A HISTORY OF CINCINNATI THEATRE FROM 1938-1969
BASED ON THE CRITICISM OF E. B. RADCLIFFE

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the degree Master of Arts in the Graduate School
of the Ohio State University

by

Mardia Joanna Bishop, B.A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1988

Master's Examination Committee:
Alan Woods
David Ayers

Approved by

Alan Woods, Adviser
Department of Theatre
To my parents Helen and Joseph Bishop whose belief in me is always appreciated, but rarely acknowledged.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express sincere appreciation to the many people who helped me in this project, in particular the following:

My advisory committee Dr. David Ayers and especially Dr. Alan Woods who saved me from the depths of "thesis hell" and encouraged me to at least attempt scholarly competence.

Nena Couch who generously granted me free access to the Lawrence and Lee Theatre Research Institute facilities.

Ray Zwick who took the time to send me materials from the Cincinnati Enquirer library.

Cathi Ege for her last minute research duties.

My cohorts Kerry Shanklin and Larry Fink who have been incredibly supportive over the past two years.

I would especially like to thank Trish Adams for her support, her brilliant editing skills, her endless supply of Skittles, and for her son Devin who provided comic relief throughout this project.

Dr. Ronald Mielech who encouraged my pursuits in theatre and whose prayers were positively answered.

Finally, I am extremely grateful to Mrs. Katharine Radcliffe, who generously granted me access to her husband's papers, and to Mrs. Martha Glaser who was more than generous
in granting me encouragement, last minute interviews, photographs and papers pertaining to her father, and most importantly, provided the impetus for this thesis.
VITA

February 15, 1963

1986

1986-1987

1987-Present

Born — Covington, Kentucky

B.A., Thomas More College, Crestview Hills, Kentucky

University Fellow, Theatre Department, Ohio State University

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Theatre Department, Ohio State University

FIELDS OF STUDY

Theatre History, Literature and Criticism:

Dr. Alan Woods, Dr. Stratos Contantinidis, and Mr. Donald Glancy

Directing, Acting, and Playwriting:

Dr. Rex McGraw, Dr. David Ayers, and Ionia Zelenka
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER V</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF REFERENCES</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURES</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Radcliffe's <em>Cincinnati Enquirer</em> portrait, 1940s</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Radcliffe in a fraternity variety show</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Radcliffe and Jerry Berns, 1938</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Radcliffe in <em>Teacher's Pet</em>, 1957</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

A journalistic theatre reviewer or critic is one of the most important yet least appreciated members of the theatre world. Although his reviews are usually eagerly awaited after opening nights, the rest of his duties in theatre are usually unappreciated, either because they are immeasurable, not realized, or ignored. Todd Hunt wrote a definitive "how to" book on arts reviewing entitled Reviewing for the Mass Media. In it he lists and defines eight basic functions of an arts reviewer: Informing the reader, raising the community's cultural level, imparting personality to the community, advising the reader, helping artists and performers, recording a segment of history, defining the new, and entertaining. 1 Of these functions, one of the most unappreciated and unrealized is a reviewer's function as historian. The critic acts as historian inadvertently or unconsciously in the process of fulfilling all his other

functions, and his approach to those other functions will in turn affect his efficacy as historian.

By informing his readers of an event, a critic is recording history and thereby acting as a chronicler of history, as much as any journalist does. By trying to raise the community's cultural level and by advising his readers what to see and what not to see, he affords posterity a glimpse of the professional and artistic standards by which the theatre of his time period was judged. By defining the new, he is identifying trends and interpreting events. By the very nature of his job, a journalistic reviewer inadvertently acts as a historian. However, his position as historian is a tenuous one because of its often unconscious nature and because the very nature of his job generates situations which are often not conducive to historical objectivity, such as adhering to the editorial policies of his newspaper. In addition, the proximity to events demanded by a journalistic style can prevent farsighted conclusions and the ability to analyze events past their initial occurrence; and, by promoting theatre, reality can be ignored in the quest to encourage support. Despite the problems in his position as historian, it is possible to reconstruct theatre history using a journalistic critic's reviews and columns keeping in mind the pitfalls that occur.

This thesis is a historiographic experiment: it is an attempt to reconstruct the history of Cincinnati theatre
from 1938 to 1969 using the reviews and columns of the city's leading theatre critic during that time, E. B. Radcliffe. A study of this type is worthwhile for three major reasons. First, this thesis uses the columns and reviews of E. B. Radcliffe, theatre critic of the *Cincinnati Enquirer* for thirty-one years, who reviewed over a thousand plays encompassing all production sources. The longevity of his career indicates he was competent in his job and successful at representing the tastes of his readers and Cincinnati in general. More importantly, the longevity of his career makes it easier to be aware of his style, tastes, and biases so that they can be understood for what they are and accounted for when reconstructing history, whereas a shorter career span would make it more difficult to assess the biases that might interfere with a critic's objectivity. In addition, nothing has been written about Radcliffe, except notices at his retirement and obituaries at his death. Second, this thesis provides a history of American theatre at the local level. It depicts the theatre history of a city representative of other American cities that took part in the major developments of American theatre history during this period from 1938 to 1969. Third, it provides a history of Cincinnati theatre, and there has been no history of Cincinnati theatre written of this period. The only other history of Cincinnati was James Dunlap's *Queen City*
Stages: Professional Dramatic Activity in Cincinnati,\textsuperscript{2} which only addressed the period of 1837 to 1861. Although there are no histories of Cincinnati theatre for this period, several sources exist that provide context for this study.

Garff Wilson's \textit{Three Hundred Years of American Drama and Theatre},\textsuperscript{3} Oscar Brockett's \textit{Modern Theatre},\textsuperscript{4} and Jack Poggi's \textit{Theatre in America: The Impact of Economic Forces 1870-1967}\textsuperscript{5} serve as excellent general histories of American theatre during the period covered by this thesis. Other secondary sources that address individual movements during this period are Joseph Zeigler's \textit{Regional Theatre: The Revolutionary Stage}\textsuperscript{6} which concentrates on the regional theatre movement and Hallie Flanagan's \textit{Arena}\textsuperscript{7} which concentrates on the Federal Theatre Project. There are also several sources that provide information on the nature of a

\textsuperscript{2} James F. Dunlap, "Queen City Stages: Professional Dramatic Activity in Cincinnati," diss., Ohio State University, 1954.


\textsuperscript{4} Oscar Brockett, \textit{Modern Theatre} (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1982).


\textsuperscript{7} Hallie Flanagan, \textit{Arena} (Rahway, NJ: Quinn and Boden, 1940).
journalistic critic's job. While the most comprehensive description of a critic's job is Todd Hunt's *Reviewing for the Mass Media*, Elliot Norton's "Puffers, Pundits, and Other Play Reviewers: A Short History of American Dramatic Criticism"\(^8\) provides good information on the history of journalistic criticism and the nature of a regional critic's job versus a New York critic's job, and Comtois's and Miller's *Contemporary American Theatre Critics: A Directory and Anthology of Their Works*\(^9\) provides a profile of the typical regional critic, who by the 1970s had been in that position for twenty years, and an excellent anthology of works on criticism as well as works by critics.

The methodology employed in writing this thesis included a comprehensive reading of materials written by Radcliffe, which consisted of thirty-one years of daily columns, magazine articles from *Theatre Arts* and *Variety*, diary entries and general notes he wrote about theatre. Additional information on Radcliffe was provided in interviews with his family, in particular his widow Katharine Radcliffe and his daughter Martha Glaser. After reading the Radcliffe canon, contextual sources of American


theatre were consulted and used to help shape the raw materials of Radcliffe's columns into a history of Cincinnati theatre. Both in terms of Radcliffe's own predilections and based on the organization of secondary sources, it seemed most logical to write not one, but two separate yet interrelated histories of Cincinnati theatre during this period: commercial and non-commercial. The first chapter includes a brief biography of E. B. Radcliffe, a discussion of his job and his development as a critic, and culminates in an assessment of his mature aesthetic standards. Chapter Two addresses the history of commercial theatre and Radcliffe's treatment of it. The chapter details the decline of road theatre and the advent of summer stock and Shakespeare festivals in the Cincinnati area. Chapter Three addresses the history of non-commercial theatre in Cincinnati, including the Federal Theatre Project, academic, community, and regional theatre, and Radcliffe's treatment of it. This thesis concludes with an appraisal of the advantages and disadvantages of basing the reconstruction of history on a journalistic critic's columns and reviews.

It is hoped that this thesis will not only provide a history of Cincinnati theatre from 1938 to 1969, but will also justify the use of journalistic criticism in other reconstructions of theatre history.
I. E. B. Radcliffe, Cincinnati Enquirer Portrait, 1940s.
CHAPTER II

E. B. RADCLIFFE

In 1934 a depressed, young newspaperman with two children and a wife to support during a harsh economic period sat down and reflected on his unfulfilled dreams. Thirteen years before this period of reflection, when he was fifteen, he had "wanted to grow up and become a writer" and a "roaring success that would be feted triumphantly at some date by future generations." In 1934, his dreams had not yet been realized. He had planned "to write about life which he would see lived as a newspaper reporter"; but in 1934 he was a mere copy boy, not the managing editor or famous author he had intended to be. For six years he had worked for newspapers--from selling them to being a utility reporter. He had worked hard to "develop his craftsmanship for production of acceptable newspaper copy." In the past six years he had "improved his ability to write news somewhat as well as raising his powers to gather information," and he had learned "that a man had to stand for something."1 Yet, he was still a copy boy.

1 E. B. Radcliffe, Diary Entry 18 February 1934.
In the next thirty years, many of this young man's ambitions would be realized. After spending three years as a general reporter he was named drama and movie editor for the Cincinnati Enquirer, a position he held for thirty-one years. Ironically, it was in many ways his years as copy boy and general assignments reporter which prepared Radcliffe for the task of theatrical criticism. The Hollywood Reporter described how his best qualities as a journalist contributed to his success as a reviewer:

Mr. Radcliffe brought his experience as a topnotch police reporter to the job of dramatic criticism. His nose for news enables him to detect elements of unsuspecting topical interest in films, to the frequent benefit of the theatres. His honest reviews both keep the movie industry going and keep it on its toes.  

In his tenure as drama editor and critic, Radcliffe reviewed over a thousand plays, made substantial contributions to theatre in Cincinnati, and earned the respect of both theatre and newspaper personnel. At his retirement and later at his death he was applauded by both local and national press. Variety commended his accomplishments as a drama critic with the following:

Despite the title of 'critic' hung on him by the paper, Radcliffe referred to himself only as a reviewer and reporter. An estimated 4000 movies and 1200 plays passed under his scrutiny in 31 years, but the legit stage was his hobby as well

---

as his beat—and his knowledge of it was encyclopedical. [sic]

And at his death, the editor of the Cincinnati Enquirer, Luke Feck, said of Radcliffe:

Rad was meant to be a newspaperman. He loved his work and living his life. His writings were fast and accurate, his reviews honest. You can say nothing better of a newsman.

Radcliffe's ambitions when he was a struggling copy boy had been realized.

Radcliffe's exposure to a newspaper career came early, as both his father and paternal grandfather were career newsmen. Born July 12, 1904, in Detroit, Michigan, to William Charles and Blanche Brownell Radcliffe, E. B. Radcliffe was christened Ellis Brownell, a name he quickly grew to detest. The misleading sound of the first name created some confusion even at the beginning, when his name was mistakenly spelled "Alice" on his birth certificate and he was designated as "female" instead of "male."

Understandably, in later years, Radcliffe insisted on the nicknames "E. B." and "Rad."

When Radcliffe was still a toddler, the Radcliffe family moved to Worcester, Massachusetts. Soon after their arrival Radcliffe's mother Blanche was institutionalized for mental illness. She was to remain hospitalized for the rest

3 "Rad Retires," Variety 8 October 1969, p. 70.
of her life. Radcliffe was then raised by his father and maternal grandparents who operated Everybody's Mission, a shelter that fed the poor and homeless and cared for alcoholics.

In Worcester, Radcliffe attended public schools and helped his grandparents with their mission. Upon his high school graduation, Radcliffe's father William, a devout Methodist, insisted Radcliffe attend Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, Ohio.

Once in college, Radcliffe's interest in journalism quickly blossomed. He majored in English Literature and spent many extracurricular hours every term working on Ohio Wesleyan's school newspaper The Transcript. After serving as managing editor of the paper his junior year, his senior year he served as sports editor. In addition to his newspaper activities, Radcliffe was a member of his college's literary society, three honorary fraternities (Pi Delta Epsilon, the journalism honorary, Phi Beta Kappa, the scholastic honorary, and Phi Mu Alpha, the theatre and music honorary), and the social fraternity Sigma Alpha Epsilon. It was in the latter fraternity that Radcliffe began his theatrical career by participating in variety shows and even directing one of them.

In addition to his academic and extracurricular activities, Radcliffe held various part-time jobs to support himself. Some of these included driving a milk truck,
selling fish, and accepting blind dates for a fee. This last odd job ultimately resulted in marriage. Whenever Radcliffe's fraternity brothers needed to find a date for their girlfriends' friends, they would ask Radcliffe to be the escort. After several unpleasant blind dates, Radcliffe started charging his friends a two-dollar fee for his escort services. After experiencing additional painful dates, however, Radcliffe decided two dollars was not worth the time and effort and decided to refuse future requests. When his best friend, Francis Tobin, asked him to escort an out-of-town guest of Tobin's girlfriend, Radcliffe at first refused; but Tobin persisted and Radcliffe finally consented, only after raising his fee to five dollars. Tobin balked at the high price, but gave Radcliffe the money anyway. The out-of-town guest, Katharine Mundy, was not so unpleasant after all and Radcliffe married her two years later in 1928.

Upon graduation in 1928, Radcliffe returned to Worcester, Massachusetts, where he began his professional newspaper career by accepting a job as a reporter for the Worcester Telegram, a daily newspaper. In 1929, the Radcliffes were expecting their first child. Enticed by a larger salary than he was receiving in Worcester, Radcliffe and his wife moved back to Ohio and settled in Cincinnati, where he accepted a job as a financial reporter for The Cincinnati Commercial Tribune. While working for The
II. Radcliffe in a fraternity variety show.
Ohio Wesleyan University, 1928.
Tribune, Radcliffe covered the stock market crash in 1929. Ironically, The Tribune, like many businesses during the Depression, folded, and Radcliffe was out of work.

After a brief stint as a sports reporter for a Florida newspaper, where he covered the Sharkey-Scott Heavyweight Championship, Radcliffe was once again out of work. In search of employment, Radcliffe drove to New York City "where he campaigned in all the newspaper offices and news bureaus without success." However, when he returned home he received a misleading wire from The Wall Street Journal. The wire requested Radcliffe to travel to New York to interview for a promotion manager's position; yet, after racing back to New York, the interviewer informed him that in order to become a promotion manager Radcliffe needed to learn how to sell papers and promptly offered Radcliffe a job selling newspapers on commission in Indiana. Radcliffe, desperate for employment, accepted and spent the next few months "trying to sell an impossible product for the times in which he was selling it."

Finally, on April 8, 1931, the Cincinnati Enquirer hired him. For the next seven years, Radcliffe honed his writing skills. Hired as a copy boy, he was later made a general assignments reporter and covered everything from

---

5 E. B. Radcliffe, Diary Entry, 18 February 1934.
6 Radcliffe, 18 February 1934.
city politics to police news to sports. His most significant stories included the 1937 Cincinnati flood and Franklin D. Roosevelt's dedication of the Norris Dam. Despite his promotion to general reporter and his being entrusted to cover important current events, Radcliffe lacked confidence in his abilities and was overly conscientious when writing a story. At the time, Radcliffe characterized himself as:

a young ex-office boy just starting as a reporter. He has ability to do the work but lacks confidence in himself and is nervous in checking and rechecking details on rewrites and in picking up salient points of a simple story to use as a lead.7

His lack of confidence remained even when he was offered another promotion and challenge. On January 8, 1938, Cincinnati Enquirer managing editor, J. W. La Rue, drafted Radcliffe from his pool of general reporters to fill the drama and motion picture editorship and critic spot left vacant by entertainment critic Herman Bernfield's retirement. Radcliffe hesitated in accepting the position because he lacked formal training in theatre; however, when presented with the ultimatum of being theatre critic or being jobless, Radcliffe reluctantly accepted the position. He had been chosen because his experience with his fraternity's variety shows made him the Enquirer's only

7 Radcliffe, 16 February 1934.
"veteran" of theatre. Unfortunately for the aesthetic and financial well-being of theatre, theatrical training has seldom been a prerequisite for a theatre reviewing position, and very few beginning critics have experience or knowledge of theatre. This lack of theatrical training is unfortunate for theatre because it leads to inaccurate assessments of productions and fails to properly educate and build an appreciative audience.

Radcliffe was well aware of his lack of knowledge and thus spent much time in his first few years as theatre critic learning about his new field. Often he did not even review productions, but instead assigned other reporters theatre reviewing jobs while he concentrated on his other duties as Drama and Motion Picture Editor. When he did attempt a review his insecurity with his critical abilities was reflected in his criticism. Often, he contradicted what few critical comments he made, and he always prefaced his comments by reminding his readers that his comments were his own opinions. For example, in his review of You Can't Take It With You in 1938, Radcliffe commented that "the entire

---

III. Jerry Berns (on the left), former Enquirer drama critic, congratulating E. B. Radcliffe upon Radcliffe's assumption of the drama critic position, January 8, 1938.
cast brought out the broad "humor" but his "personal opinions of good characterizations" were limited to "those of Elwyn Harvey, Walter Beck, William Jeffrey, Dulcie Cooper, Rene Roberti, and Ellis Baker. They seemed to have a slight edge on others. Although beautiful Mary Patton and Alan Brixey did just as well."10

However, Radcliffe overcame his insecurities and lack of knowledge. By 1944, he had settled into his job as theatre critic, had his own definite views of and criteria for what he considered good theatre, and proceeded to enjoy a long career as Cincinnati's leading theatre critic. In his book on Cincinnati, Dick Perry commented on Radcliffe's notoriety; according to Perry, there was not a trace of any insecurity on Radcliffe's part.

E. B. Radcliffe is a man of such well-defined tastes where the theater is concerned, and has been at it so long, that some national companies have the uneasy feeling that he personally invented the theater west of the Alleghenies. Readers aware of his distinct likes and dislikes have their own way of reacting to his opinions. If he proclaims one play good, some of his readers wouldn't go near it if you paid them, and other readers couldn't wait to get there. Thus, when you hear a Cincinnatian say, "Well, Radcliffe says . . .," he will be saying it one way or the other: with a tone implying either that Mr. Radcliffe couldn't review his way out of a paper bag, or that God has spoken. There are no middle-of-the-road readers where Mr. Radcliffe is concerned. He

10 E. B. Radcliffe, *Cincinnati Enquirer* 24 January 1938. Subsequent references from Radcliffe's *Enquirer* columns will be indicated in the text by the date of the column.
calls the shots as he sees them, and will take
sass from no theatrical advertising man.11

On September 30, 1969, Radcliffe retired from the
Enquirer. In his thirty-one years as a theatre critic,
Radcliffe reviewed over twelve hundred plays. These plays
encompassed all types of professional and non-professional
productions, all genres of dramatic literature, and were
reviewed by Radcliffe all over the United States, from
Cincinnati to New York to Stratford, Connecticut. In
addition to his reviews for the Cincinnati Enquirer, he
served as a stringer for Variety, contributed regularly to
Theatre Arts, and instigated several projects to benefit
theatre in Cincinnati. Although he had earned national
recognition for his accomplishments as a theatre critic, his
only comment upon his retirement was "I've been able to
write the way I pleased. If no one liked it, it was my
fault."12

Radcliffe's retirement did not last long. After a few
months rest with a "retirement" fishing boat, Radcliffe
moved to New York to join Bill Doll and Company,
Incorporated, a national organization of press agents. Due
to health reasons and familial connections, Radcliffe
returned to Cincinnati two years later; yet, he continued to

11 Dick Perry, Vas You Ever in Zinzinnati? (Garden
City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1966), p. 188.

12 "Radcliffe, Heise End Long Careers at the
work, first, as a press agent for a golf association, and then, in 1973, as an editorialist and copy reader for News Express, a publisher of community newspapers. He also freelanced as a travel writer for the Enquirer.

After suffering a heart attack, Radcliffe was forced to refrain from work. When he recuperated he found it necessary to settle into semi-retirement and opted for a less strenuous job. Although still in the newspaper business, Radcliffe's next job was rather ironic—as he did in 1931, Radcliffe once again delivered The Wall Street Journal. This job was to be his last.

Radcliffe's continuing health problems forced him to retire from this job as well. On May 20, 1977, while in Connecticut visiting family members, Radcliffe suffered a fatal heart attack. At his death, Radcliffe's place in the history of American regional theatre was clearly evinced in the respect and admiration accorded his life's work by newspaper and theatre colleagues alike. In their obituary, the Enquirer commended Radcliffe's excellence as a journalist, his efforts to sustain the quality of Cincinnati theatre throughout his career, and his "profound love for the theatre world" which gave to his journalistic talent its lasting significance.13

When Radcliffe was first named Drama and Motion Picture Editor in 1938 he was responsible for producing one page of entertainment news in the daily newspaper and four pages in the Sunday editions. Entertainment news and reviews encompassed music, dance, movie, and theatre events as well as entertainment industry gossip. In the first nine months of his job, Radcliffe usually wrote the daily announcements of what each entertainment club would feature for the day, movie reviews, and a few theatre reviews. For the most part, he concentrated on his editing duties and left theatre reviews to other reporters.

Then, in October 1938, in addition to his editorial duties, he was given his own daily column, "Between Hollywood and Broadway with E. B. Radcliffe." The name of this column changed several times over the years to reflect Radcliffe's changing emphases and his eventual concentration on theatre as well as Radcliffe's growing control over the amusement section. In 1941 it became "Out in Front with E. B. Radcliffe," in 1946 it changed to "Show Mirror by E. B. Radcliffe," and in 1951 became "E. B. Radcliffe's Theater." The final change, in 1956, to "Theater by E. B. Radcliffe," remained throughout the rest of his career. In the beginning, with "Between Hollywood and Broadway," Radcliffe concentrated on the glamorous aspects of the entertainment world. His "Show Mirror" period also emphasized Hollywood and the lives of its stars more than theatre. In the early
IV. Radcliffe, far left, with Clark Gable in the movie *Teacher's Pet*, 1957. As part of a promotional campaign, Paramount Pictures hired forty-five theatre critics of daily papers across the United States to play newsmen in the movie that featured journalist and editor Clark Gable falling in love with journalism teacher Doris Day. Radcliffe had one line.
1950s, the title changed to "E. B. Radcliffe's Theatre" was indicative of Radcliffe's growing seriousness as a theater critic and his concentration on legitimate theatre and its problems.

Radcliffe's column material varied extremely over the years and from day to day. Movie reviews, Hollywood gossip, letters from readers, theatre reviews, theatre news from New York, Cincinnati, and regional centers such as Stratford, Ontario, promotions for various theatre productions, book reviews, reminiscences of times past, tidbits of theatre history, and his own reflections on the state of theatre and film could all be found under his byline. But the focus and emphasis on certain materials depended on their availability and Radcliffe's changing attitude towards his job. By the late 1940s, when Radcliffe was becoming more concerned with theatre, theatre topics appeared far more frequently than movie news and reviews.

The type of theatre reviewed also depended on Radcliffe's own biases and the availability of professional road shows. During the decline of the road, in the 1950s, Radcliffe was forced to review more amateur and community productions, and also spent time in his column defending Cincinnati against what he considered unfair accusations by New York producers that Cincinnati was unsupportive of theatre. He even used stories from Cincinnati theatre history to support his viewpoint that Cincinnati had always
been a theatre town. Although his historical tidbits are questionable support of his position, they provide interesting glimpses into Cincinnati's theatrical past. In one 1951 column, Radcliffe noted that Cincinnati had defended theatre even when President Lincoln was assassinated by actor John Wilkes Booth. Booth's brother, Junius Brutus Booth, was also an actor, and was appearing in Cincinnati at the time of the assassination. A mob tried to lynch Junius Booth, but according to Radcliffe, they were stopped by a group of theatre enthusiasts. (Actually, a clerk from the hotel where Booth was staying smuggled him out of the city.\textsuperscript{14}) An editorial in the \textit{Enquirer} the morning after the aborted lynching defended theatre by insisting that not all actors were potential assassins. Radcliffe used this incident to give some historical flavor to his argument that Cincinnatians were supportive of theatre. Radcliffe sometimes ventured into the remoter past to make his point, and once asserted that Cincinnati's indigenous support of theatre was evident in the fact that the very first play done professionally in the Northwest Territory, O'Keefe's \textit{Poor Soldier}, was done in Cincinnati in 1801.

But the decline of the road in the 1950s also forced Radcliffe into alternative venues. In 1950, he assumed the

position of opera reviewer for two years, a position he relinquished to the Enquirer's music critic in 1952. Since summer theatre appeared in Cincinnati and Stratford in 1952, Radcliffe could focus once again on his first concern. He also served as a television critic in the late 1950s. By 1959, television's scope and popularity was so overwhelming that Radcliffe resigned as television reviewer in order to keep his daily theatre column.

Even when Cincinnati theatre was insufficient to maintain a daily column, Radcliffe sometimes compensated by travelling to other cities to increase his own exposure to theatre and to provide his Cincinnati readers with glimpses of road shows they might not be able to see that year. If Cincinnati did not receive a particular touring show, Radcliffe often went as far as Indianapolis, Columbus, or Cleveland to the production. In 1943, he began what would become his yearly pilgrimage to New York City to review the Broadway season firsthand. As the regional theatre boom occurred in the 1950s, he made a point of travelling to regional high spots such as Stratford, Ontario to bring his readers news of shows in these new regional theatres.

The advent of his own column in 1938 had forced Radcliffe into a job which frankly intimidated him: theatre reviewing. As he grew more knowledgeable and confident with theatre, he began to enjoy reviewing theatre more than any other aspect of his job. His first few years as a critic
were an apprenticeship which he spent educating himself about theatre, developing his abilities, and forming his critical standards of theatre. During these years Radcliffe developed tremendously from a theatre publicist and enthusiast to a discerning critic with his own set of standards for theatrical art.

Radcliffe's initial attempts at theatre reviewing were characterized by excessive praise. His reviews were basically plot summaries and the only critical comments he ventured, if he included them in his reviews, consisted of the following: mundane opening and closing lines such as "You will miss a grand show if you miss Susan and God" (3/29/39); comments on the value or relevance of a play's theme for audience members; praise of actors' abilities, such as "[George] Trader's performance as Grandpa is a high spot in the comedy [You Can't Take It With You]. He radiated warmth and good cheer!" (1/24/38); and, like many beginning reviewers, Radcliffe was often overly impressed by the visual aspects of a production and praised them inordinately: "sets of the play are striking and very cozy and intimate. The gowns and intimate fancies that are displayed by the cast provoke favorable gasps of envy on the part of ladies in the audience" (The Women, 11/28/38).

Radcliffe's encomiums on production elements were seldom motivated by their appropriateness to the specific play at hand; instead, he simply lauded those aspects of the play he
admired, usually those that reflected contemporary popular tastes, whether they fit the particular production demands of the script or not.

In his initial attempts at reviewing, Radcliffe was extremely reluctant to offend anyone. At this stage of development, he rarely voiced a negative comment, and when he did, he would undercut his negative criticism by adding an encouraging remark. For example, after panning *Ohio Doom* as being in a dramatic "rut bordered with cliches" he encouraged the playwright with the following:

There is no doubt that *Ohio Doom* reveals Mr. Igo as a sensitive man with a keen feeling for individual reactions to supernatural and man-made forces. *Ohio Doom*, however, doesn't reveal Mr. Igo as the capable playwright he may become with more practice (11/23/38).

As Radcliffe grew more knowledgeable about theatre (and influenced by his idol George Jean Nathan), his critical comments and his theatrical vocabulary expanded. He began using an appropriate professional vocabulary in his criticism in order to educate his readers and evaluate productions according to theatrical terminology. His use of these terms, however, was initially naive. For example, of Chekhov's *The Seagull*, he commented: "Although the play lacks the conventional beginning, middle, and end of plot, it has conflicts, crises, and contrasts which provide it with power to command interest" (4/15/39); and, in his review of the Lunts's in *Idiot's Delight*, he stated: "Their
timing and manner of delivery emphasized what might be
described as the punch line in the dialogue" (4/11/39).

By 1944, Radcliffe had become secure and comfortable
with his reviewing duties, his style had become smoother,
his critical comments of a production had expanded, and his
criteria of what constituted a good theatre production had
been formed and were easily discernible in his reviews. By
the late 1940s Radcliffe was a mature theatre critic whose
decided opinions on the art of theatre had become part and
parcel of the theatre world of Cincinnati.

Radcliffe divided his criteria for judging a production
into three categories: production, which included sets,
lights, sound, costumes, and props; script; and,
performances by actors.

The area of acting criticism was the one in which
Radcliffe was most comfortable and verbose. His standards
of acting were rather conservative in their emphasis on
externals. To Radcliffe, good actors were those who had a
stage magnetism, exercised control in their performance, and
provided a convincing portrayal of a character using
appropriate physical mannerisms and vocal expressions. From
his review of her performance in *Corn Is Green*, Ethel
Barrymore seemed to fulfill Radcliffe's standards:

for all her little tricks of expression with her
eyes, the movements of her head in the manner of
FDR, and other features of a virtuoso performance
which one of less personal magnetism would be
regarded as overacting, she makes her school
teacher the strong-willed, smiling-hearted intelligently purposeful creature the author intended her to be (4/7/42).

Some other actors who fulfilled Radcliffe's standards were Cornelia Otis Skinner, the Lunts, Maurice Evans, and John Gielgud. All of these actors were considered "technique" oriented and received traditional training in touring and stock repertory companies. Most importantly, these actors were reserved and did not venture from the status quo into extremes of either excessive internalization or emotional posturing. Radcliffe was never very fond of movements that ventured from the status quo of commercial road productions. He often criticized those movements that were experimental and acting techniques were no exception. Radcliffe displayed a thinly disguised distaste for "method" techniques in his review of Angel Street. After commending Sylvia Sidney on her controlled performance of an emotionally demanding role, he stated:

Sylvia Sidney needs no 'mood props' as I believe they are called in a certain school of acting. She needs no St. Catherine's wheel or rack in her dressing room in order to prepare herself for her night's distress (3/4/42).

Radcliffe also despised the other end of the acting spectrum--old fashioned histrionic posturing. In one of his columns, he humorously commented on the various ways actors deal with grief: nose pinching, looking away, and hand gnawing. Then he explained how each of these techniques was
done. He observed the following about the looking away technique:

The technique of looking away from the bearer of evil tidings while one fights to master the emotions consists in twisting the head as far as it will swing in one direction without breaking the neck. Then, with strong profile turned to the onlookers, one stares into the wings as long as one thinks one can dominate the scene (10/24/40).

Thus Radcliffe, like many critics of his time, formed his acting preference in line with the acting paradigms of his generation and disapproved of what he perceived as the outmoded techniques of the previous generation and the radical techniques of the next generation.

Radcliffe's criteria for excellence in playwriting were also conservative: he expected a script to have a well-made structure that logically led to a climax, and a universal theme that ultimately portrayed man as good and noble. Radcliffe's favorite playwright whose scripts fulfilled both of these criteria was Robert Sherwood. In his review of There Shall Be No Night, Radcliffe commended Sherwood as a master playwright:

All the material that might be incorporated in an analytical symposium on the subject of war has been incorporated in the play without lessening its dramatic values and its power to move the emotions and inspire its beholders (11/29/40).

Other playwrights whom Radcliffe respected were William Inge, William Saroyan, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, Jean Anouilh, Thornton Wilder, Arthur Miller, and Robert Bolt. All of these playwrights were master craftsmen of
well-made, commercially successful plays of Radcliffe's generation of criticism, 1940-1960.

As with his attitudes to acting, Radcliffe showed contempt for those plays that steered away from the norm established by his generation. He despised absurdist plays' lack of well-made structure and seemingly nihilistic obsessions. He considered Ionesco's *The Lesson* "junk" (7/7/67) and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* a joke on somebody although expert opinion is divided about whom the joke is on. Smartest opinion holds that this Irishman is pulling the public's leg. To do so he has cooked up some wonderful nonsense that sounds like profundity and may trap professing intellectuals into professing that they find "Godot" deep stuff. So goes wonderful nonsense in the theater in New York these days (4/22/56).

Radcliffe was also uncomfortable with England's "Angry Young Men" and found them disappointing because of their cynicism, indulgence, and often unflattering opinion of mankind as a whole. He considered Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* as "protest at its loudest, most acidulous and most uneffective." Radcliffe's headline for this review summarized his whole perception of the "Angry Young Men" movement: "Fate's a meanie! Man Cries 'Ouch!'" (2/24/59).

As in most journalistic reviews Radcliffe did not expend much space on production elements in his reviews. Nevertheless, he still held certain expectations of production elements and expected them to be fulfilled. Although he included sets, costumes, lights, sound, and
props in this category, he rarely commented on lighting or sound unless a script placed particular emphasis on these two elements and that production was noticeably successful in staging them. Like most reviewers, Radcliffe concentrated instead on those production elements that were most noticeable—sets and costumes—and he had strict, yet simplistic, standards for them. Basically, Radcliffe's criteria for sets and costumes were that they should fit the type of play in which they were used—realistic plays needed illusionistic sets and musicals needed spectacular scenery—and, no matter what style, they should be elaborate, expensive, and new in order to give audiences their full value of their ticket price.

Although the visual aspects of a production were commented on least in his reviews, Radcliffe still considered them important enough to make or break a production. Despite Maurice Evans's competent performance as Hamlet, Radcliffe felt the production cheated audience members because its costumes and sets were "soiled and worn from travel" (2/17/40).

What is quickly apparent in all of Radcliffe's partialities in acting, production, and scripts is that the overriding paradigm for his theatrical tastes was the professional road production of the 1940s and 1950s. Radcliffe's partiality for the type of show which dominated the road is understandable since these professional
productions were often the best available to Cincinnati audiences. Of course not all road productions were excellent by Radcliffe's standards, nor by his contemporaries', especially time-worn revivals; however, the road productions were professional and featured excellent stars, such as Katharine Cornell and the Lunts. Most importantly, road productions, compared to the other types of productions available to him in 1938 when he was forming his standards--community, academic, and the last few Federal Theatre Project productions--were of a higher quality.

Although it was fortunate that Radcliffe developed a set of standards and used the best source available in creating them, it was unfortunate because his standards became solidified and commercially successful scripts of wide-appeal, professionally-trained and often "star" actors, and expensively-mounted costumes as sets. Obviously these standards were inappropriate for many forms of non-road theatre. As a result of his strict adherence to these standards, Radcliffe descended into a form of critical opportunism, neglected to recognize important historical trends, and with the decline of the road he found himself trapped into a perpetual state of nostalgia.

The decline of road productions in the 1950s put Radcliffe in a predicament--the shows which fit his critical standards were no longer plentiful enough to sustain his column. Therefore, Radcliffe had to look to amateur
productions with a new attitude. Since the decline of the road coincided with the growth of amateur theatre in Cincinnati, the problem was not a dearth of theatre but a scarcity of the theatre which best suited Radcliffe's standards. Not surprisingly, he altered his expectations accordingly.

During the 1940s when road productions were fairly plentiful in Cincinnati, Radcliffe rarely reviewed amateur theatre. He found it significantly inferior to professional theatre, and considered its only value as providing a source to train audiences to appreciate professional theatre. His basic attitude toward amateur theatre is apparent from his review of a community theatre production that he found "surprisingly pleasant entertainment":

It's the kind of little theater production in which you do not suffer with the actors as they struggle with their assignments, and one in which there are chuckles and laughs for those who are not related to members of the cast. It's worth its moderate price of admission unless you expect Queen City talent to produce Cole Porter music and a DeSyliva production like a magician pops rabbits out of a hat. (All Wool and a Yard Wide, 5/8/41)

Upon the drastic decline of road productions in the 1950s and the subsequent rise of amateur theatre in Cincinnati, Radcliffe opportunely reevaluated his position towards amateur theatre.

The time when you had to be a doting relative or debtor of someone in the cast in order to enjoy plays put on by school and community groups is a thing of a more distant past than many professional theater observers and veteran
theatergoers realize. The nature and variety of offerings show remarkable advances in standards of production and performance (10/16/51).

Radcliffe now saw amateur theatre's value, not only as training audiences, but as producers of new and experimental works, training grounds for young actors, and a means of decentralizing theatre. Although Radcliffe's attitude toward amateur theatre seemed to change in the early 1950s, he failed to apply consistent standards to non-professional theatre: the values he assigned to it tended to appreciate in direct proportion to the road's decline. For example, during the 1951-1952 season when there were only five road productions and ten community productions, Radcliffe reviewed all of the community efforts. The road season did not start until the end of December this year because of contract disputes. Radcliffe's disgust with professional producers at this episode immediately became amateur theatre's gain.

Too bad that after such a promising start by local amateurs, the professional theater, to which we look for the best in this art form, has attained its present unique and unenviable state of suspended animation. Our professionals, especially theater owners and craft groups which work with actors (God Bless Them!) need more of the spirit of the amateur—using that word with an eye to its basic meaning (10/20/51).

Radcliffe's "new" appreciation of amateur theatre evaporated as easily as it had appeared however. During the 1954-1955 season there were thirteen road productions and twelve community theatre productions. Radcliffe reviewed
all of the road productions and only one of the community productions. In addition, his comments on amateur theatre decreased as he focused his attentions once more on professional theatre.

In addition to creating opportunistic relationships with other forms of theatre, Radcliffe's preoccupation with the road also made him too short-sighted to recognize the nascent development of new theatrical trends. Because of his concentration on the road, Radcliffe was incapable of perceiving the potential significance of several important events in Cincinnati theatre history. Although Radcliffe was quick to jump on the bandwagon expounding amateur theatre during the 1950s when community and university theatre grew, he did not attempt any considered analysis of the possible effects that the growth of these groups could have on American and Cincinnati theatre and quickly abandoned his new found enthusiasm when road productions increased.

Another event that was ignored by Radcliffe was the inception of regional theatre in Cincinnati. Radcliffe neglected Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park's first two seasons and its possible significance in Cincinnati theatre history. Although Radcliffe was already aware of other regional theatres, he did not place Playhouse in the Park within this movement until long after its inception.
Beyond Cincinnati, Radcliffe's preoccupation with the road made him ignore or deny contributions that non-road or non-Broadway theatre made to developments in American theatre. According to Radcliffe, tributary theatre would never equal Broadway in critical acclaim. He considered Off-Broadway essentially unimportant. "In the period of its existence, Off-Broadway theater contributions of note have been few and far between. Three Penny Opera [was the only] outstanding contribution of Off-Broadway and only because Off-Broadway was the only place it could get a hearing" (11/16/63).

After claiming that tributary theatre could never produce as many artistic works as Broadway, Radcliffe then attributed several tributary theatre successes to Broadway, such as Inherit the Wind which first achieved its success in Margo Jones's regional theatre and The Iceman Cometh which was successfully produced at Circle in the Square when it was an Off-Broadway house (11/16/63).

One final problem in Radcliffe's criticism caused by his preoccupation with the road was the chronic state of nostalgia it induced after the road declined. The following quotes are typical of almost daily laments throughout his career: "Cincinnati is standing in the need of theater as well as prayer" (9/13/59), and "road theater in terms of volume is a joke (theater comes easier and more profitable any place else, including a prison)" (11/1/59).
Because Radcliffe's criteria for good theatre were elements of the typical 1940s and 1950s road productions, and because Radcliffe was a journalistic theatre critic in a road city which for the most part received scripts with proven commercial, if not artistic, appeal, it was difficult for Radcliffe to develop any formative theoretical or aesthetic influence: he could only report on the mostly conventional fare which toured Cincinnati. He acted as a journalistic reviewer, capably fulfilling the usual functions associated with this job as outlined by Todd Hunt in the previous chapter. Here it will be sufficient to highlight the most important of his functions.

First, Radcliffe acted as a consumer guide to entertainment in Cincinnati. He gave his readers advice on which shows he felt deserved his readers' investments of time and money. Often he alluded to this commercial function quite explicitly, and would end his reviews with a comment such as "the price for the show is reasonable" or "this one's worth your money."

Radcliffe took his position as consumer guide very seriously, "I hope my info helped readers to make up their minds" (12/25/60), and he was very protective of his readership. He deplored misleading advertising that might take advantage of his readers and frequently criticized those who used deceptive promotional tactics. One such person, according to Radcliffe, was Douglas Cramer, general
manager of Cincinnati Summer Playhouse, a professional summer tent theatre which lasted from 1955-1960. Radcliffe once referred to Cramer, rather sarcastically, as a "general manager who has inimitable power to amaze this column with his promotional ingenuity" (12/7/55). One instance of Cramer's "ingenuity" concerned Cincinnati Summer Playhouse's production of Cyprienne, which Summer Playhouse publicized as a Broadway tryout. When it opened at the theatre, it really was a tryout, but after the play opened Uta Hagen decided to postpone its Broadway debut because she received a starring role in Goat Island, which was to open on Broadway that October. Cramer issued a press release confirming the postponement; yet, he still advertised the production with the following: "Only four more nights in Cincinnati prior to its Broadway Premiere." Radcliffe's comments on this advertisement were: "Only four more nights to see a surefire hit that's so good its backers want to postpone making money on it for eight month? Hurry! Hurry! . . . Hokum!!!" (8/27/55).

Radcliffe's second function as a journalistic reviewer was to promote the theatre, which he did extremely well throughout his career. He promoted theatre by enthusiastically publicizing productions he felt his readers should attend.

Radcliffe's third function was to educate his audience. He accomplished this by informing them about new events in
theatre, such as the introduction of arena staging; explaining trends, such as the economic causes behind the road's decline; and, by explaining principles of drama and using dramatic terminology, as when he differentiated for his readers between comedy of manners and farce. Radcliffe was very successful in fulfilling this function, except when his preoccupation with the road blinded him to other important developments in theatre.

Radcliffe's job, by its very nature, provided Cincinnati with an almost daily chronicle of theatre events: by simply recording these events, Radcliffe became, inadvertently, a historian. At times, Radcliffe stepped into that function almost consciously when he chose to interpret events explicitly, such as the declining road problem. Radcliffe also acted unconsciously as an interpretive historian by virtue of the selection and choices implicit in his work. The inclusions, exclusions, and emphases in his daily column not only constitute a historiographical process, but may also have played a part in the history of Cincinnati theatre, as that theatre community came to recognize and respect Radcliffe as its leading critic, consumer guide, and chronicler.

The next two chapters will present the history of Cincinnati theatre from 1938-1969 as it was reconstructed through the viewpoint of E. B. Radcliffe, from the vantage point of two decades' hindsight. In addition, the
reconstruction of Cincinnati theatre history will maintain
the possibility that Radcliffe may not only give us a
possible reconstruction, but may also have played some small
part in constructing that history.
CHAPTER III
CINCINNATI COMMERCIAL THEATRE

When Radcliffe assumed his position as theatre critic in 1938, Cincinnati theatre consisted of a few community groups, one university group, a high school drama conservatory, the Federal Theatre Project, and professional road productions. The common acting style was technique oriented and the most popular styles dramaturgically were socially conscious melodramas such as Robert Sherwood's The Petrified Forest and zany character comedies such as Kaufman's and Hart's You Can't Take It With You. Over the next thirty-one years Cincinnati theatre went through a drastic transformation. When Radcliffe retired in 1969 there were eighteen community groups that formed an Association of Community Theatres, new theatre departments and facilities in five colleges and universities, a regional theatre, and road productions. The acting style leaned more toward Stanislavski internalization than technique and experimentations in nonverbal communication were attempted by groups such as the Living Theatre. The popular dramaturgical style in the non-commercial theatre was absurdist, such as Ionesco's The Lesson; and, in the
commercial theatre, the popular dramaturgical styles were situational comedies, such as Neil Simon's *Barefoot in the Park*, and optimistic musicals, such as *The Sound of Music*. While these differences drastically changed theatre in Cincinnati, they also were part of larger, national trends that were shaping American theatre in the middle of the twentieth century.

In the course of his career, Radcliffe recorded these changes. Sometimes he was aware of their part in the overall trends, but often he was much too close to the event both historically and emotionally. Overall his records depicted a situation similar to those in the larger cities across the United States—a non-commercial theatre that expanded over the years to a healthy and vibrant existence and a commercial theatre that declined into a limited and panicked state. Throughout his career, although he recognized and appreciated the growth of non-commercial theatre in light of its possible benefits to commercial theatre, Radcliffe emphasized the commercial theatre because it was his qualitative and aesthetic norm while other types of theatre served only as cheap imitations of commercial theatre for him. Over the years, Radcliffe struggled with the commercial theatre—promoting, extolling, lamenting, the type of production which would never return: the 1920s road productions of his youth.
Most road productions in the 1920s featured legendary stars and were either elaborate musical comedies, spectacles, or literary dramas. Theatre clung to these three styles in the 1920s because music and dialogue were vital to their success and the silent motion picture industry could not appropriate them yet. More importantly for Radcliffe, the productions in the 1920s were plentiful. The average number of road companies on tour during the 1920s was sixty\(^1\) and Cincinnati received the majority of them. Although the numbers decreased to an average of twenty-two in the 1930s, their style basically remained the same.

The 1938-39 Cincinnati season, which was the first Radcliffe reviewed, had seventeen productions. Although the number of productions was low, the number of stars was not. This season featured Sir Cedric Hardwicke, in *Shadow and Substance*, George M. Cohan in *I'd Rather Be Right*, Ethel Barrymore in *Whiteoaks*, Cornelia Otis Skinner in her one-woman show, Walter Huston in *Knickerbocker Holiday*, Lynn Fontanne and Alfred Lunt in *Amphitryon 38* and *The Seagull*, Gertrude Lawrence in *Susan and God*, Lawrence Olivier in *No Time For Comedy*, and Katharine Cornell in *Candida*.

At this time, Cincinnati was a Shubert road city where productions played a one-week engagement. The connection to the Shuberts was a strong one, having begun in 1905 when Cincinnati investors, led by the Cincinnati Republican boss George Cox, backed the Shuberts in their construction of eighteen theatres on the touring circuits. This, the Shuberts' first building project, was a result of the Theatrical Syndicate's refusal to lease their theatres to the Shuberts. In 1938, of the two theatres which housed road productions, the one used the most, the Cox Theatre, was owned by the Shuberts. The Cox (named after its chief financier) seated 1350 and the Taft Theatre, which was owned by a masonic fraternity and housed musicals and larger productions, seated 2510. (The other Shubert theatre in Cincinnati, the Shubert, housed vaudeville and revues.) Some of the productions which toured Cincinnati were produced by the Shuberts as well.

Although the majority of productions consisted of Broadway hits with stars, there were also time-worn revivals that frequented Cincinnati annually and sometimes even twice in one season. *Tobacco Road* toured Cincinnati eleven times before it was finally put out to pasture in 1942, and *The Student Prince* toured seven times until it was retired in 1945. (In the early 1960s it was revived in an adaptation

---

2 Poggi, p. 17.
for Ice Follies.) Other popular revivals were *Blossom Time* with six stops, and *The Merry Widow* with five stops.

In the 1920s the average number of road productions touring Cincinnati was fifty, while the average number of road companies that toured nationally during this time was sixty. A drastic reduction occurred in 1931 as the Depression caught up with the road and the average number of touring companies shrank to thirty-four. Cincinnati received twenty-nine productions that year. By 1935, the average number of road companies was reduced to twenty-two and the average number remained at this level through 1961. Out of the twenty-two available productions, Cincinnati usually received sixteen from 1938 to 1949, twelve from 1949 to 1959, and ten from 1959 to 1969. During Radcliffe's reign Cincinnati road theatre experienced a very gradual decline that had started in the early 1930s. Although the number of productions did not change drastically through his career and Radcliffe's position of deploiring the situation remained the same through his career, there were distinct changes in attempts to revive the road, in Cincinnatians' support of theatre, and different factors in the internal structure of road business contributing to the decline. These different characteristics of the road situation can be divided into three ten-year periods.

---

3 Poggi, p. 30-31.
From 1938 to 1949, the average number of road productions Cincinnati received was sixteen. During the early part of this period there were several attempts by New York producers to increase the number of road productions by increasing audience support; however, Cincinnatians did not respond to their efforts. Throughout this early period Cincinnati audiences were known for lackluster response and poor support at the box office. Because of the major difficulties caused by World War Two, such as the limitations imposed on baggage car numbers, rationing, and a loss of artists, and Cincinnati's lack of sufficient audience support, producers tended to ignore Cincinnati in the latter half of this period. A final characteristic of this period, which Radcliffe used to explain poor audiences, was the over-abundance of time-worn revivals, such as *Tobacco Road*.

The first attempt to revive the road during Radcliffe's career was the Theatre Guild's initiation of a two-week subscription plan that would guarantee at least six Theatre Guild productions in a city if enough subscriptions were sold. Cincinnati split the two-week plan with Columbus, Ohio, beginning with the 1940-41 season to become one of ten subscription cities. That season the Theatre Guild productions included *There Shall Be No Night*, *Time of Your Life*, *Ladies in Retirement*, *The Male Animal*, *Twelfth Night*, and Katherine Hepburn in *The Philadelphia Story*. 
Despite an occasionally stormy relationship with subscribers in Cincinnati, the Theatre Guild subscription plan remained a fixture in Cincinnati theatre until 1975. At times, the Theatre Guild was forced to cancel productions in their program during the middle of a season, and at times Cincinnati did not fill its subscription quota. Even though subscribers received refunds for cancelled productions, Radcliffe attributed any reductions in subscriptions to the unreliability of the Theatre Guild's guarantee. In actuality, Cincinnati subscriptions hovered around 3400 when 4000 was the ideal goal for a city of Cincinnati's size. In 1963, however, subscriptions rose to six thousand after a successful promotion drive by the volunteer organization, Friends of Cincinnati Theatre. The group, organized by Cincinnati fine arts benefactor Irma Lazarus, was also responsible for increasing subscriptions to 8000 in 1965 so that Cincinnati could become a two-week city.

Two other attempts to revive the commercial theatre in the 1940s were not as successful as the Theatre Guild's plan. The first one was the Dollar Top Theatre Experiment which was to be housed in the Emery Theatre. This venture was initiated by a local Cincinnati producer, Paul Theis, in 1943. At this time the highest priced theatre ticket was around $2.50. Unfortunately, not enough Cincinnatians took advantage of the reduced one-dollar ticket rate to make the experiment succeed. Another attempt was the establishment
of a resident stock company by Lee Shubert in 1943. The operation was to have a ten week season and a $1.50 top admission price; however, for reasons never fully articulated by Radcliffe, this proposal was cancelled right before its season opened.

In the latter half of this period producers stopped trying to revive their interests in Cincinnati and more frequently bypassed Cincinnati for cities such as Cleveland and St. Louis where audience support was greater. Cincinnati received the title "The worst show town in America" from J. J. Shubert⁴ and in 1946 the Shuberts threatened to pull out of Cincinnati because they were not making any money there.⁵

Naturally, Radcliffe deplored the cancellations, the lack of road productions, and the neglect of Cincinnati by producers. His attitude is best revealed in a commentary he wrote in response to Blithe Spirit's bypassing of Cincinnati:

There always is an excuse and why should this time be an exception. But the old alibis about routing difficulties, our 'unfavorable' geographic location, and only play dates for cities of nearly a million population, will not work. It [Blithe Spirit] bypasses a community which would support it at a time when theatergoers literally thirst for a first-class attraction. Why? (1/22/45).

⁴ E. B. Radcliffe, Cincinnati Enquirer, 9 September 1945. Subsequent references from Radcliffe's Enquirer column will be indicated in the text by the column's date.

⁵ Variety, 15 June 1946, p. 51.
Later that year he printed in bold print his disgust with the lack of bookings: "Why - Doesn't - New York - Give - Cincinnati - a - Break - And - Isn't - It - Time - To - Get - Mad - About - It?" (4/18/45).

In actuality, Cincinnati was not a very strong supporter of road productions from 1938-1948. In 1939, the descriptive comments in Variety that accompanied productions' gross receipts in Cincinnati ranged from "Light" to "Limp" to "So-So." The repertory productions of The Seagull and Amphitryon 38, which grossed the most that year in Cincinnati, elicited the comment, "Very good for this stand," after their $18,000 gross figures.6 Cincinnatians were not only known for their lack of support at the box office, but also for their lackluster responses in the house. An actor from the touring production of State of the Union once asked Radcliffe what was wrong with Cincinnati audiences because they did not laugh very much; in fact, he said he "considered making a curtain speech and telling the audience the second act would be given in English" (3/25/47). In addition to its unsupportive audiences, Cincinnati was being neglected because it was part of a larger trend in which producers were consolidating the road to eastern cities and eliminating those cities which could only support a one- to two-week run. Although

6 Variety, 27 April 1939, p. 48.
Radcliffe considered "routing difficulties," "an unfavorable geographic location," and "a population of under one million" as producers' alibis, they were in fact part of the trend of consolidating the road.

In addition to publicly lamenting the apparent neglect of Cincinnati by New York producers, Radcliffe continually tried to disprove the producers' accusations that Cincinnati was unsupportive. One of his tactics was to list statistics that seemed to support his position that the producers were wrong. For example, in one column he observed that the past two seasons of Theatre Guild subscriptions had been sold out and that Cincinnati's subscription figures compared favorably with those of larger cities that were receiving attractions that bypassed Cincinnati. He noted that Cincinnati had 3400 subscribers; while Cleveland, a larger city, only had 2700, and St. Louis, another larger city, had 3500. Radcliffe's conclusion was: "These figures conflict with the reasoning behind the old saw about Cincinnati and Holy Week being the two worst weeks in show business" (3/30/46).

While Radcliffe's evidence was impressive at first glance, it was misleading. He neglected to mention that Theatre Guild productions rarely bypassed Cincinnati because the Guild operated on a guaranteed subscription plan. Moreover, the subscription numbers he listed have no direct relation to non-Guild productions and are not necessarily
indicative of Cincinnati's support of non-Guild productions. So Radcliffe was using questionable evidence.

Although Radcliffe's inaccurate claims that Cincinnati was financially supportive of theatre are misleading, his purpose in using such statements was not to confuse his readers, but to fulfill one of his jobs as a reviewer by promoting theatre. Radcliffe was well aware of Cincinnati's poor audience, yet he did not want to offend potential audience members; instead, he dared them to prove producers wrong by attending productions, and tried to create a positive image for Cincinnati readers as a theatre town.

Another tactic Radcliffe used in order to try to vindicate Cincinnati audiences was one that critics had used for years: he claimed that Cincinnatians did not go to the theatre because they had been cheated too many times by poor productions and misleading advertising. He condemned "shortsighted producers who used to palm off incompetents as original Broadway casts and thereby conditioned audiences to only attend productions that featured stars" (3/23/39).

Radcliffe's complaints of poor productions and misleading advertising were particularly valid in the case of the numerous revivals that toured Cincinnati. In the beginning of his career, Radcliffe's attitude toward

---

8 Poggi, p. 34.
revivals was somewhat positive--most theatre seemed adequate
to him. The first time he reviewed Tobacco Road was in
1938, its third appearance in Cincinnati that year.
Radcliffe said of it:

For stark realism and vivid revelation of a phase
of American life, few plays produced in recent
years have approached Tobacco Road as evidenced by
the continued interest manifested in it since its
presentation nearly five years ago (3/19/38).

He also naively reported that "this probably will be the
last visit of the piece to Cincinnati" (3/19/38). However
his naivete waned, after seeing a few more "farewell"
performances of Tobacco Road year after year. By 1940,
Radcliffe could vent his frustrations rather humorously
towards revivals repeated solely for profit motives. After
reviewing Tobacco Road for the fifth time in his career,
Radcliffe criticized the misleading 'farewell engagement'
publicity tactic:

Years ago--back somewhere between the late
Archaean and early Paleozoic age--Tobacco Road
began making farewell appearances in Cincinnati.
Local newspapermen would solemnly announce the
date of the final presentation only to regret
their optimism at some later date. Just what
happens to Tobacco Road when it is not playing
Cincinnati is as much a mystery as the nesting
place of the Woofus Duck. In all probability
Tobacco Road goes into the ground and waits to see
its shadow before it pops up.

The reason we say this is because Mr. Miles
(Tobacco Road's press agent) called on us
yesterday to swear on a ten-foot stack of
Varieties [sic] that Tobacco Road was hoping to
make its final appearance here at the Cox for one
week beginning January 5. While bearing false
witness with straight face, Mr. Miles, now plump
and prosperous looking (Tobacco Road has grossed
several million), tried to tell us that he wore shoes when he first publicized the show here. Anybody knows that shoes weren't invented until a helluva long time after that. In fact, it wasn't until Blossom Time and My Maryland that press agents wore shoes on their Cincinnati calls (12/18/40).

Radcliffe's frustration with revivals grew over the years as revivals began to outnumber premieres. At one point he stated that he would rather have "the average New York rejection" because it "is better entertainment than the repetitions of Blossom Time, Tobacco Road, and Student Prince" (10/8/45). His treatment of the revivals in his reviews grew rather cynical. In a 1944 column Radcliffe reported that Nelson Trowbridge, Shubert manager at the Cox, insisted Tobacco Road would not play Cincinnati in the 1944-45 season. Radcliffe responded with "Does he wanna bet?" He even warned his readers of a future Tobacco Road with a twist: "They haven't even begun to consider setting it to music!!" (9/17/44). In a review of Student Prince in 1945, the fifth time he reviewed it, he stated:

As usual the production is one on which scene designers and costumers didn't knock themselves out with hours of brain sweat. And reverse the backdrop, haul away the beer tables, remove the trellises of roses (something new this year), and throw some dirt on the stage, and you'll be all set for Tobacco Road (10/26/45).

His final note on the nature of revivals appeared in a 1946 column: "In these uncertain times there are three things Cincinnatians can count on--death, taxes, and annual appearances of Blossom Time" (3/15/46).
Although Cincinnati audience numbers discouraged producers from booking the Shubert theatres, they were not the only source of discouragement. The other source was the Shuberts themselves. As part of the Shubert chain, the Cox theatre (unlike those in Columbus and Cleveland that was independently operated) was more difficult and expensive to lease. Secondly, the Cox Theatre had tremendous sight line problems. "Limitations in areas of the Cox Stage rob those in certain rows of proper illusion of the fantastic Christian Birard Chez Francis Cafe exterior" (Madwoman of Chaillot, 5/9/50). The Cox also had uncomfortable seating and needed general repairs, problems which were not addressed until 1953 when J. J. Shubert allocated $15,000 for minor improvements such as painting and cleaning.

The period from 1938-49 was a very frustrating one for Cincinnati theatre. With a limited number of road productions available Cincinnati only received approximately sixteen road productions annually. At least half a dozen productions bypassed Cincinnati as their producers looked for higher profits in other cities. Although Radcliffe pleaded for more road theatre, it simply was no longer available.

1949-59 was also a frustrating period for commercial theatre in America, a period which saw its own set of problems for the road: Broadway was immersed in a confining
financial situation which demanded "hit" productions and limited experimentation, and its 1949-50 season reached a new low of only 59 new productions; Broadway ticket prices doubled; television, no longer a novelty, had become part of daily life for eighty-five percent of Americans by 1959; and, the road was reduced to a dozen of the largest cities in the United States. Cincinnati was fortunate enough to be one of them. However, only eleven road productions toured Cincinnati during the 1949-50 season and by 1956-57, that number reached an all-time low of six productions. This time poor audience support played no part in the limited attractions because Cincinnati was no longer the "worst show town in America"; instead, the demand for productions far outweighed the dwindling supply and cities were left with several dark weeks during the theatre season.

Despite the problems associated with a lack of road productions, at least the lack of audience support was no longer an issue in Cincinnati. According to J. J. Shubert it was "no longer hard to get producers to play Cincinnati" and business had increased fifty percent from 1952 to 1953. However, since there were not many road productions


11 Variety, 7 June 1953, p. 51.
available, the increase in support could not generate more road theatre; the law of supply and demand had finally tipped in the producers' favor.

Radcliffe's reactions to the road situation in the first half of this period were the usual lamentations, encouragements of any suggestions of road growth, and analysis of the road's decline. Surprisingly, in the second half of this period Radcliffe stopped writing about the road. In 1958, he became the Enquirer's television critic and spent most of the next two years reviewing television exclusively. He even ignored the theatre when he went to New York in 1958; instead he watched television shows being produced. Radcliffe's actions reflected the trends at work historically--during television's honeymoon period there was an abundance of television shows which attracted Radcliffe and his readers, and a corresponding decline in theatre which left him little theatrical activity to report. Radcliffe's silence was only temporary as the road experienced new life in the early 1960s.

The biggest news affecting Cincinnati road theatre came from a 1950 federal government lawsuit filed against the Shuberts in order to break up an alleged monopoly of theatre ownership and booking facilities. By 1957, when the suit was settled, the Shuberts were ordered to divest of several theatres, including one of their Cincinnati houses. By this time the two theatres they owned were the Cox and the
Shubert. The Shuberts built the Shubert Theatre in the early 1900s. During the 1940s when it was housing vaudeville and musical revues, the Shuberts leased it to RKO. In 1955, the lease expired. Since there were not enough road productions to require the use of two theatres and because the Cox was too small for musicals and had architectural problems, the Shuberts abandoned the Cox in 1955 and refurbished the Shubert to house all legitimate theatre. The Shuberts offered to sell the Cox to the Nederlanders, theatre producers and owners from Detroit, but the Nederlanders were not interested. Until the 1960s, when the Cox was razed to build a parking lot, it was leased to community groups and periodic professional ventures.

New promotional efforts for the road were limited during this period since theatre personnel reconciled themselves to the inavailability of Broadway productions and concentrated on creating new outlets for theatre, such as Off-Broadway shows and Summer Stock. Although Radcliffe was never reconciled to a possible change in nature of theatre professionalism, Cincinnati went on to support other forms of theatre. As a result, road theatre was treated as a special occasion and other theatrical forms, such as summer stock and community theatre, became dominant.

While the previous period of road activity was rather quiet, the remaining ten years of Radcliffe's career, 1959-69, saw a few temporary spurts of life in the road. The
first was a tour produced by the National Repertory Theatre formed by Eva Le Gallienne in 1963. The National Repertory Theatre offered a $3.00 top ticket price as opposed to the usual $5.00-$6.00 range. Unfortunately, the program only survived through the 1966-67 season because of a lack of revenue.

The second venture was the formation of the American Musical Theatre Club in 1966 by Martin Tahse. Tahse set up an eighteen-city tour of four musicals, including Where's Charley and On a Clear Day You Can See Forever, but declared bankruptcy after the second one opened. The final spurt of growth in Cincinnati's road was Cincinnati's expansion in 1965 to a two-week city under the Theatre Guild's subscription plan due to the doubling of subscriptions to eight thousand.

These attempts to revive the road were all short-lived and by Radcliffe's retirement, the average number of road productions in Cincinnati was ten. Over the years he desperately had wanted the road to return to what it had been in the 1920s, but by the time he assumed his job it was already too late--road theatre would inevitably be swallowed by television and motion pictures, and finally expand into summer stock and Shakespeare festivals.

As tremendous financial restraints forced Broadway and road company productions to decrease, other outlets for theatre production were needed and created. Community and
educational theatres across the United States emerged and by producing new works, training actors, and providing entertainment, they strengthened non-commercial theatre options. Meanwhile, commercial producers moved to Off-Broadway in New York City and discovered the profit potential of Shakespeare festivals and summer stocks that played recent Broadway hits in the vacated hinterlands. The latter two outlets became known as "summer theatre" which was different in structure and temperament from the traditional commercial theatre that was composed of Broadway and winter road companies. Summer theatre was usually produced on a lower budget, performed in made over barns, under tents, or in the open air, had cheaper admission fees, and encouraged a festival atmosphere. This temperament was inherent in the nature of summer theatre since the open facilities mandated less formal seating and could not prevent natural intrusions such as bugs, skunks, and sudden thunderstorms. Of the two types of summer theatre, Shakespeare festivals and summer stock, the latter was more popular in numbers.

Although professional summer stock theatre, also called straw hat or tent theatre, had been popular in resort areas for a long time, the 1950s saw it expand outside the east coast region. Initially, the structure of a typical commercial summer stock followed the organization of stock theatres in the nineteenth century: a resident stock
company that usually imported a star for individual productions. After this structure proved financially viable, New York producers flocked to this new opportunity and financed road productions, either by selling complete productions to established summer theatres who "jobbed" them in or by placing the production on a newly created summer road circuit. Eventually winter road productions began touring the new summer circuit as well as the winter road circuit; thus, the road had been revived, but in the summer months instead of the winter. Although larger cities, such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Chicago had traditional winter road productions in the summer, this was not summer theatre, but a winter road season that extended into the summer. In the late 1950s, the winter road productions touring summer theatres were working under different circumstances, for example, an outdoor, less formal building and a younger, non-elitist audience. As a result, the content of road theatre changed from seasons that included a fair number of dramas to seasons of musicals and comedies.

By 1957 there were 154 Equity summer theatres across the United States.12 In 1955, due to the initial growth spurt of summer stock, the Stock Manager association, an association of stock theatre owners that had been formed in the early 1940s, divided its members into four groups in

---

order to more efficiently serve its members' operational problems, such as union negotiations and equipment. The four groups, which served as classifications of summer stock theatre were: the Council of Stock Theatre (COST), whose members were usually located in resorts; the Council of Resident Stock Theatre (CORST), whose members were not classified as resorts and usually had smaller houses (seating less than five hundred) than COST theatres; Musical Arena Theatre Association (MATA), whose members produced musical theatres in tents; and, Associative Civic Musical Theatre (ACMT), whose members were connected with local governments, usually by the civic-owned building used for productions.¹³

By the late 1950s summer theatres began experiencing some of the same problems that plagued Broadway and winter road productions, and many of the summer stocks that appeared in the mid-50s disappeared as quickly as they had come. The main cause of their closings was the rise in star fees. In the late 1940s, a star could be engaged for $500 per week. By 1957, stars were asking for as much as $5000 per week. In 1958, COST, CORST, MATA, and ACMT met and agreed to place a $2000 ceiling on a star's fees; however, the ceiling was ineffective because theatre managers

¹³ John Wilson, p. 16.
continually ignored it in the course of competition.\textsuperscript{14} Other causes for the decline in summer theatres were television, general rising costs, and the fact that summer theatres' appeal was often based on their value as novelties. After two or three seasons, the novelty had worn off and attendance decreased.

There were several attempts to establish summer theatre in Cincinnati; some were more successful than others. Although none of the attempts was successful in the long run, they were successful enough and plentiful enough to make Cincinnati a part of the national movement which saw summer theatre outdrawing winter theatre. (In 1957 within a 250-mile radius of Cincinnati there was one Shakespeare festival, six summer stocks, and the Cincinnati Zoo Opera.) The first attempt at Cincinnati summer theatre, initiated in 1946 by J. J. Shubert, was the establishment of a resident stock company to play in the Cox Theatre for ten weeks. The venture was cancelled after two weeks. When it closed Robert Allen, an \textit{Enquirer} reporter commented on its failure: "The instantaneous reaction of practically everyone to the original sudden announcement of a Cox summer season was that it would be no go." Allen cited the warm temperatures in

\textsuperscript{14} "The Straw Hat Season and Tents Too," \textit{Theatre Arts} June 1958, p. 71.
the Cox ("85 degrees at 8:30 p.m. or 95 during matinees") as the reason for the venture's failure.\[15\]

The next attempt was more successful than the Shubert venture and was a typical summer stock theatre of the period. In April 1955, Alexander White, a producer who began a successful summer theatre in Indianapolis in 1954, approached the Cincinnati City Council and theatre personnel with his plans to start a summer repertory theatre in a twelve hundred seat tent in a suburban area of Cincinnati. White was granted permission to establish the Cincinnati Summer Playhouse in Finneytown. He named Richard Rosenfield as its artistic producer and created a board of directors.\[16\] Cincinnati Summer Playhouse opened its first season with *The Fifth Season* on June 14, 1955.

When the playhouse first opened it was organized as a resident stock company, with many of the characteristics of theatres in the Council of Resident Stock Theatre. It had a local board of directors, and hired a professional resident company that was supplemented with stars a few days before a show opened its week-long run. The stars usually picked their vehicles. Cincinnati Summer Playhouse's first season's guest stars included Uta Hagen, Maureen Stapleton, and Geraldine Page. Its repertory usually consisted of


recent and past Broadway hits with an occasional Broadway tryout. The playhouse's first season consisted of *The Fifth Season, Sabrina Fair, Holiday, The Rainmaker, On Borrowed Time, Bell, Book, and Candle, Affairs of State, King of Hearts, and Cyprienne*. Its first season was quite successful and earned a $7000 profit.\(^{17}\)

After two successful seasons, Cincinnati Summer Playhouse's third season was more contentious. In July of 1957, it seems that the Playhouse's Board tried to gain control of the theatre. First, Richard Rosenfield resigned with half of the season remaining. Then the Board of Directors hired Peyton Price to succeed Rosenfield and created the title of "managing director" for Price. The Board also changed the Playhouse's structure, following the lead of many other summer stock theatres by importing whole productions as well as jobbing in actors for the Playhouse's own productions. They then fired the resident company and director. Although, not documented anywhere, from the few existing sources that continually mention the Board's actions instead of Peyton's, it is apparent that Peyton was hired as a figure head and that the Board controlled the theatre. This was the first season that Cincinnati Summer Playhouse had lost money.

\(^{17}\) *Variety*, 28 September 1955, p. 49.
In 1958, the Board made one more structural change: importing New York road productions that had toured Cincinnati in the 1957-58 season at the Shubert Theatre. Thus, Cincinnati became a summer road city as New York road producers jumped on the summer band wagon.

One of the reasons for the influx of road productions was that in 1958, former Shubert executives, Morrie Effron and Mark Kroll, were hired as the Playhouse's General Manager and Producer respectively. The Playhouse was also moved from Finneytown to Montgomery, which was on the other side of the city. By the middle of the 1959 season, however, the theatre closed and its tent was sold to a Milwaukee catering service. Apparently, Cincinnati Summer Playhouse's many organizational changes as well as the fading of the summer theatre fad were responsible for poor box office support.

Radcliffe's reception of Cincinnati Summer Playhouse productions was predictable considering his criteria for theatre productions. In the first season, he disliked most of the productions and did not give the Playhouse much press exposure at all. During the Playhouse's first season, Radcliffe reserved several columns to review and praise extensively Stratford, Ontario's festival productions and gave equally comprehensive reviews to Hiram College's melodrama season and Wilmington College's summer season. All three of these organizations were outside Cincinnati.
Cincinnati Summer Playhouse, which was located in Cincinnati, was only mentioned three times before it opened (he mentioned Stratford eleven times) and his reviews of its first two productions were very short. In the reviews he commented that "time and space do not permit report on directional touches and staging features" (6/15/55) and "space limitations prohibit the usual cast list and detailed report on individuals" (6/22/55). His response to the second production was "performances were carried through with tolerable degrees of success" (6/22/55). Once the Playhouse developed into a summer road theatre, Radcliffe's reviews became much more favorable.

Some of Radcliffe's problems with Cincinnati Summer Playhouse were justified. First some of the scripts were poor choices for a summer theatre audience looking for light entertainment. Sardou's *Cyprienne* was certainly not suitable for a summer audience. Sardou was a master of the "well-made play" of nineteenth-century France. Although popular in his time, by the 1950s his plays were extremely dated and his dialogue stilted. His plots were usually built on some trivial insignificant fact or secret that became over-exaggerated. His plays have so many reversals in them that they become ridiculous, which caused George Bernard Shaw to nickname them "Sardoudledum." *Cyprienne* was no exception. At Cincinnati Summer Playhouse, *Cyprienne* was
chosen by its star Uta Hagen because she wanted to give it a tryout before attempting Broadway.

The other problem Radcliffe had with the Playhouse was caused by questionable advertising tactics by the Playhouse's first general manager, Doug Cramer. Radcliffe, acting as a consumer guide, was protective of his readers and despised misleading advertising that would take advantage of them, such as Cramer's advertisement that encouraged people to attend Cyprienne because it was a New York tryout, even though its Broadway premiere was postponed indefinitely.

Radcliffe's criticism of the Playhouse also seems justified in light of the fact that the productions were apparently not that good in the beginning. The following comments on Holiday for Lovers are typical of Radcliffe's criticisms of Cincinnati Summer Playhouse during its first two seasons:

Playing this one, as it is done at the Playhouse, is cartooning in circles by directors, actors, and technicians. Scene changes were made flat footed not without confusion. The actors labored to give body and tang [to the script]. Edith Atwater gave the closest thing to a characterization and Albert Dekker was insecure in his part (7/10/57).

Other Cincinnati critics echoed this sentiment.

The other form of summer theatre in the Cincinnati area was a Shakespeare festival. Antioch College's Shakespeare-under-the-Stars was one of the first of a string of Shakespeare festivals founded during the 1950s, the most
successful one being at Stratford, Ontario. According to Barnard Hewitt, Antioch's festival, along with San Diego's and Ashland, Oregon's festivals, influenced the establishment of the American Shakespeare Festival at Stratford, Connecticut.  

Shakespeare-under-the-Stars developed from a semi-professional summer theatre program that Radcliffe supported and reviewed from its inception in 1940. In 1952, under the direction of Arthur Lithgow, the organization devoted itself to producing all of Shakespeare's plays over a five-year period. Hiring actors such as Ellis Rabb and Nancy Marchand, the Festival soared from an initial production expenditure of $3600 to a $155,000 budget in its last season, which included a second company established at the Toledo Zoological Gardens. Three-fourths of its actors were Equity performers; the rest were apprentices from Antioch College.

For its first season Antioch's festival produced Shakespeare's English chronicle plays, and for its second season, in 1953, it produced all of his Greek and Roman plays. Despite saving Shakespeare's most popular tragic

---

18 Hewitt, p. 474.


20 Alice Griffin, "Theatre USA," Theatre Arts, August 1955.
plays, Macbeth, Hamlet, and King Lear, for its last season, Antioch's festival ended like many other summer theatres—in the red. Its fourth season lost $42,000 and its last season in 1957 lost $34,000.21 The festival played to eighty-five percent capacity during these seasons; however, its expansion to Toledo caused larger operational costs that could not be covered unless admission was raised or a subsidy was found.22 In 1958, the project was suspended both at Toledo and at Antioch. It seems that by expanding to Toledo, the festival had grown too big and elaborate to survive under its simple structure. Beginning in 1959, Antioch continued a summer theatre program under the name Shakespeare-under-the-Stars, but the program returned to its semi-professional status and produced operettas in addition to Shakespeare. Despite the Festival's financial failure, it still succeeded in accomplishing its initial goal of producing all of Shakespeare's works over a five year period.

Radcliffe was quick to understand the success of Shakespeare ventures, being "conservative financial risks" during a time when producers were reluctant to invest in any play untested for financial success. He enthusiastically supported the many Shakespeare festivals, which was not

21 Variety 13 June 1958.
22 Variety 13 June 1958.
surprising since they hired the type of actor he admired. He attended the openings of both the Stratford, Ontario, and Stratford, Connecticut, festivals and returned to both of them yearly. Radcliffe considered Stratford, Ontario a "miracle," from the high quality productions to the "$100,000 tent amphitheater that is likely to become the talk of the theater world" (7/15/53), and he spent many columns praising the work of the actors, directors, designers, and, mainly, the Stratford community for supporting such a venture.

Although Cincinnati's winter season was left barren by the drastic decline of road productions in the 1950s, Cincinnati was quickly introduced to summer theatre seasons that were populated by non-road sources. At first, Radcliffe was skeptical about the quality of summer theatre and was dismayed that "summer theater displaced winter road theater in vitality and size of operation" (6/1/55). However, he grew accustomed to summer theatre as it reintroduced a "road" format; and, he admitted summer theatre had several good points.

Personally I would rather see plays and musicals in proscenium stage legitimate theaters where the declining number of road shows are performed in winter months. But I would rather see some theater than none. And the new boom in summer theater outside New York and away from the eastern seaboard is the healthiest sign of life the legitimate theater has shown of late. It promises to build new and bigger audiences (6/3/57).
He even admitted that "artistically, summer theater is doing all right." Moreover, "Summer seems to bring something the theater loses in the winter and on Broadway--the real fun of theatergoing" (7/17/56).

From 1938-1969 Cincinnati experienced the crisis that the commercial theatre was experiencing--the eventual death of the road which would take away commercial theatre as America understood it. Before the commercial theatre could collapse though, producers adapted to the limited road status and found other outlets to produce theatre that were quite successful. Throughout this process, Radcliffe lamented the decline of "his" theatre and would like to have seen theatre return to the way it had been in the 1920s. However, the clock could not be turned back, and as the rest of the theatre world went on, Radcliffe half-heartedly supported the new, but whole-heartedly longed for his road. With the advent of the expansion of summer stock theatre, Radcliffe commented: "This new way to bring theater to an audience won't take the place of conventional theater, but it is bound to have an effect on the operation and the competition is definitely healthy" (3/14/57).
CHAPTER IV

NON-COMMERCIAL THEATRE IN CINCINNATI

Since the early twentieth century, when the traditional commercial theatre venues of Broadway and the road began a steady decline, there have been attempts to decentralize and diversify American theatre. The economic constraints that developed on Broadway created a "hit" or "miss" mentality for producers which reduced most play production to forms which generated a guaranteed public response, such as musicals, Shakespeare, thrillers, and light comedies. Experimentation and avant-garde forays were hardly welcome in such a mentality. Because the commercial American theatre was gradually reduced, both in number of productions and their scope, a corresponding aphoria resulted in several areas and efforts to decentralize and diversify arose to fill the gap, efforts largely concentrated in various forms of non-commercial theatre.

In the previous chapter, the erosion of commercial theatre in its road form and its transmigration into the newly created summer circuits illustrated the commercial theatre's dependence on the tried and true: familiar theatrical forms, well-known performers, non-demanding
entertainment material were once again the staples. Experimentation and expanding forms of dramatic literature were left to other theatrical production structures. According to Jack Poggi non-commercial theatre "arose largely to provide a hearing for plays of limited appeal"\textsuperscript{1} or, as Zelda Fichandler, founder of Arena Stage, expressed somewhat more dramatically, non-commercial theatre served the heroic purpose of "revers[ing] a direful trend--the contraction and imminent death of the art of theatre."\textsuperscript{2}

Although Poggi refers here to professional non-commercial theatre ventures, amateur ventures have also played a seminal role in the decentralization/diversification process. Amateur organizations actually have some advantages over their professional counterparts: amateurs can often take bigger risks, aesthetically, and sometimes financially, when they are backed by institutions or sponsors. Nonprofessional theatre organizations can also spawn larger and more ambitious entities in the wake of their success. Academic theatre, for example, has often enjoyed a freedom of aesthetic choice unheard of in commercial venues. Even when hampered by the philosophies or educational directives of their institutions, academic


theatres usually enjoy more secure and relaxed financial prospects than theatre producers outside academe.

The move to decentralize theatre began as soon as Broadway's fortunes began to decline. The Little Theatre movement of the 1920s spread across the United States and "issued high-sounding manifestos of their purposes and stressed what was then avant-garde in the drama."3 Then in the 1930s, the Federal Theatre Project was created to provide jobs for unemployed theatre artists. The FTP mounted productions in forty cities, produced new works, and experimented with new forms of drama. After its dissolution by the Federal government and the interruption of World War Two, other forms of non-commercial theatre rose in its place, specifically community and academic theatre. By the mid-1950s, both of these forms were well-established, with new theatre buildings, community associations, and, in the case of academic theatre, new departments for the study and practice of drama. The final step in the advent of non-commercial theatre was the regional theatre movement of the late 1940s. By 1965, America had thirty-two Equity theatres around the country.4

From his vantage point in Cincinnati, Radcliffe witnessed all of these trends in non-commercial theatre and

---

3 Zeigler, p. 8.
4 Poggi, p. 213.
sometimes appreciated their potential significance. The most prevalent sources of non-commercial theatrical activity in his midst were the community and academic theatres of Cincinnati. Although they disappeared for the most part during the War, the 1950s saw both forms grow in strength and influence. As part of a fairly pervasive trend, community and academic theatre were hardly unique to Cincinnati, but Radcliffe was also fortunate enough to see and evaluate some of the final work of the Federal Theatre Project and to see the genesis of a regional theatre company.

Radcliffe's attitude to non-commercial theatre was heavily influenced by his predilection for commercial theatre, and the tastes he formed by relying upon road productions and theatrical norms. Not only did he tend to overlook non-commercial productions when road shows were available to review, he also considered most non-commercial theatre forms amateurish, in a pejorative sense, even though some were professional in nature. His attitude to non-commercial theatre improved if the theatre adopted some commercialistic tendencies. For example, Radcliffe's attitude toward Cincinnati's regional theatre softened considerably when star directors and performers were brought in by Playhouse in the Park's third artistic director Brooks Jones.
Radcliffe's first taste of non-commercial theatre, however, was not much to his liking. His opinion of the Federal Theatre Project owes something to the situation and mentality in which he lived, and much to his own theatrical tastes. The Federal Theatre Project was created by Congress in 1935 as part of the Works Progress Administration to provide employment for theatre artists and administrators. Headed by Hallie Flanagan, the FTP created production units in major cities across the United States. In its short existence, it had employed "an average of ten thousand professionals"5 per year and "had mounted more than a thousand productions in forty cities"6 before its Federal subsidy was abolished in 1939.

By 1938, when Radcliffe first assumed his job, the FTP in Cincinnati was one of only two remaining production units in Ohio. The other was in Cleveland. While other units in Ohio were being phased out, Cincinnati's FTP was just consolidating its position in the community. From its inception in Cincinnati early in 1936, the Federal Theatre Project's position in Cincinnati had always been tenuous. "None of the local papers gave much coverage to its [the WPA's] theatrical activities," and it wasn't until September of 1936 that a Federal Theatre Project production was

6 Zeigler, p. 9.
reviewed. In addition to the inadequate press coverage, the general public regarded the venture rather suspiciously and did not treat it with respect until the FTP actors entertained victims of the 1937 flood. Cincinnati's FTP did not have its own theatre building until 1938 when the city allowed it to convert an empty building on Race Street into the Playbox Theatre. The first production at the new theatre was Orson Welles's touring production of Macbeth.

By the time Radcliffe arrived on the scene, the FTP had settled into their converted Playbox and had been receiving press coverage. The Cincinnati FTP would sometimes host touring FTP productions, such as Welles's Macbeth, and also produced new works by local playwrights, such as Ohio Doom, which Radcliffe panned. They also staged living newspapers such as Spirochete: The Great Killer.

The security of Cincinnati's FTP was shattered six months later, in 1939, when it was one of the few FTP's outside New York to be investigated by the Dies Committee on Un-American Activities, a subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives investigating the WPA. The first accusation filed against the Cincinnati FTP was the employment of amateurs rather than

---


8 Flanagan, p. 171.
professionals. In May 1939, a House investigator reported
to the Committee that ninety-five percent of the seventy-
three people employed by the FTP in Cincinnati had amateur
standing, although two days later he contradicted himself in
a Cincinnati Enquirer article when he commented that all the
employees had professional standing.\textsuperscript{9} The second accusation
filed against the FTP was that it was producing questionable
propaganda. Their last production had been E. P. Conkle's
Prologue to Glory, which was regarded as radical by the Dies
Committee because of the play's unsavory view of
politicians. The play depicts Abraham Lincoln fighting
unscrupulous politicians on his way to the White House. The
Dies Committee considered it "propaganda" to portray
politicians as crooked.\textsuperscript{10} In 1939, Congress withdrew
funding from the Federal Theatre Project because it
considered it a tool of Communist influence. Cincinnati's
FTP, like other units across the country, closed its doors.

According to Joyce Maurer, the Federal Theatre Project
in Cincinnati was not supported by local newspaper critics
because it was looked upon as relief work instead of
artistry,\textsuperscript{11} which was not an uncommon (or entirely
unjustified) viewpoint given the Project's obvious objective

\textsuperscript{9} Flanagan, p. 172.

\textsuperscript{10} Flanagan, p. 173.

\textsuperscript{11} Maurer, p. 12.
to offer relief work to unemployed theatre professionals. Radcliffe was a typical instance of this attitude to the FTP. In addition, he considered their work amateurish, although he did publicize their work. When *Spirochete: The Great Killer* opened to small houses, Radcliffe chastised Cincinnatians for not supporting it:

The play is playing to small houses. This seems a sad reflection on the civic organizations and medical leaders who endorsed *Spirochete* before it opened. Wonder how much the civic leaders, physicians, social workers, and so-called "lovers of the theater" have taken the trouble to see (or persuade their friends to see) the production that they touted so highly.12

Radcliffe's most common reaction to the FTP, however, was to ignore it. In 1938 and 1939, road shows were still fairly plentiful in Cincinnati, and that was always his first interest. He only reviewed three FTP productions, and his silence on the questions of controversy surrounding the FTP and its subsequent demise indicate either a lack of appreciation and perception on his part for such an important moment in the country's theatre history or the inability for him to speak due to the political constraints placed on him by the conservative paper for which he worked. At his point in his career, naivete, inexperience, and editorial policies are most probably the reasons for the

---

12 E. B. Radcliffe, *Cincinnati Enquirer* 28 February 1939. Subsequent references from Radcliffe's *Enquirer* column will be indicated in the text by the date of the column.
oversight instead of any ingrained biases. In addition, living in an event makes it difficult to think in terms of historical significance. This blinding proximity might also account for some of Radcliffe's disregard for the two theatrical movements of the post World War Two period; academic and community theatre. Here again, Cincinnati presents a fairly representative slice of American theatre history and once again Radcliffe was sometimes slow to appreciate it.

An important link between the amateur and professional theatre was forged after World War Two by the rapid proliferation of theatre in academic settings. The first theatre department was established in 1914 at the Carnegie Institute of Technology. By 1960, 308 colleges and universities were offering a theatre major and an additional 293 were offering a minor in theatre.13 In addition to establishing theatre departments, colleges and universities were constructing new playhouses. The growth was equally impressive for community theatre. By the early 1960s there were "20,000 to 50,000 community theatres of all kinds in the United States. Three to six thousand of these theatres performed three or more plays a year in permanent

buildings." The growth of these two groups in Cincinnati is quite representative of the national trend.

When Radcliffe became theatre critic in 1938, academic theatre included drama clubs at Xavier University, Hebrew Union College, and the University of Cincinnati. There was also a high school conservatory, the Schuster-Martin School of Drama. The only theatre department existed at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music. Although academic theatre existed in small numbers at this time, there were several groups and productions. Both the University of Cincinnati's drama club, the Mummers' Guild, and the Conservatory of Music's theatre department were known for producing new plays. The Conservatory of Music's department even started a special program for introducing new playwrights. Stephen Fox MacNeil, chairman of the Conservatory's department, established the "test-tube" theatre in 1939 at the department's theatre, the Gateway, for the purpose of producing new plays by local playwrights. MacNeil's intention was to expose his students and new playwrights to New York producers. Lee Shubert even came to the first production Sing Before Breakfast. However, MacNeil cancelled the project after its first season. According to Radcliffe, it was cancelled because the scripts were not

---

"first-rate" (4/23/40), which was probably partially correct since none of the plays was produced on Broadway.

From these small beginnings, academic theatre in Cincinnati blossomed into a thriving venture and integral part of Cincinnati theatre. The expansion of academic theatre began in the late 1940s. At this time two new departments were established: one at the University of Cincinnati, and the other at Xavier University under the speech department. Then in the 1950s, two more appeared: one at Edgecliffe College, and one at Mount Saint Joseph's College. All four of these programs built new theatres in the early 1960s.

Just as MacNeil's "test-tube" theatre reflected his times by producing potential Broadway plays for a Broadway-centered theatre, so these new departments reflected the theatre trends of their time. Paul Rutledge, chairman of the University of Cincinnati's theatre department, cashed in on the popularity of summer theatre in the early 1950s and established a summer theatre at Culver, Indiana. His purpose was to provide additional training for his actors, training not available in the traditional form of apprenticing in road productions. Edgecliffe College also capitalized on summer theatre's popularity by establishing the Cincinnati Shakespeare Festival in 1960. Then in 1962, they established a professional repertory company that lasted until 1969. Through grants from the National
Endowment for the Arts, the two schools employed professional actors to teach in the schools' theatre programs while the actors were in Cincinnati to perform at the Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park.

Overall, academic theatre activity in Cincinnati was a reflection of national growth in non-commercial theatre, just as community theatre was. Community theatre in Cincinnati also expanded and thrived after World War Two. At the beginning of Radcliffe's career, community theatre was somewhat plentiful. It included the following groups: Spotlighters, Hilltop Community Playhouse, Bond Hill Dramatics Club, Norwood Community Theatre, Jewish Center Players, Wyoming Players, Mariemont Players, Stagecrafters, and the Actors' Guild. Of these groups the Actors' Guild was the only one Radcliffe reviewed, probably because of its semi-professional status.

The Actors' Guild was originally formed as a little theatre in 1926 by former actors of the Stuart Walker Company, a professional touring stock company based in Cincinnati. When Walker dissolved his company after being enticed by Hollywood, several of the actors remaining in Cincinnati formed the Actors' Guild. After one season, however, the Guild disbanded when its actors followed their former leader to Hollywood. In 1935, the Guild was reorganized by Owen Phillips, one of its former members, who was then serving as chairman of the Cincinnati Conservatory
of Music's drama department. For the Guild's first season, Phillips brought in professional actors from the Barter Theatre, where he had acted after the disbursement of the Guild in the 1920s, to supplement the local semi-professional talent he used. For their next seasons, Phillips concentrated on using local amateur and semi-professional talent. The group used the Terminal Theatre, a movie house that was located in the train station Union Terminal, to house its productions. By 1939, Phillips' efforts were recognized in a newly published book on community theatre:

Cincinnati under the Stuart Walker regime was recognized as one of the country's leading drama centers. It remained for Owen Phillips to carry on the work. In four brief seasons—against almost overwhelming opposition, no capital—he built a small amateur group into a nationally known civic theater.15

The Actors' Guild disbanded three years later when Phillips entered the military as an entertainment officer where he directed several USO shows during World War Two.

After a dormant period during the War years, community theatre again emerged in the late forties and grew to an association of eighteen groups by 1956. During this post-War period several new groups were formed: Northern Hills Little Theatre, Music-Drama Guild, Cincinnati Valley Players, Beechmont Players, Bellarmine Players, Tri-County

Players, and Stage, Incorporated. Also a few of the older groups such as the Wyoming Players, Mariemont Players, and Stagecrafters, increased their activity. This expansion of community theatre culminated in the establishment of an annual theatre festival, which was sponsored by the University of Cincinnati, and the formation of the Association of Community Theatres in 1956. Through the end of Radcliffe's career in 1969, the number of community groups remained about the same—for the few that folded, new ones arose.

The tremendous spurt of community and academic theatres was a major trend in American theatre history and one of the few trends that Radcliffe recognized. When Stage, Incorporated was founded in 1947, Radcliffe's remarks included the following:

At first this event may strike you as rather a minor matter deriving any significance it may have from its standing in highly localized interest. But the fact of the matter is that this event is part of an increasing tally of evidence of dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in a theater where major benefits are highly localized in New York, or else subject to mystifying uncertainties and frequent inadequacies of the theater in cities of the 'road' (7/13/47).

In addition to recognizing this trend, Radcliffe was very supportive of some of amateur theatre's ventures. In 1952, Radcliffe persuaded Noah Schecter, manager of the Shubert theatres in Cincinnati, to negotiate with the Shuberts in New York to allow Stage, Incorporated and the
Music-Drama Guild to lease the Cox Theatre at reduced rates.\textsuperscript{16} Both Stage, Incorporated and the Music-Drama Guild were large community groups and each produced four to six productions per year; however, neither group had access to adequate theatre buildings. This situation threatened their existence at times. Radcliffe's persuasions were successful: surprisingly, the Shuberts acquiesced and for two seasons the groups played at the Cox during the road's dark weeks. Radcliffe's motive was not only to benefit these community groups; he also wanted to help road theatre by building audiences and by making theatre-going a habit, which was more difficult if there were dark weeks (3/6/53).

Despite his encouragement and recognition of amateur theatre, Radcliffe failed to evaluate it on its own merits. He basically viewed amateur theatre's efforts as incompetent presentations and poor imitations of the road. He rarely reviewed community theatre except when there was no professional theatre available or when the amateur group had a semi-professional status, such as the Actors' Guild in community theatre and Edgecliffe's repertory company in academic theatre. He did recognize that amateur theatre served several vital functions, but Radcliffe interpreted all of these functions in light of the road. In addition, the functions he saw for amateur theatre also reflected the

time periods in which he was writing. During the first part of his career when the road situation was mourned and attempts were made to revive it, Radcliffe thought amateur theatre's purpose was to "encourage a new audience for the professional companies" (7/29/39) and provide opportunities for new plays to be produced so that they could be scouted by professional producers. Radcliffe was very supportive of MacNeil's "test-tube" theatre before it began because of its potential to provide new dramatic works for Broadway. "Credit should be given to Mr. Fox [MacNeil] for courage to try out a new idea in testing plays" (3/15/39).

In the second part of his career when the demise of the road was apparent and new outlets for theatre production were emerging, Radcliffe adapted his views of amateur theatre's purpose to account for new needs created by this situation. Encouraged by the growth of academic theatre, Radcliffe felt amateur theatre could function as an apprenticeship for young actors. Since there were not as many road tours, the traditional training ground for actors, colleges, and universities could provide training.

Radcliffe also saw it as amateur theatre's responsibility to provide a means for producing experimental work. "At a time when the economic and financial problems of the professional theater retard experimentation these non-Broadway sources are likely to be forthcoming [with] new
ideas, advances and changes in play material and form" (4/27/48).

New scripts and dramatic forms were not the only types of experimentation provided by amateur theatre. It was amateur theatre that gave Radcliffe and Cincinnati their first experience of arena staging. Broadway could not use arena and thrust staging very well because of its established proscenium houses; but theatre groups that blossomed during the 1950s--summer tent theatres, Shakespeare festivals, academic and community theatres--could take advantage of the financial and artistic benefits that these staging practices offered. Radcliffe's first experience with arena staging was through Stage, Incorporated's production of Craig's Wife. The community theatre rented the pavilion area of a local hotel and used arena staging to enhance the psychologically realistic style of the play. Although Radcliffe preferred "proscenium staging of legitimate theaters," he found that the play benefitted from arena staging:

The eavesdropping sensation was made possible because the play was given a ring theater presentation by Stage, Inc. With the play unfolding in the center of the room, right in the laps of an audience surrounding it on all sides, its development intensified the intimacy of action, made watching it seem like being in on it rather than observing it as a bystander. Those patrons in the first row could have lighted an actor's cigarette, if it went out (10/12/50).
A final function of amateur theatre, according to Radcliffe, was to give Cincinnatians an opportunity to see "New York successes which do not tour" (4/27/48) and classics from the theatre's past that commercially-minded Broadway could not produce. Inevitably, the economic constraints that prevented Broadway from experimenting hit community theatre as well and community theatre was reduced to producing commercial hits since it depended on audience support for survival, while academic theatre, having more secure financial backing and being an educational theatre, could afford to produce experimental works and classics.

Overall, Radcliffe's treatment of amateur theatre was conditioned by the situation of road theatre--if road theatre was unavailable, Radcliffe would focus more on amateur theatre. Because of his fluctuating coverage of amateur theatre, it is very difficult to reconstruct the history of amateur ventures in Cincinnati, especially community theatres, from Radcliffe's columns. Radcliffe was more predisposed to cover academic theatre because its productions benefitted from a wider financial base and because of the inherent longevity of academic theatre institutions, and their connections with professional theatre. Radcliffe placed community theatre on the bottom of the artistic totem pole because of its amateur status and the instability often intrinsic to many community groups.

Community theatre existed as "an escape" from the "humdrum
existences" (7/29/40) of middle-class suburbia; and for Radcliffe presented few goals he could articulate aside from those which fed directly back into his first concern, professional theatre.

Professional, non-commercial theatre, which presumably presented Radcliffe with the best alternative to a world without road theatre finally arrived in Cincinnati in 1960 in the form of a new regional theatre: Playhouse in the Park. The Cincinnati Playhouse was part of a larger movement in American theatre: the explosion of regional theatre which occurred in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Even this venture was seen by Radcliffe through the mirror of a debilitated theatrical style: the road. The emergence of local professionalism in Cincinnati is chronicled by Radcliffe through the distortion of a critical model to which Cincinnati Playhouse neither aspired nor conformed; and the eventual acquiescence of Radcliffe to the importance of the Playhouse in the Park came at that point in Playhouse history when traditional performers and production values were introduced in its program.

The genesis of the regional theatre movements is usually traced to 1947 when Margo Jones founded Theatre '47 in Dallas, Texas. Her plan was to create a permanent, professional, native repertory theatre that would "give the young playwrights of America (or any country) a chance to be seen" and "provide the classics and the best new scripts
with a chance for good production."17 Other cities soon followed Jones's lead, and by 1955 there were five such community-based, professional repertory theatres in the United States. In 1959, the regional theatre movement received a major boost when the Ford Foundation provided large grants to a few of the regional theatres which seemed to have enough audience support and organizational stamina to survive and to influence others. This encouraged other cities to establish their own professional theatre companies and by 1965 there were thirty-five regional theatres.18 One of those theatres was Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park.

Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park began in 1960 when a group of civic leaders decided to increase the cultural appeal of the city by establishing a theatre in Eden Park. The new theatre was to be an "Off-Broadway type operation, instead of a Broadway rehash" (5/19/60) with a resident company of Equity actors and a repertory of contemporary American and foreign plays, with an emphasis on world premieres. The group incorporated under the name Anvil, Inc. and issued seven hundred shares of stock at fifty dollars a piece in order to raise the $35,000 necessary to start the venture. Part of the funds was used to remodel a


18 Oscar Brockett, Modern Theatre (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1982), p. 175.
dilapidated shelter building into a 182-seat thrust theatre. Under the direction of its producing director David Jones, the Playhouse in the Park opened its first season on 10 October 1960 with Compulsion. The Cave Dwellers, Death of a Salesman, Androcles the Lion, Orpheus Descending, and Caligula composed the rest of the season. Tickets were $2.40 for weekdays and $2.90 for Fridays and Saturdays.

Playhouse in the Park's first two seasons were successful: financially, the theatre managed to stay afloat, played to ninety percent capacity, and introduced the type of repertory that it would maintain to the present day. Like most other regional theatres, Playhouse was primarily interested in producing the classics, contemporary drama, and new plays. However, it was not until 1962, when Brooks Jones was hired as its new producing director that Playhouse was turned from an "ordinary institution into an exciting one."\(^{19}\) Under Jones, the Playhouse expanded the Shelter House to 247 seats by adding a wing in 1964, and became one of thirteen theatres selected by Theatre Communications Group, an organization established to help regional theatre management by obtaining actors and facilitating communication between theatres. Thirteen theatres were selected in 1967 for continued support because

\(^{19}\) Zeigler, p. 101.
they had sound administrative policies.\textsuperscript{20} Cincinnati Playhouse, under Jones, also hired noteworthy actors, such as Douglas Seale and Stephen Porter; brought in experimental groups, such as the Living Theatre; premiered several plays, both American and foreign; began a year-round operation schedule; received funding from the National Endowment for the Arts; created a project to bring theatre to schools using support from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; and, also received major grants from the Rockefeller Foundation to fund new play productions and pay Playhouse artists to teach at the University of Cincinnati's Drama Department. Jones's primary achievement at the Playhouse was the construction of the Marx Theatre, a 650-seat thrust stage, in 1968. The theatre cost only one million dollars to construct, "an extraordinarily low figure for the form and the period," and "is one of the most refreshing theatres in North America because it has a sense of humor about itself. In the lobby, for instance, the ceiling is carpeted, and one wall is devoted to 'graffiti' tiles signed by everyone who gave $25 or more to the building fund (including Tallulah Bankhead)."\textsuperscript{21}

Although some of these grants and distinctions were typical of the accomplishments of regional theatres all over

\textsuperscript{20} According to Zeigler, the TCG chose theatres that played by its rules.

\textsuperscript{21} Zeigler, p. 102.
the country, and might even have occurred under a different producing director, Brooks Jones's leadership nevertheless saw Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park transformed from a fledgling residential repertory company to one of the major regional theatres in the United States.

Radcliffe's reactions to the inception of Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park were cool. He announced the plans for the new theatre, but missed its opening production in order to attend a film premiere of *The Alamo*. He did review the Playhouse's second production and found it "adequate" (10/26/60). Radcliffe's less than enthusiastic response probably stemmed from the fact that he considered it another amateur theatre venture, because in the case of large cast shows, the Playhouse would cast community members to supplement its eight member resident company. Radcliffe was not the only critic to comment on uneven acting. Julius Novick found the productions he was in 1967 as "uneven" and "inconsistently performed," yet "left the Playhouse with a sense that something had really happened to me—a feeling rare enough in our own theatre."\(^{22}\)

Another strike against the Playhouse was the type of promotional tactics that Radcliffe had always detested. In one instance, Playhouse's publicity misquoted Radcliffe in one of its advertisements and he publicly rebuked them:

---

I would be pleased if the Playhouse in the Park young people quote Old Dad correctly in their advertisements. The kind of 'feast' I referred to in my review of The Cave Dwellers had its shortcomings. The implications of the current advertisement quotations is not that of the sentence from which it is lifted in part. I said I liked the acting. Liked the second part of the play. Thought the first act verbose and boresome (10/30/60).

After Brooks Jones became producing director of Playhouse and imported well-known actors and directors, such as Douglas Seale, a director from the American Shakespeare Festival, Radcliffe respected the Playhouse more; yet, he still had problems with Jones's selection of plays. Although Jones closed every season with The Fantasticks and relied on "almost classics," such as the works of Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, to compose the majority of his seasons, he still introduced many foreign plays to Cincinnati, such as Genet's The Balcony and Betti's Crime on Goat Island, which Radcliffe found "dull" and a "waste of time" (4/3/64). Although Radcliffe's attitude toward the Playhouse softened somewhat when Jones introduced theatre qualities that Radcliffe respected, Radcliffe still wished that the "road would receive a much-needed transfusion" (3/12/66).

Radcliffe's treatment of non-commercial theatre was similar to his treatment of non-road commercial theatre; that is, he only focused on it when road theatre was not available and only truly respected the other forms when they
approached the criteria he demanded of theatre. For example, the only academic theatre he reviewed regularly during its growth period was Edgecliffe College's professional repertory company productions. Although the influence which Radcliffe's predilections in theatre had on Cincinnati audiences is impossible to measure objectively, the problems his perspectives generate for the historian attempting to reconstruct Cincinnati theatre history must be evaluated and analyzed in order to bring the subjectivity of the individual critic into the more objective area of theatre history.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The previous chapters have reconstructed the history of Cincinnati theatre from 1938-1969 using the reviews and columns of E. B. Radcliffe. Although the history is sparse and contains gaps, it was nevertheless possible to reconstruct history using journalistic evidence. However, several problems arose that were caused by either the nature of Radcliffe's job or his biases.

Because Radcliffe was a journalistic reviewer certain aspects of his job interfered with a historiographic process. First, as a reviewer he was responsible for promoting theatre and promoting Cincinnati as a theatre town. In performing this function he at times manipulated facts or used questionable evidence to support his promotions. For example, in one instance, Radcliffe slanted the truth of Cincinnati audience support. During the 1940s, Cincinnati was unsupportive of theatre; it had the worst box office receipts of any road town. Therefore, producers were hesitant to book Cincinnati on their show's touring route. To defend Cincinnati's support of the road, Radcliffe continually threw out figures that seemed to disprove
producers' claims that Cincinnati was unsupportive; however, the figures were usually misleading, as in the case when he touted Theatre Guild subscription numbers. By stating that Cincinnati had a higher number of Theatre Guild subscriptions than Cleveland, Radcliffe tried to imply that Cincinnati was more supportive of theatre than Cleveland was; and therefore, Cincinnati should receive as many road productions as Cleveland did. In actuality, Cincinnati had more subscriptions than Cleveland; however, overall, Cleveland was more supportive of theatre than Cincinnati. First, Theatre Guild productions only composed approximately one-third of touring road productions. Second, Theatre Guild productions were not patronized solely by subscribers; and, the Theatre Guild could rely more on non-subscription support of their productions in Cleveland than in Cincinnati. Therefore, Theatre Guild subscription numbers could not be used as an accurate assessment of Cincinnati's overall support of theatre; and, Radcliffe's attempt to do so, while impressive at first glance, was an erroneous implication.

Another aspect of his job that complicated the historiographic process was Radcliffe's proximity to events. For example, as a theatre reviewer in Cincinnati, he was usually only concerned about the presence or absence of theatre in Cincinnati. Radcliffe continually claimed that Cincinnati was being abandoned by producers, while other
cities, who according to Radcliffe were not as supportive of theatre as Cincinnati was, were not abandoned. In actuality, Cincinnati was fortunate to be one of the few cities remaining on the road circuit since other cities, such as Indianapolis, were dropped. As a result of his proximity to Cincinnati's situation, he failed to notice an obvious trend occurring in American theatre which was not unique to Cincinnati: the consolidation of the road to the east coast and a few of the largest cities across America.

In addition to the problems created by the nature of Radcliffe's job in reconstructing Cincinnati theatre history, his biases also created problems. Because Radcliffe's standards for theatre were based on commercial road shows, any form of theatre that was not a commercial road show usually did not receive high marks from Radcliffe. In this context it is not simply the limitation of Radcliffe's standards which is important but how those standards affect the historiographic process. Radcliffe's bias towards commercial road shows had two principal effects on that process. First, any types of theatre other than commercial road shows were neglected in his columns; therefore, the histories of these productions would be underrepresented if the historian relied on Radcliffe alone. For example, in reconstructing the history of the Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Radcliffe's contributions consisted of: an initial article announcing the establishment of
Playhouse in the Park and the basic plans for and characteristics of the venture; occasional mentions of new developments in the Playhouse, such as the Theatre Communications Group's inclusion of the Playhouse in its program; and, reviews of Playhouse's productions. The remaining information on Playhouse was derived from other sources, such as Zeigler's *Regional Theatre*.

The second effect that Radcliffe's predilection towards road theatre had was that it forced him to create a warped history of the road. For example, Radcliffe's continual laments on the lack of road theatre in Cincinnati and his promotion tactics leave the impression that the road could have been healthy if Cincinnati had not been neglected for what he perceived as unknown reasons. In reality, the road was not healthy; and, Cincinnati as well as other cities was being overlooked, not because of some villainous plot by producers, but because there were no road productions available and the trend of that time was to consolidate the road to larger cities and the east coast. In addition, Radcliffe's continual hopes for new life for the road, such as his remark that the road should receive a "much-needed transfusion" after seeing the growth of professional theatre in a non-commercial form in Playhouse in the Park, leave an impression that the road was just waiting for the right opportunity to be revived. In actuality, the road could
never return to what it had been in the 1920s because economic conditions no longer permitted it.

In using Radcliffe's columns as a basis for theatre history, the main problem is a continual lack of information on the dissolution of various theatre ventures and, most importantly, the reasons surrounding their dissolution. The passing of most theatre ventures is usually noticeable only because Radcliffe stopped writing about them. Sometimes, however, his silence about certain theatres only indicated that road theatre had absorbed all of his attention and other theatres were simply being ignored. For example, the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music's theatre department existed throughout Radcliffe's career, yet the only time he mentioned it was in the late 1930s when it attempted a "test-tube" theatre to try out potential Broadway productions. When theatres did indeed terminate, Radcliffe very seldom supplied reasons for their cessation, which becomes very frustrating for the historian. Continually, in his reviews, there was no evidence supplied or reasons offered for the failure of any theatrical plans and projects, except for those concerning the road. Most probably, the reason for this silence was the nature of Radcliffe's job. Since part of his job was to promote and encourage theatre, Radcliffe was more concerned with announcing new theatre ventures in order to depict an art form that was alive, active, and worthy of time and monetary
investments. Therefore, announcements of theatrical ventures' failures would leave his readers with the impression that theatre was an incompetent and dying art form.

Despite the many problems in using journalistic criticism as a basis for the reconstruction of history, there are some positive points. First, the reliability of the recording of productions is excellent. By reviewing productions, Radcliffe created a record of their existence and gave some idea of what they were like. Second, the topical nature of journalism provides a good overview of attitudes and tastes of the period. The longevity of Radcliffe's career indicates that he was competent in his job and that his tastes were a fair reflection of the tastes of the majority of theatregoers in Cincinnati. Radcliffe's reviews depict Cincinnati audiences' tastes as leaning toward conservative and elaborate commercial attractions.

A final positive point for using journalistic evidence in the reconstruction of theatre history is that often the majority of source material available for theatre history is journalistic evidence, so it is important to develop strategies for using it effectively. Theatre is a consumer commodity as well as an art form, and as such it relies on direct and indirect promotion, be it in the form of paid advertisement, publicity, or reviews. All of these forms are found in journalistic source material and sometimes
serve as the only existing documentation of productions. Theatre artists have always been likely candidates for human interest stories, gossip items, and the machinery of stardom, all of which also thrive in the journalistic world. For the theatre historian, the process of interpreting such material is layered; in addition to providing a lucid interpretation of the facts, the historian encountering journalistic evidence must often determine what, if any, facts are discernible in these materials and how they might have been obscured by a distorting mirror of subjectivity and mixed objectives.

Despite the sometimes negative view offered here of E. B. Radcliffe's work, one cannot deny his genuine dedication to theatre and his lifelong endeavor to bring Cincinnatians every opportunity to see the best of it. In addition, this thesis used only Radcliffe's columns as source material and is not intended as a biographical assessment of the man. Personally, Radcliffe probably understood the irrevocable demise of the road, but his sincere love for this dying theatrical form prevented him from addressing its situation objectively. Finally, although the critic and historian often represent two extremely divergent viewpoints, as they do here, those differences can be used to balance and rectify one another: Radcliffe's unending appreciation of the road reminds more anti-establishment-minded modern historians, that the
touring road productions of these years did have much to offer and still have much to teach us about the positive possibilities of spectacle, showmanship, and star performances, all of which the modern historian has come to mistrust. The modern historian can, in turn, reevaluate more fairly perhaps those forms of theatre which Radcliffe did not appreciate, such as amateur efforts and fledgling regional theatres.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


---. Personal Interview. 27 April 1988.


"Rad Retires." *Variety* 8 October 1969: 70.


---. *Diaries*. E. B. Radcliffe Collection. Lawrence and Lee Theatre Research Institute, Ohio State University.

---. *Letters*. E. B. Radcliffe Collection. Lawrence and Lee Theatre Research Institute, Ohio State University.


