fellow hits his voice, it's as good as anything he'll ever do. Cliff hit his voice with his very first play. It was a bull's eye. He never surpassed it. Oh, he may have done eight major plays, but you know it's sort of like the young coon hound who grows up and the first time he trees a coon he really lets go. After that he may bark the same, but never with the complete fervor he had that first night he broke through. The old American Success Story took hold, of course. Cliff was 'hailed' and all that. America's always on the lookout for the White Hope, and this is so terribly unfair to a young writer to plume him up beyond all reason. No man can live up to the expectations that sort of thing creates. We should be thankful Cliff was as good as he was.

"O'Neill's plays were 80 per cent inside himself. It was a subjective dialogue. About Cliff, you had the feeling he'd heard



ODETS IN CHAPEL HILL — Playwright Clifford Odets, who died Aug. 15 at 57, is shown here during the early thirties on one of his many visits to the University. Left to right are Dubose Hayward, author of "Porgy"; Odets; Paul Green and Carolina Playmakers director and Dramatic Arts Professor Frederick Koch.

his dialogue, that it was real. "It is a great loss he is gone so early. He was in his prime, only fifty-seven, and we might have looked forward to some fine plays in eight or ten years. He might have found another era of protest, this time on the international scene. He could very easily have shown up the dangers of this perverted nationalism which threatens to throw us into nuclear war. He could have put Barry Goldwater on the stage better than any other playwright in America."

Mr. Green corresponded regularly with Odets. His last letters came from Hollywood, where he was working on a new one-hour TV series, built around a permanent cast of twelve headed by Richard Boone. Mr. Green had asked him several times to come

to Chapel Hill for an extended visit, but Odets was busy. His last letter came July 10. On July 23 he was operated on for a severely ulcerated stomach. The surgeons found cancer, totally unexpected. On August 15 he died.

Mr. Green is not certain, but he had heard that immediately prior to his death he had been planning to rehearse a musical version of his play, "Golden Boy." Whether this would have led him back to his first love, the legitimate stage, cannot be said. Perhaps he was a victim of the creative malaise described by John Gassner, who once said that "most American playwrights, when they quit getting angry, lose their talent."

Mr. Green disagrees, especially as regards Clifford Odets.

## In The Margin

By W. H. SCARBOROUGH

### What They're Saying About Annie

Betty Smith's fourth novel, "Joy in the Morning" has been on the stands for a week at this point, and if early sales are a fair index of success, the book and its heroine, Annie Brown, will be climbing onto the best-seller list for a long, profitable perch.

The Intimate Bookshop — where all the copies of "Joy" are autographed by Miss Smith — reports that first-week sales are every bit as good as those of "The Sand Pebbles," Chapel Hill's last sale key jangler, which went hand over hand up to the crow's nest, hit the number two slot and settled down for a long watch at No. 3.

Miss Smith writes from New York, that although the Sunday New York Times Book Review frowned at Annie old-maidishly, Orville Prescott made it all up in the Monday review. Same for the New York Herald-Tribune.

"The reviews seem to be one-third 'Joy' and two-thirds 'Tree.' Therefore 'Tree' is having quite a big sale now," Miss Smith wrote.

Generally the critics have been most favorably inclined toward Annie. They've found her engaging, appealing, a little provincially naive, with a funny way of expressing herself to be sure — but nevertheless, we must have that nice young Brown couple around for dinner some evening, they appear to be saying behind the literary lorgnettes.

A sampling of the reviews:

ORVILLE PRESCOTT  
The New York Times

"It is exactly 20 years now since the publication of Miss Smith's first novel, 'A Tree Grows in Brooklyn.' Few modern books have been so beloved and few have contained so large a dash of autobiography. 'Joy in the Morning' probably won't equal the popularity of 'A Tree,' but it is certain to touch many hearts. And it seems equally inspired by personal experience. This is the story of Annie's life as a teen-age bride in a Middle Western college town. Betty Smith, just out of her teens, studied at the University of Michigan. Annie, like Miss Smith, came from Brooklyn, and also like Miss Smith, Annie was enthralled by words and books, and began to write plays at a precocious age.

"'Joy in the Morning' is exclusively Annie's book. Some old sourpusses may compare Annie to Pollyanna. But their scorn won't keep the many thousands of women who are going to read 'Joy in the Morning' from loving Annie—even though they may want to shake her every now and then."

JOHN K. HUTCHENS  
The New York Herald-Tribune

"The tree that grew so wondrously in Brooklyn has been transplanted, these 20 years later, to Mid-Western soil, and the agreeable news today is that it flourishes nicely out there, too. This is not to say, you understand, that 'Joy in the Morning' is a sequel to the sensational seedling that Betty Smith planted way back then.

"If I may say so without suggesting a comparison of which Miss Smith must long since have grown weary, I would observe that 'Joy in the Morning' lacks the freshness and vitality of 'A Tree Grows in Brooklyn.' It does not, as Lewis Gannett said of that earlier book, 'sing.' But it would be a stony-hearted reader of 'Joy in the Morning' who did not find himself moved by Annie McGairy, of Flatbush, as she walks across the Mid-Western campus and worries lest a cop will ask her to leave, as she eavesdrops outside a classroom, taking notes and doing assignments on her own, as she awaits and experiences the birth of her first child.

"Miss Smith, it will surely occur to you, has overlooked no ingredient to round out a new re-telling of an old story. But then it will also occur to you that the re-telling has a simple, unpretentious air of truth. It can make a big difference in favor of such a book as hers."

W. G. ROGERS

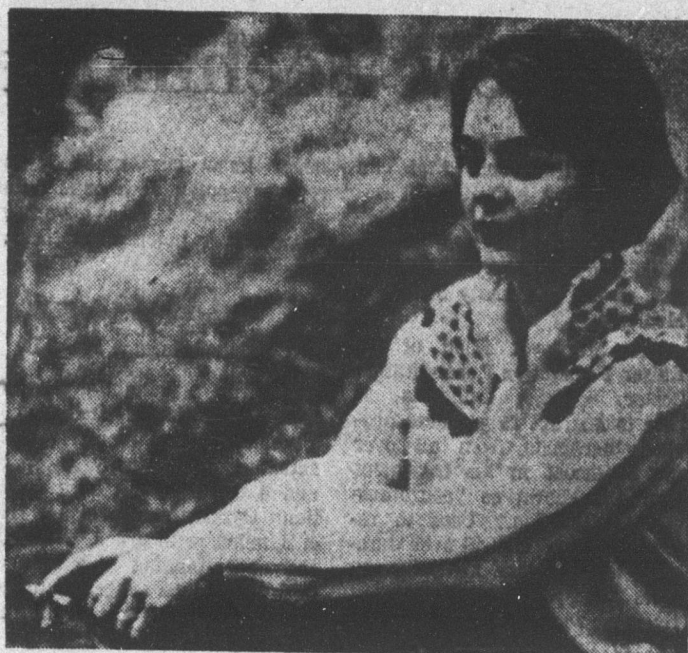
The New York Herald-Tribune Sunday Book Review

"Looked at from one point of view, there are only two kinds of novels, and each kind possesses undeniable virtues.

"First there are novels that break new ground. They tell a story, but a story never heard before — lots of things, for instance, happen in our century that didn't happen before and can be turned into fiction only in our day. Or they tell a story in a different way, a new form, from an angle being explored for the first time.

"This is the warm, earnest glorification of the everlasting common man, the salt of the earth, and in general of purity, decency, love and goodness. All's right with this world. Thousands and thousands of readers will eat it up, alternately smiling and weeping, smiling and weeping."

## BOOKS



Anna Sevier

... Author Of 'Early Summer'

## The Cup Of Youth Runneth Not Over

EARLY SUMMER. By Anna Sevier. Atheneum. 177 Pages. \$3.95.

Precocious young lady novelists have been with us long enough for the debut of another to create no particular ruckus. After the critics discovered that Francoise Sagan was going to get older than seventeen, they even stopped commenting on it and started getting testy at being pestered by requests for movie money and cokes.

If Anna Sevier, a young lady from the mountains of Virginia, had heard about critics, she undoubtedly threw salt over her shoulder to ward them off. Certainly she didn't bother to put on a Sunday pinafore for them, and in her first novel, she has broken every rule the old fuds try to impose on the literary conduct of such as she.

As a consequence her first novel proves both disarming and disappointing — disarming in that Anna Sevier is already as good a writer as some authors ever need be — disappointing in that her slim first volume is a little tea cake of a thing that doesn't convey enough of her flavor.

For a story, "Early Summer" has just about the quantity of plot that a telephone conversation between two coeds meeting at the end of a summer can boast. It is considerably more formal in structure, however, vastly more subdued, and gives considerable strength to the suspicion that Miss Sevier has sat at the feet of her elders, say perhaps Elizabeth Bowen or Katherine Ann Porter, or maybe Virginia Woolf.

In fact, not since "Where the Boys Are" has a beach party served to shore up the structure of a novel. This, however, didn't start out that way. Authentic beach parties never do.

Grey Andersen has finally managed at the age of twenty to elude her parents and take a four-day excursion to Cannes before she must return with them to America after a sojourn in Paris. For a while it appears that Miss Sevier is having her young lady say in effect, "getting there is half the fun." Such is the nature of the interior monologue the reflective, perceptive Miss Andersen conducts

with herself as the night train hears the Riviera.

It is quite a monologue, and it serves as a perfect showcase for Miss Sevier's virtuosity. Time and again the splendid phrases turn with nary a sprain:

"When it rains in Paris there is never a taxi" — a bon mot worthy of sometime Parisian Gertrude Stein. Or again, as a representation of mood so many travelers have known: "I feel the first steady swells of elation, the first tides of excitement that I have brought this scheme to its completion, that I am arriving now at the brink of my own self-imposed precipice."

On her snapshot of the French as a type: "—Like a shy child in strange company. They can't forget for a minute that they're French and you're not and that makes you different. So they peer out from behind invisible skirts at you and act as though you're not really there, and you know that later on they'll sit somewhere over their aperitifs and talk about you in little liqueur-scented whispers."

Or again in a philosophical cast: "Good people want to have little demitasse doses of happiness to linger over when they can only remember."

"I don't think I've ever had an adventure before. Not an all-alone out-on-your-own adventure that belonged to me and nobody else," she muses on. After this we really expected something fully as rousing as the travails of the lady in D. H. Lawrence's "The Woman Who Rode Away." But this is not to be. Deliverance, it seems, always comes at the hands of Americans, with an occasional helping hand from whatever compatible nationality happening to be at hand.

We were torn between a belief that it was one heck of a just as a four-day beach party and accepting at face value the young lady's protestation that this was a breakthrough from childhood into fully realized womanhood. The emotions have wild adventures up and down the spine, and the shivers provoke much talk. For a girl of twenty, methinks the lady doth verbalize too much. Still, we realize that Miss Sevier is drawing a portrait of life as a woman experiences it in that region lying between recognition and expression. At first blush both are imperfect. Repetition either blunts or sharpens both.

Certainly Anna Sevier, first time out, has made a number of recognitions and is struggling womanfully with the expression. She should very shortly be recognized in her own right. We'd like to meet both her and her heroine five years later.—WHS.

## 'Experimentals' For Self-Revelation

The 201st Series of Student Productions of New Plays: FOR THE LOVE OF A WORM by Sally Cook, directed by Anne Williams; TEN CARS BEFORE HOPE by Jon Phelps, directed by Blair Beasley, Jr.; and I WANT SO MUCH: I'VE GOT SO MUCH TO GIVE by Elizabeth Smith, directed by Shari Stern, The Playmakers Theatre, August 14 and 15.

By JOHN CLAYTON

The one-act "experimentals" as they are frequently called here in Chapel Hill are rarely as good as the major productions, but they are frequently more important both as theatre and as direct expressions of the University's prime purpose of producing students willing to commit themselves to the effort and the anguish of developing their own understanding rather than passively digesting the slice each of those who teach them has achieved. Playwriting can be and frequently is the ultimate exercise in self-discovery and self-revelation; it tests the direction and breadth of the playwright's concern as well as the subtlety and profundity of the understanding he brings to bear upon the facet of life that has engaged his attention.

It is for this reason (as well as others) that the creation of new plays is a far greater University imperative than the production of old ones, especially to those who would rather serve as intellectual obstetricians than embalmers.

Of the three plays produced last Wednesday and Thursday, by far the most rewarding in the magnitude of its concern was Mr. Phelps' portrait of an old lady left to live out what remains to her of life in one of those institutions designed to cater to the aged, infirm, and unwanted. What rendered Mr. Phelps' exercise remarkable was not his situation, which was slight, nor his plot, which was negligible, nor his social philosophy, which was nonexistent in so far as he represented it, but rather the range and complexity of human relationships he was able to conjure up through his perceptive development of the central character. Briefly, his play dealt with an afternoon in the life of the old lady when she is visited by a young couple who reject her

desperate appeal to take her home with them. Mr. Phelps softens the obligation of the couple by making the relationship a distant one, toughens it by revealing that the old lady had raised the orphaned young woman, offers them an out by introducing the existence of a son who has direct responsibility for the old lady, and allows them to rationalize their refusal on the standard ground of inadequate medical attention at home, crowded quarters, young children, and so forth. Against the pull and haul of these factors is voiced the cry of the old lady that the only future she faces in the institution is "to die or go crazy."

If Mr. Phelps had contented himself with allowing his characters to verbalize the situation outlined above his play would have had little to recommend it. His distinction lay in what he enabled the old lady to suggest, a distinction made manifest by

the exceedingly skillful playing of Myra Lauterer. It was in the vision of what life with the old lady might mean that the dramatic tension was sustained, and the quicksilver changes, the slight accents, the subtle shift in tone from warmth to querulousness never allowed the audience to make a simple choice. The character never became a generalization. Always she was a particular person possessed of all the frustrating ambiguities of the living individual, "compact of jars" in Shakespeare's phrase, and always we had to adjust to the new evidence. She was warm and loving, no, she was a busybody; she was lucid, no, senile; healthy, no, an invalid; driven dotty by the environment, there because she was going dotty; reasonable, unreasonable; and each little flash revealed vistas of what life with "Granny" might be like. In the process of this characterization, the play grew quite beyond the

maudlin soap opera to take its rightful place in the main stream of our dramatic heritage. For if Mr. Phelps' play is an exceedingly minor trickle in that stream, it nevertheless is flowing in the right direction which is to constantly explore and test the Tao. The major playwright is rarely content to merely illuminate dark corners. This was the failure of the school of naturalism. Implicit in his work is the moral question, "What is right action?" The old lady demonstrated in this vintage how the specific tends to confound the generalization and how rarely we have the good fortune to be confronted by simple questions. Wisely, the playwright left his audience with the burden of decision, forcing it to become active rather than passive participants in the quest.

As for the rest of the evening, Miss Cook's play for children, *For the Love of a Worm*, (Continued on Page 4-B)

## Credible Folks From The Mill

THE MAKE-BELIEVE MAN. By Elizabeth Fenwick. Harper & Row. 183 Pages. \$3.50.

By J. A. C. DUNN

After weeks of a tundra of tedious tension from Harper's "Novel of Suspense" mill, Elizabeth Fenwick has successfully combined a believable situation with people who matter—not that they are important people. On the contrary, there is not an entity in the lot. But they are familiar people whom you would not like to be in the situation Miss Fenwick places them in.

Literary pundits and similar scratchers of the skin of fiction doubtless feel that the household intruder is a musty gimmick, worked until its cogs are worn round and its bushings decidedly bushed. But for almost anybody who lives outside a hospital, an asylum, prison, an institutional dormitory, on shipboard, or in an army barracks, a man forcing his way into your house poses a threat whose stature easily matches, at moments, those of World War Three, or mortgage foreclosure. The threat is accentuated when the householder becomes a hostage in his own

home. The usual treatment of this kind of situation is with hooded who have either just escaped from prison or are bent on extorting ransom, sometimes both. Ransom is pretty old hat these days. But the psychotic intruder is innocently psychotic. This is the horribly sinister thing about Cliff. He is such a nice fellow. Other than being a bit plump around the jowls, he is clean-cut, courteous, well-mannered, a hard worker, and quiet. He is also crazy as a June bug, but this does not appear until he has been forced to move from his comfortable lodging in young Norma Hovic's mother's house after Norma is widowed and comes home with her small son to live with her mother. And then Norma's mother is called away to help at the birth of a daughter-in-law's child, leaving Norma alone in the house.

Norma Cliff appears. Cliff wants his old room back. He has been in Chicago, where he has had a little trouble. It is not a little trouble at all; it is a lot of trouble, but he describes it as only having hurt his feelings. It is not hard to have serious misgivings about a man who reacts to Cliff's kind of trouble

with only hurt feelings. And then there is the business of the changed lock; the milk delivery chute; and getting 11-year-old Jimmy safely to and from school; and the Hausens, whose innocent though somewhat exaggerated concern for their neighbors' welfare results in a chillingly ugly psychosis scene. The conclusion drops off somewhat, and the hero and heroine emerge suitably entwined on page 183, but unlike most heroes and heroines destined for fictional entwinement, Norma and Mr. Bennig are ineptly, believably human. Norma falls somewhere in the vast range of innocuous anonymity between Little Orphan Annie and Scarlet O'Hara, and Mr. Bennig is just as far from being the Milquetoast of Toomerville as he is from James Bondage.

All the nerve-racking process of finding the smiling Cliff, who disappears ominously after his unsettling appearance, is told in greyhound speed in prose that is greyhound lean. Except for Harper's insistence on obviously commercial formula brevity, "The Make-Believe Man" is a refreshingly ripe fruit in Harper's barrel of often questionable apples of suspense.



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  2. Elizabeth Appleton . . . O'Hara
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