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WITH RESPECT TO LIVE TELEVISION DRAMA

DISSERTATION
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
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By

* * * * *
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The 1957-58 television season was one of significance for television critics. It marked the outbreak of an open feud between representatives of the television industry and many of the critics—a feud that was to continue for many seasons. This does not imply that all had been harmonious between the critics and the industry prior to the fall of 1957. There had been other disagreements. Several earlier clashes were widely reported. Among them were the 1956 battle between Jack Gould and the networks when Gould reportedly shamed the networks into televising the United Nations Security Council debate on the Middle East; the incident when John Crosby's concern over the fate of Playhouse 90 caused a network board chairman to cancel his vacation and remain in New York for the purpose of launching the new series; and Jack O'Brian's well-publicized feuds with numerous network personalities. However, such incidents were rare, and there is little evidence in print that representatives of the industry talked back to the television critics much before 1957.

Probably the simplest explanation for this apparent truce was given by Jack Gould in a 1957 column in which he wrote what he considered to be the case against the television critics.¹ He said he was doing this because there was an unwritten law against arguing with
critics. Those who did, Gould pointed out, were accused of being poor sports, while agreement was looked upon as currying favor.

It is significant to note that Gould's column was written in May, 1957, near the end of the 1956-57 season, because the eruption that followed in the fall of 1957 proved Gould wrong. Many representatives of the industry did have their say about television critics. In the months that followed, a network president, advertising agency representatives, television producers, writers, performers, trade magazines, popular magazines, and a researcher accused television critics of a variety of charges and shortcomings.

Before examining these charges, however, it seems advisable to review the brief but exciting history of television and the associated criticism that accompanied it. Such background information helps bring the 1957-58 season and its subsequent feud into sharper focus.

The growth of television as a medium of mass entertainment in a decade roughly from 1949 to 1959 was astonishing. Following World War II many predicted that network television was ten to twenty years in the future, and even the more optimistic saw technical difficulties, economic pressures, and programming problems as the great obstacles. Titles of representative literature from the immediate postwar period provide evidence of such concern. A page from Readers Guide\(^2\) covering the period from 1947 to 1949 reveals such titles as "Better Television," "Introduction to Television," "Paradoxical State of Television," "Still a Toddler," "Television--Boom or Bubble," "Television Reaches Out," "Where Is Television?" "Slow Down for Television Boom," "Television Grows Up," "Television Moves In," "Teevee Pains," and "Didn't Anybody See Me on
Television?" In addition, there were innumerable articles on the technical aspects of television.

Gould's article, "The Paradoxical State of Television," written in March, 1947, reveals something of the status of television at the time a major technical break-through had just been made with the Federal Communications Commission's announcement that television should proceed with presentations in black and white and should not attempt at that time to offer images in color. Such action, Gould thought, gave the networks a sense of direction.

Gould also mentioned that television had, in recent weeks, covered the opening of Congress, scooped the newsreels on the Harlem tenement explosion, presented Charlie McCarthy to television, and convinced the sports experts that television could cover a prize fight with great skill.

Despite such accomplishments, Gould recognized that television still had many problems to overcome. He divided these problems into three different but overlapping classifications: technical, programming, and economic.

Gould said that while the Federal Communications Commission's action had gone a long way in clarifying a basic technical difficulty, it would probably be at least five years before black and white television could be operated profitably on a national basis. In that time, Gould reasoned, television would probably undergo additional major technical changes.

A major technical difficulty as seen by Gould was the size of the screens of existing television sets. He observed that the clearest
and brightest images were to be had on a screen six by four inches, since the two qualities of definition and illumination tended to decrease as the size of the picture increased. The limited size of the screen not only made viewing difficult on the eyes, it also caused movement and action in the studio to be kept at a minimum.

Gould referred to recent dramatizations of Angel Street and Abe Lincoln in Illinois to illustrate his point. He said that both plays lacked not only the dimension of the Broadway theatre but of Hollywood films as well:

... It was not unlike seeing a series of picture postcards with rather serious consequences to the play's fluidity and continuity. More skillful use of cameras is raising the standards of production, but it promises to be a while yet before there are Pulitzer Prizes in television.

Still another problem was programming. Television, said Gould, was having a difficult time finding material to put before the camera, since much of its current fare was very old, very bad Hollywood movies and vaudeville acts. He preferred the vaudeville acts because they were live, and any live programs, Gould reasoned, helped pave the way for the appearance of more actors from the legitimate stage.

Gould compared the economic problems of the industry to the unanswerable chicken and egg question. Would the public invest in television before good shows were available or would the advertisers invest in television before the audience was there? Gould recognized that television was potentially a tremendous advertising medium, but the costs were going to make agency people get their feet wet slowly and carefully.
Gould concluded:

All in all, the hot-stove league of television is in continuous convention, yet of necessity it must always talk around the point. What's going to happen when pictures travel through the air and can be seen in the comfort of one's own living room by merely flicking a switch? Nobody knows for sure. It's never been done before.

By the early 1950's, however, the technical break-through had been accomplished and the essential problem of transmitting a clear picture to a workable television set, moderately priced, was an accomplished fact. Television was available to all but the most remote sections of the United States. The pages of Readers Guide show a transition from a concern over the practical and technical aspects of television to a concern over the impact of television on American society.

Representative titles from Readers Guide reflect the new thinking about television: "Entertainment, Television Is a Big Boy Now," "Hollywood Faces the Fifties," "How Do You Light Your Room for Television?" "New World of Television," "Two Roads to Dilemma--Radio and Television," and "What Should We Do About Television?"

As might be expected, the daily newspapers kept pace with the rapid development of the new medium by giving it increasing space. A National Broadcasting Company survey in 1955 revealed that the space given to television increased by 500 per cent from 1953 to 1955. Many daily newspapers added a full color Sunday supplement dealing exclusively with television, appointed television editors or columnists, and often purchased the services of syndicated columnists like John Crosby. Such columnists as Jack O'Brien of The New York Journal-American, The Chicago
American's Janet Kern, Terrence O'Flaherty of The San Francisco Chronicle, Harriet Van Horne of World Telegram and Sun, and Ben Gross, The New York Daily News, became very popular with readers. Newsweek called the television critic "the new elite of the editorial room" and reported that many received as many as six hundred letters weekly. The television critic, Newsweek said, had replaced the theatre critic, the movie critic, and the book critic, and in many cases had challenged the sports writer, as the paper's most popular columnist.10

For many it may have seemed that the television critic in the daily newspapers had suddenly materialized overnight. Such was not the case. The fact is, the concept of broadcasting criticism was well established long before television became a practical reality. A few newspapers and magazines began critical evaluation of radio entertainment in the 1920's. In addition to the daily listings of programs, they frequently added some commentary about programs and news of technical developments in the industry. In the late 1920's, for example, the articles by John Wallace in Radio Broadcasting were being read with interest by the industry. In the early 1930's Leslie Allen of Forum and Ring Lardner of The New Yorker were contributing critical reviews of radio, supplemented by articles, in such trade magazines as Variety, Billboard, and Broadcasting as well as columns in daily newspapers. Later, of course, came such critics as John Hutchens and Jack Gould of The New York Times, Ben Gross of The New York Daily News, and John Crosby of The New York Herald Tribune.

It must be admitted, however, that radio columnists hardly enjoyed the popularity or prominence that has been afforded television
critics. The columns by radio critics are not easily found in the pages of the daily papers of the past. Columns appeared almost anywhere space was available. The experience of John Crosby is a case in point: During his first year as a critic for The New York Herald Tribune, his column appeared in the classified section of the paper. It was not until his column became syndicated a year later that it was moved to the entertainment page.

Despite the relative obscurity of the radio critic, however, broadcasting criticism did exist, permitting many of today's television critics to move easily from radio to television criticism. Many columns that were "radio" columns, became first "radio and television" columns, and finally, "television" columns. Naturally not all columnists moved to television criticism from radio criticism. Donald Kirkley of The Baltimore Sun was a drama critic for twenty-five years before becoming a television critic; and Janet Kern had wide experience as a writer for radio and television before becoming television critic for The Chicago American.

Returning to the historical development of television and the accompanying criticism, one must also consider attitudes that existed during the growth period of the very late 1940's and early 1950's. Television was new and exciting. Viewers were watching everything that was being televised. Each new program was an experience. Producers, directors, actors, and critics were learning with each new show. As the industry's craftsmen gained control over the mechanical aspects of television--cameras, microphones, lights, make-up, and sets--they were able to break the rigid restrictions of the tight stationary
close-up shot and, by doing so, were able to free the cameras and the actors for greater flexibility of movement. An exciting group of youthful playwrights accepted the limitations of the new medium and created an art form in the television play. It was a period of exciting pioneering. It was a period that directors and producers referred to as "the flying by the seat of your pants era."

Critics were caught up in the excitement of the time and reflected their enthusiasm in many of their columns. Most of them were proud of the new medium and regarded it with a kind of awe. From the industry's viewpoint any adverse criticism could easily be overlooked. Millions of new sets were being sold monthly and scores of new stations were being added yearly. Advertisers, reluctant at first, flocked to buy programs, and when one dropped a sponsorship, a new sponsor stood waiting to pay the bill. Television was both popular and prosperous.

By mid-1950's little had seemingly changed. The center of the industry was still New York, and while Hollywood was making inroads with films, much of the networks' programming was still live. The dramatic shows were regarded as prestige shows despite relatively low ratings, and Kraft Theatre, Studio One, and Robert Montgomery Presents were now veteran programs. While the number of new dramatic shows increased with each season, the demands for new scripts were being met by such playwrights as Paddy Chayefsky, Rod Serling, Reginald Rose, Summer L. Elliot, J. P. Miller, Tad Mosel, and David Shaw, who continued to turn out scripts at the alarming rate of ten to twelve scripts yearly.
As audience-participation shows, quiz shows, and filmed shows continued to make inroads, the critics might have objected more strenuously than they did had it not been for the dramatic shows. Original plays especially written for television gave the critics an opportunity to review a play in somewhat the same fashion that a dramatic critic reviews an opening show. It gave him an opportunity to express an opinion and exercise a judgment.

Suddenly, however, the attention of the critics was focused on the 1957-58 season. Many did not like what they saw, and while this may have been overlooked in past seasons, other factors added to the bad reviews caused the industry to talk back. In the fall of 1957 the country was beginning to feel the first effects of an economic depression that was to extend through the first half of 1959. At the same time production costs of television were continuing to rise. Many sponsors, feeling the effects of an economic reversal, were taking a hard look at the way they were spending their advertising dollars. Inevitably there were delays in buying new shows, as well as in canceling older shows. Some sponsors, reportedly smarting from harsh criticisms of the dramatic shows they had sponsored, decided to play it safe and buy a filmed series, which it was said the critics seldom reviewed.

The dramatic programs felt the effects almost immediately. From a high of fourteen hour-long shows during the 1956-57 season, the number dropped to seven during the 1957-58 season and finally to a single regular weekly hour-long show during 1958-59. The veteran shows suffered with the newer shows. Robert Montgomery Presents left the air in
1957, and Kraft Theatre and Studio One, after first moving to Hollywood, also gave up a few months later. Westerns, quiz shows, and situation comedies replaced the dramatic shows, and an attitude of dissatisfaction was noticed in the critics' reviews.

As the summer of 1957 turned into fall, the critics accepted the new shows with attitudes ranging from indifference to scorn. What could probably be called the traditional straw that broke the camel's back was a headline in Variety on October 2, 1957. It stated flatly, "NEW SEASON A DUD." 11

Already suffering from programming difficulties and economic pressures, representatives of the industry lashed out against the television critics. Broadcasters and their associates charged the television critics with a variety of sins. These charges and the critics' responses will be examined in greater detail in Chapter III, but the most frequent charges can be summarized briefly:

It was declared that the critics' qualifications were unimpressive, their reviewing methods erratic and their opinions worthless. Such strong accusations invite investigation and research.

I - Research in the Field of Television Criticism

A survey of the research done in the field of television criticism revealed two significant studies. One was done for a doctoral dissertation and the other as a special research project for The Fund for the Republic. The dissertation by Ralph Lewis Smith, A Study of the Professional Criticism of Broadcasting in the United States 1920-1955, 12 was a historical-descriptive study examining the efforts of
broadcasting writers who wrote during the first thirty-five years of activity in radio and television. Smith's stated objectives were (1) to fill a gap in the history of the media; (2) to explore the progress of the new branch of the professional criticism; and (3) to indicate values such criticism had for assisting the art and the industry of broadcasting.

As a preliminary step to selecting a group of critics for study, Smith perused periodic issues of various daily newspapers and national magazines. From this he concluded that most broadcasting columnists could be classified as reporter-agents rather than as thoughtful evaluators. Such an assertion permitted him to concentrate on sixteen writers who he felt had contributed informed, sensitive opinions about broadcasting:

Late 1920's:
- John Wallace
- Radio Broadcast

Early 1930's:
- Leslie Allen
- Christian Science Monitor
- Cyrus Fisher
- Forum
- Ring Lardner
- New Yorker

1940's - 1950's:
- John Hutchens
- New York Times
- Jack Gould
- New York Times
- Jack Cluett
- Woman's Day
- John Crosby
- Herald Tribune (New York)
- Albert Williams
- Saturday Review of Literature
- Saul Carson
- New Republic
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<td>Harriet Van Hone</td>
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After selecting the critics, Smith posed the following four questions:

1) Who are the critics? When, did they write? What are their procedures and problems? What is their function?

2) What are the critics' opinions about major broadcasting forms—drama, games, light entertainment, news, music, discussion and talks programs, documentaries?

3) What have critics said about three persistent problems in American broadcasting: educational programs, advertising, various systems of operations?

4) What has been the response to the critics and what suggestions have they made for strengthening broadcasting?

From his research Smith concluded that the critics had reached only partial accord about criteria for evaluating a media dedicated to mass entertainment, information, and advertising, and that they had reached only limited conclusions about the socioeconomic implications of broadcasting.
However, he thought it possible to draw six conclusions about what the critics had suggested for improving broadcasting:

1) Honesty in the content and production of programs and commercials.

2) Variety in programming—by adding more of the serious and the satiric, and in operational systems—education and toll channels.

3) Maintenance of human dignity particularly violated in audience participation programs.

4) Excellence in writing and production.

5) Continued cultivation of the art of relaxed informality pertinent to talk programs and commercials.

6) Further development of a sense of responsibility in the industry, the public, and the government looking toward a general maturation of programs.

Smith also found little evidence of the critic's influence, but strongly suggested that an attempt to measure the influence of the critics was a fertile field for additional research.

A second major study of television criticism was made by Patrick McGrady for The Fund for the Republic. In advance of the publication of his report McGrady revealed his major conclusions in an address before the Radio and Television Executives Society on January 28, 1959.13

The study was conceived as a detail in the Fund's broader inquiry into the basic issues underlying and confronting a free society such as ours.
McGrady quoted Eric Goldman of the Fund's Committee of Consultants as motivation for his research. Goldman to McGrady:

"A great deal has already been said on the subject of television in a free society. Some of it is cogent and persuasive; much of it utopian. The prime need is for an approach which, while totally open in what it will consider, nevertheless recognizes television's practical limitations as well as its potentials. Such an approach suggests the desirability of pinpointing trouble spots as well as engaging in overall consideration."14

After preliminary research, McGrady concluded that television criticism constituted such a trouble spot. He recalled that at the time that he began his study in July, 1958 critics were, and had been the targets of terrific invective--most of it from people in the television industry "... who denigrated the critics' qualifications as unimpressive, their reviewing methods as erratic, and their opinions as--worthless."15

McGrady felt that the same charges could be leveled against other areas of American journalism. He reasoned that American journalists were men whose only intellectual concern was their newswriting job: the end result of the publisher's reluctance to exploit the intellectual of his staff and to improve it. Despite this implied shortcoming, McGrady insisted that the television critic was a journalist with great power, and even though many of them obviously neglected or abused their power, it did not lessen the significance of their role as tastemaker.

To complete his research McGrady sought out and talked with forty-four of what he designated as the country's most important critics. These included writers from daily newspapers, trade
magazines, and popular magazines, such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Reporter*, *The Saturday Review*, and *The New Yorker*. He also talked with advertising agency representatives and broadcasters.

McGrady's initial consideration was whether critics were really qualified to judge television. McGrady concluded that one cannot arbitrarily state what kind of a background is best for a critic, and that background--impressive or unimpressive--had absolutely nothing to do with a critic's influence. The critic, he maintained, was essentially a writer. His style and abilities and purposes vary as do all writers. That many people believe a writer should have a solid background, McGrady believed was unrealistic, since most daily newspapers are not equipped to provide such specialized service. He felt that a far more important consideration was the critic's ability to put television into a broader perspective and by doing so, to consider TV in terms of the need of a free society. In McGrady's opinion a television critic needs four things to be a fair judge of television: taste, wit, heart, and time. 16

Criticism, he points out, takes many forms, and he feels there is room for many:

... We receive sermons from Jack Gould, brash lectures by Janet Kern of the *Chicago American*, bright and touching observations by John Crosby, a referee's balance sheet from George Rosen of *Variety*, a kindergarten catechism from Jack O'Brian, and many, many words from Ben Gross who has both looked and listened. 17

McGrady seriously questioned whether there was an ideal form after which serious criticism could pattern itself and quoted
I. A. Richards, the literary critic, concerning many of the forms which serious criticism has taken:

"A few conjectures, a supply of admonitions, many acute isolated observations, some brilliant guesses, much oratory and applied poetry, inexhaustible confusion, a sufficiency of dogma, no small stock of prejudices, whimsies and crotchets, a profusion of mysticism, a little genuine speculation, sun-dry stray inspirations, pregnant hints and random apercus . . . "

McGrady found a spectrum of television criticism in the United States with the very forceful and subjective critics at one end and the least critical at the other end. He said the powerful ones were either syndicated or located in New York, were very sure of themselves, and were prideful of the influence they wielded over the industry. McGrady asserted there was little question that the influence this group of critics had exercised over the networks' thinking was prodigious. Critical influence, McGrady reasoned, must be measured according to what audience the critic intended to reach:

... More and more, serious after-the-fact critics find themselves talking to sponsors and advertising people. Sometimes at the great expense of their readers' patience and interest. The other category of critic is the previewer, who makes an impression on viewer preference and, therefore, the ratings.

McGrady pointed out that many critics had a habit of advertising themselves as the "conscience" of the industry. He thought it would be more desirable to have them serve as the intelligence as well. It struck McGrady as odd that the conscience of an industry should be located so far from its heart. He concluded, however, that such an arrogance was seemingly satisfactory to both the critic and the industry and would therefore probably last for some time. That the situation existed at all, McGrady reasoned, was evidence of the
industry's guilt and fear—and with some cause. The networks and adver-
tisers wanted to make money but feared Federal controls. Such fear of
Federal intervention, McGrady believed, gave an abnormal weight to the
critics' words.

Influence over viewers, however, was seen by McGrady in quite a
different light. He believed that the regular critic who writes after
the show is over has very little effect while the previewer has con-
siderable influence over viewing habits. He said that previewing was
the most neglected form of criticism:

. . . The previewers answer the viewer's question "What's
worth watching tonight?" The regular critic tells you
what was worth watching last night or the night before.
. . . Previewing, as a genre of criticism, is rapidly over-
taking after-the-fact criticism in terms of profits, number
of readers, and influence. It is certainly the most for-
midable influence on viewer preference. Surveys indicate
that program mention or non-mention by a previewer can
influence ratings by up to nine points.20

McGrady said that Jack Gould realized the importance of preview-
ing and had tried to get the industry to give New York critics advance
previews. That they had refused, McGrady thought, was evidence of their
reluctance to face serious criticism. When the regular previewers are
given special showings, they simply do not write about the show if they
don't like it.

McGrady was of the opinion that New York critics were not sub-
jected to any direct pressures, but that less influential out-of-town
critics were, particularly if the critic wrote for a paper that hap-
pened to own a television station as well.

However, he called attention to a subtle form of pressure that
most critics have been exposed to. The industry calls it junket
diplomacy. McGrady said this was a constant concern among many con-scientious critics. The plan works very simply: The networks take the critics on a trip reportedly for the purpose of seeing new shows in production or as a means of providing background material for the critics. The worth of such trips and a key to their nature was told to McGrady by one critic. He said the junkets were outrageous drunken parties, and while everybody pretended the trips were not commercial, it was hard to believe otherwise. He concluded:

"... Nobody spends that much money for nothing. It's undignified. The critics are like pigs in a trough. I personally have turned down $15,000 in travel bribes, some five trips around the world, three trips to Europe. Besides, my paper does not allow me to go on junkets." 21

McGrady concluded:

Each side accuses the other of prejudicial subjectivity. Television's peculiar subjectivity is more easily ascertained than the critics: it is simply an abiding, overriding concern with making money—the abiding, overriding concern of almost any business.

The critics' subjectivity—as seen by the industry—lies in their violent, often confused refusal to countenance money-making as an abiding, overriding concern of television.

If television and criticism are going to make more sense than they do now, this fundamental issue will have to be resolved. 22

The two research projects throw light on some basic questions and raise others. It is difficult to disagree with Smith's conclusion that critics have reached only partial accord about criteria for evaluating the media. This seems apparent when one considers not only the vast numbers and kinds of programs the critics must consider, but also the fact that television has the dual purpose of entertaining and advertising. Neither is it difficult to agree that the evidences of the
effectiveness of television criticism are difficult to find and that there is a need for research in the field. The McGrady report is evidence of an attempt to fill this void. The question that arises from Smith's conclusions, and from the earlier assertion that critics' reviewing methods were erratic and their opinions worthless, is whether this is true of their criticisms of all programs. What of criticism of live dramatic shows, for example? Have the critics established standards of evaluation for drama that could be overlooked when one is using a broad brush treatment and considering criteria for all of television? Live dramatic programs were such a significant part of network programming during the first half of the 1950's that plays seem a logical choice for consideration. It also seems advisable to limit the number of critics to be considered so that their criticisms can be explored in depth.

Consequently, the scope of this research will consider the criticisms by four television critics of live television dramas for a period from 1953 through 1959. Only plays in length of one hour or longer will be considered. The objective will be to find whether the four critics have a recognizable set of standards, either collectively or individually. The scope limitations and organization of the investigation will be explained at greater length in the conclusion of Chapter III.
CHAPTER I

FOOTNOTES


4. Ibid., p. 34.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., p. 35.

7. Ibid.


10. Ibid.


15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., pp. 3-4.

17. Ibid., p. 4.

18. Ibid.

20
19. Ibid., p. 6.
20. Ibid., p. 8.
22. Ibid., pp. 10-11.
CHAPTER II

SELECTION OF CRITICS AND THEIR BACKGROUNDS

With guidance from articles in current periodicals, talks with advertising agency representatives, and two research studies, a list of twelve critics, generally considered to be influential, was prepared for consideration. These included, though not necessarily in order of their importance, the following:

Jack Gould  The New York Times
John Crosby  The New York Herald Tribune
George Rosen  Variety
Harriet Van Horne  The New York World Telegram
Jack O'Brian  The New York Journal-American
Marya Mannes  The Reporter
Janet Kern  The Chicago American
Hal Humphrey  The Los Angeles Mirror-News
William Ewald  United Press-International
Donald Kirkley  The Baltimore Sun
Terrence O'Flaherty  The San Francisco Chronicle
Ben Gross  The New York Daily News

To compile the list, a 1957 Newsweek article, "Big Men on the Paper," served as a starting point. Discussing the status of America's television criticism, the article declared that the newspaper
television critic on many daily papers was challenging the sports
columnist for the title of the paper's most popular columnist. Many
television critics were receiving as many as six hundred letters weekly
and their desks were piled high with gifts at Christmas time. The
names of Gould, Crosby, Kern, O'Brian, Van Horne, O'Flaherty, Rosen,
and Gross were listed as critics generally considered as influential.¹

With the list from Newsweek, the next step was to contact
Detroit representatives of ten major advertising agencies with the hope
of getting additional assistance in identifying the most influential
critics. The request brought some unexpected and somewhat startling
results. From the very first representative contacted to the very
last, there was a reluctance to discuss critics. This was true re­
gardless of the national prestige of the agency or of the man's
position with the agency. All refused to be quoted; all refused to
complete a questionnaire, or for that matter, to sign anything; all
refused to be identified or to have their agencies identified. In
fact, it was only after much assurance that the information would be
presented in such a form that it could not possibly be traced to the
original source that most representatives agreed to rate the critics.
In most cases it was also necessary to agree that no one else in their
own agencies would know they had discussed the matter.²

For the most part, the agency representatives approved News­
week's list. It was also suggested that the names of Humphrey, Ewald,
and Kirkley should be added.

The McGrady study added only the name of Mannes of The Reporter.
But as a point of added interest, McGrady attempted to grade the ten
top critics in order of their influence. He warned, however, that he was positive about only the first three or four. McGrady ranked in order Gould, Crosby, Rosen, Van Horne, O'Brian, Mannes, Kern, Humphrey, Ewald, and O'Flaherty. It should be noted that when Newsweek reported on the McGrady study, his warning about being certain about only the first three or four had been omitted.

A 1959 Time article, "Measuring the Giants," stated flatly that the television critics had no influence with viewers. What influence they did have, the article asserted, was exercised over the industry itself by a small handful of critics--Gould, Crosby, Humphrey, O'Flaherty, and Rosen.

To choose five critics from the group of twelve critics, the following criteria were arbitrarily imposed:

1) The critic must be regarded as influential.
2) He must write for a daily newspaper.
3) Representation from outside New York City must be included.

The reason for deciding that each critic should be considered influential is obvious. The second and third criteria need additional explanation. A decision to use only critics writing for daily newspapers was made because the magazine critic appeared to be something quite different from the newspaper critic. His influence is apparently less. (Only one magazine critic, Marya Mannes of The Reporter, was considered influential.) He reaches only a limited, selective readership; he is limited to the number of columns he writes, and for that reason is inclined to be concerned with the broader aspects of
television rather than particular programs; and he is not forced to write under the pressure of daily dead lines, as many critics are.

It also seemed desirable to have representation outside the New York area. Television, unlike the legitimate stage, reaches every part of the country. Being located at a center of production undoubtedly has its advantages, but there may also be advantages in viewing television at a distance—to be able to judge only what is seen without knowing the people and problems involved. The local critic also has the advantage of knowing something of the way viewers in towns outside New York feel about what they see.

Using these criteria, two critics were immediate and obvious choices—Gould and Crosby. All sources identified the two men as television's most powerful and influential critics. They have the journalistic weight of their newspapers behind them; they are syndicated; they are located in one of the two major production centers; and as Newsweek stated, "... because of the respect for their opinions in the upper echelons of the network."5

The choice of the other three critics was accomplished through an elimination process. Mannes was eliminated because she writes for a monthly magazine. There was insufficient material to explore dramatic criticism in depth. Jack O'Brien and Ben Gross were given no further consideration after a spot check of their columns. It was concluded that O'Brien was too often inclined to be a feudist rather than an objective critic, and that Ben Gross wrote, as one advertising agency representative said, "... in a style that a backward sixteen-year-old might cherish."6
At first glance Ewald of United Press-International seemed a good choice, since he was unquestionably one of the most widely read television commentators, syndicated as he was in over four hundred newspapers. However, Ewald's serious criticism, as a Newsweek article pointed out, only began in late 1957. Before that he was concerned primarily with television chit chat. For this reason, Ewald was not given further consideration.

A West Coast critic was obviously desirable. Humphrey and O'Flaherty were listed possibilities. Since Humphrey is located in Los Angeles, and for that reason close to the West Coast production center, he appeared a logical choice. A check of his columns, however, showed that Humphrey often wrote about other phases of West Coast entertainment, frequently neglecting television for days. Then, too, his television columns were more often concerned with filmed shows rather than live TV drama. For this reason O'Flaherty, who writes only about television, was chosen as the third critic.

Two women appeared on the list of influential critics for daily newspapers--Van Horne and Kern. The final choice of Kern was dictated by the fact that she was outside the New York area.

The final critic chosen was Kirkley. His choice was dictated by the fact that he was held in such high regard by the many representatives of advertising agencies, especially as a critic of live TV drama. He had served twenty-five years as a theatre critic before turning to television criticism.

Those in the final selection are listed:

Jack Gould The New York Times
Following the choice of the five critics, the next problem was
to gain access to all their columns for a period from 1933 through
1958. In the cases of Gould and Crosby, there was no problem. Both
were available in Detroit libraries, but Kirkley and Kern proved more
difficult to locate, and in the case of O'Flaherty, it was impossible.
Since none of the newspapers in the Detroit area subscribed to The
Baltimore Sun, The Chicago American, or The San Francisco Chronicle, an
attempt was made to borrow microfilms from other libraries through
interlibrary loans. This proved unsuccessful. Libraries that had the
desired microfilms pointed out that they carried only a single print,
and since the material was in constant use, it would be impossible to
make them available. When this source failed, the local representa­
tives for the three papers were approached to find whether the parent
paper would be willing to make prints of the microfilm available for
use in Detroit. All explained that it was impossible to lend their
microfilms for even a short period of time. However, they said that
the films could be used at their main offices. This suggestion was
impractical, since experience with The New York Times already showed
that it was taking approximately three weeks to review and take notes
on each year's material.

As a last resort, personal contact was made with Kirkley, Kern,
and O'Flaherty, inquiring whether they might have personal files, and
if they did, whether they would be willing to lend them. This too was unsuccessful, but opened the door to an alternate approach. The three critics graciously extended invitations to use their files in their offices at Baltimore, Chicago, and San Francisco. As a result, trips were made to Baltimore and Chicago. The expense of the trip and the time involved ruled out the possibility of a trip to San Francisco. Further correspondence with O'Flaherty followed.

At Baltimore Kirkley generously devoted a weekend to reviewing the file of his columns. Many helpful suggestions were made, and approximately 500 columns were chosen for further study. These were turned over to the Recordak Corporation for microfilming and reprinting in regular size. The same procedure was followed with Kern at The Chicago American office in Chicago.

In later correspondence with O'Flaherty, another approach for obtaining his columns was suggested. He had discovered that a friend had a complete file of his columns and thought perhaps it could be shipped to Detroit for reproduction. With this as a possibility the first draft was begun with the expectation of including the O'Flaherty material when it arrived. After considerable delay, however, O'Flaherty wrote that it was impossible to obtain the material from the expected source. As a substitute, he sent approximately forty columns from his own file. These proved insufficient to give any validity to an evaluation of his material. Since additional time was now limited, it was decided to use the materials of Gould, Crosby, Kern, and Kirkley as a basis for the study.
The following pages contain biographical backgrounds of each critic. The information was obtained from regular library sources, through interviews, and by direct correspondence.

The following basic questions were asked each critic:

1) What is your educational background?

2) What is your professional background—by what steps did you reach your present position?

3) What other work is required of you by the newspaper, in addition to your regular column?

4) What other related activities do you, or have you, engaged in—writing, TV appearances, little theatre work, etc.?

5) How do you keep abreast with trends and developments in television?

The scope of each biography includes educational background, professional background, job responsibilities, related activities, and significant attitudes gleaned from their writings as they related to opinions of live television drama.

I - John Crosby

John Crosby, generally regarded as one of the two influential critics in the United States, is Television Critic for The New York Herald Tribune. His three-a-week column is also syndicated in ninety newspapers.

Educational background. Crosby was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, May 13, 1913. He attended Milwaukee Country Day School and later Phillip Exeter Academy in New Hampshire. After graduation from the Academy
in 1931, he attended Yale University for two years. At Yale he was honored by being the first freshman to have a play performed by the Yale Dramatic Club.

**Professional background.** Crosby began his newspaper career as a reporter covering the police news and politics for The Milwaukee Sentinel. Then through his friendship with Whitelaw Reid, whose family published The New York Herald Tribune, he obtained a job as a reporter on that newspaper. He was assigned to the police beat and wrote occasional news stories. During this period he also wrote a play, "The Mirror Cracked." The play interested Theresa Helbun of The Theatre Guild, who invited him to join the Guild's playwriting course. His play was optioned to five producers but never was produced.

He entered the Army in 1941 as a Private and rose to the rank of Captain before his discharge in 1946. During the second half of the War, he wrote newscasts for the Army News Service.

Returning to The Herald in 1946 Crosby was surprised when he was asked to write a radio column, since he admittedly knew nothing about radio. Nevertheless, he agreed to try, and his first column appeared May 6, 1946. Almost an instant success, Crosby's column was syndicated September, 1946, on a five-a-week basis.12

**Job responsibilities.** Once established, Crosby began writing his column away from The Herald office. He explained that he did so to avoid press agents and radio people who might attempt to influence his thinking. He refused many invitations to appear on radio shows for the same reason. However, this attitude apparently changed with the advent
of television. During 1957, 1958, and 1959 Crosby appeared as a guest on many television shows including The Arthur Godfrey Show, The Jack Paar Show, The Peter Lind Hayes Show, and The Last Word. He also acted as alternate host for The Seven Lively Arts during the 1957-58 season.

To carry out his responsibilities as a critic, Newsweek reported that Crosby watched twenty-five to thirty hours of television weekly. Something of his selection process was revealed by Elinor Friedman, assistant to Crosby, who wrote: "Mr. Crosby watches TV often, at least watches every new show and most of the special programs--news, drama, events." Crosby's viewing is done at home, and his column is written at his Herald Tribune office. When he wishes to watch conflicting programs, he usually stacks a portable TV set on top of his regular set. His column is written the following day, since Crosby is syndicated and does not have to meet a rigid deadline as Jack Gould does.

The direct obligations of his job, other than writing his column, are minor. The only one mentioned by Friedman was that he is often called upon to comment on the state of the industry by people who are writing articles or doing theses or surveys.

Related activities. Any additional activities Crosby engages in are apparently assumed obligations. These are things he does because he wants to, not because he must. However, there seems little question that these activities stem from the fact that he is a television critic. Over the years Crosby has, in addition to the television appearances
already noted, engaged in lecture tours, written articles for several
magazines, written a book, and written two plays.

His lecture tours have taken him over much of the United States
where he has lectured on the ills of television and the impact of tele­
vision on our children. His thoughts on the effects of television on
children have made him much in demand with school groups. Crosby
appeared in Detroit in 1959.¹⁶

Among the many magazines for which Crosby has written articles
are Life, Look, Holiday, Saturday Evening Post, Reader’s Digest,
Woman’s Home Companion, and Collier’s. His book, "Out of the Blue,"
published in 1952, was a collection of his columns which he said were
those columns that had given him and his assistants their greatest
pleasure.¹⁷ Information about Crosby’s play was reported by The New
York Herald Tribune on September 20, 1958. The brief article said that
Crosby had sold a play, "Love in Public," to producer Alexander H. Cohn
for Broadway production in February of 1959. It was described as a
three-act comedy about the impact of modern communications on society.
Nothing further was heard about the play as late as March, 1960.¹⁸

In response to the question asking how Crosby kept abreast with
what was going on in the television industry, Friedman wrote:

I go through all the mail and put aside pertinent re­
leases, letters or comments on the industry for Mr. Crosby
to read. I think as a journalist, he has a natural instinct
for trends and developments which are helped by corresponding
literature on the subject, much the way businessmen keep up
with certain trends.

In addition, of course, there is a steady stream of phone
calls from all major figures in the industry reminding, com­
menting and inviting.¹⁹
Significant attitudes toward live television drama. From 1953 through 1958 Crosby was, as were Gould and Kirkley, a staunch advocate of live television drama from New York City. He constantly championed live television over filmed dramas and frequently compared the two media in explaining why.

As early as 1953, Crosby stated that all the really memorable shows on television had been done live. He was speaking particularly of television drama. Admitting that the advantages of live shows over filmed shows were subtle and complex, and that you were dealing largely in intangibles, Crosby stated his case.

He said the mediocrity of film was due partially to the way films were made—in bits and pieces. Such a procedure, he reasoned, did not encourage the actors to give a sustained performance or permit them time to build a mood. In live television, on the other hand, there was a tremendous feeling of urgency and immediacy that made actors, directors, and producers rise to great heights.20

Later, in reflecting on the demise of Studio One, Crosby said that the show had been important because the people who had created it—producers, directors, cameramen, and actors—had willed it so:

... They thought what they were doing was just about the greatest thing in the world and because they thought so, it had that air. Filmed TV drama, it seems to me, is created by a lot of people who seem fully convinced that what they're doing doesn't amount to much—and it doesn't.21

Crosby's preference for New York over Hollywood was stated clearly in 1957 at the time Studio One and Kraft Theatre had departed for Hollywood. He recognized that both shows had moved because the problem of space in New York was so acute, but added that he thought it
was unfortunate. He recalled that such high quality shows as *Marty*, *Bachelor Party*, and *Twelve Angry Men* had been done in New York, and said that they had been intelligent, realistic, contemporary, and intimate with a feeling of actuality, reality and authenticity. Such qualities, Crosby opined, were not impossible to get in Hollywood, but the films produced there had not shown evidence they could be.

He said that a "phony grease paint crept into Hollywood stories;" that the dramas produced on the West Coast had a wooden quality; and that the same plots and characters had been lying around Hollywood for years.\(^{22}\)

At another time Crosby said that the flight to film was depressing in an industry where all the great shows had been done live and most of the junk had been on film.\(^{23}\)

Late in 1958 Crosby responded to the McGrady report with a column entitled, "TV Kills Its Critics." His primary theme was that the time to measure television critics had passed since there was really nothing left to criticize, however, he ended on a hopeful note which adds to his thoughts about television drama:

So perhaps there is hope for us in television. Perhaps it is a passing phase. I remember when there were 10 or 12 hour-long drama shows on the air a week, and you could write a little essay, pointing out trends in dramatic themes, styles in acting and all sorts of other reasonably critical efforts.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Today you'll find gossip, or interviews, or personalities, or chit chat on most everything except criticism.\(^{24}\)
II - Jack Gould

Jack Gould, generally regarded as television's most influential critic, is Television Editor and Columnist for The New York Times, and while he is syndicated in only ten papers, as compared with the ninety papers that carry Crosby's column, the weight of The New York Times is thought to be tremendous.

Educational background. Jack Gould was born in New York City February 5, 1914. He graduated from Brown High School in 1932 and received no further formal education.

Professional background. Gould joined the staff of The New York Herald Tribune immediately after graduation from high school, where he became a reporter covering the entertainment field. In 1937 he left The Tribune for The New York Times where, as he said, "I was a third-string critic under Brooks Atkinson for six years."

In 1942 he joined the radio department as a writer under the editorship of John K. Hutchens, and became Radio Editor in 1944. The job was later expanded to include the job of Television Editor. Gould worked as Radio and Television Editor until 1954 when he was hired as Information Advisor for The Columbia Broadcasting Company. The job lasted only six weeks. Gould was obviously unhappy away from newspaper work. "I returned to the 'Times,'" he said, "because I was too old to make the switch from an objective to a subjective approach."

During his short stay, Gould recalled he did little work. The Times had not replaced him as Editor, and when he was offered his old
job back, he readily accepted. Gould and John Shanley now jointly head the Radio-TV Department of The New York Times.28

Job responsibilities. Like Crosby, Gould does his television viewing at home. His specially planned viewing room contains a color set, a black and white set, and a short wave set on which he likes to monitor foreign broadcasts. When the networks are in direct competition, as occurs during a Republican and Democratic National Convention, a third set is brought in and all are kept going at the same time. Unlike Crosby, however, Gould writes his reviews at home, since he must meet The New York Times' 11:20 p. m. dead line. When a show lasts until 11:00 p. m., Gould has only twenty minutes to write his column.29

Gould does not write all the reviews, however. He has three other critics on his staff--John Shanley, Val Adams, and Richard Shepard. Most regular programs are reviewed more than once, but are only written about if, in the judgment of the staff, there is something to say. Gould spaces the work so that no reporter, including himself, is given an unusually heavy burden of program criticism in one evening.30

Beyond the responsibilities of critic and editor, Gould's columns reflect another assumed obligation. Over the years Gould has had an interest in the production aspects of television. Many of his columns show evidence of careful and extensive research. In 1953 when live television drama from New York City was forced to produce in extremely cramped quarters, Gould wrote a column called, "Working in a Closet." He said that the old cliche about TV working in a closet was no longer just a gag. He said that in show after show the productions had no
perspective, no diversity of sets, and no sense of scope. Because of this, actors seemed to be going around in tiny circles with close-up after close-up as the only camera shot possible. He warned those who were champions of live television over filmed dramas that they had better do something before film producers found a way of making better and clearer films.31

Television's early obsession for realistic scenery also attracted Gould's attention. In 1954 he surveyed production techniques used in television dramas and wrote that one of the curses of contemporary theatre was the belief that realism panorama and perspective were attained better through the handiwork of the carpenter, painter, and prop man than through the words of the writer or the artistry of the player. He added:

..., In blind and literal obeisance to the dictates of the visual age, the most flexible and rewarding of settings--the imagination of the audience--is shunted aside in favor of attempts to reproduce actuality with ten-penny nails, 2 x 4 boards, ready-mix paste, and bric-a-brac from Third Avenue.

The use of dominating scenery may have its place in pedestrian commercial show business where the object is to bedazzle the customer and camouflage the inadequacies of the script. But in theatre of meaning and moment it cannot be the function of scenery to supersede the vital partnership in drama--the relationship between the playwright with something to say and the actor who says it for him.32

Another evidence of Gould's interest in the production phase of television was found in a 1957 column, "Sound Approach." The plea for better audio was Gould's appeal. In many programs, he said: 

..., the dialogue may be lost in the overwhelming deluge of background music; a player may suddenly become lost in the aurally dead pockets on the stage... the
deadliest thing on a live show may be the sound. Good sound is achieved only by time, rehearsing and testing. The audio engineer is frequently looked upon as a necessary evil.

The production staff if so pre-occupied with the picture that the overworked sound men often are forced to step around everyone else in the studios and settle compromises. There have been cases where a single audio man has been asked to operate 30 different audio controls.

Nothing is more boring to visual reality than to have the sound held to precisely the same level while the star is seen first at a long distance from the camera and then, moments later, in a very tight close-up. The video director seems to forget that in the changes of perspective he has bodily moved his audience and that to be realistic his sound must vary accordingly.

Additional columns on the production aspects of television appear repeatedly in Gould's writings. Of particular interest were a series of erudite columns written in 1957 on the impact of electronically taped shows. In one Gould explained tape in detail and attempted to evaluate its use in television drama. He concluded that whether tape would improve or harm the production of plays was going to depend on how intelligently it was employed by producers and directors.

Another of Gould's assumed obligations revealed itself in the summer and fall of 1958. At that time there was preliminary activity toward permitting the New York critic to have preview showings of major dramatic shows. The idea was promoted by DuPont Show of the Month. Gould thoroughly approved the idea and wrote a series of columns campaigning for such action. He warned the other critics that they were going to have to leave the comfortable fireside if such an idea materialized. This topic will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter III, and is presented here only as an indication of how Gould saw his job.
Gould's obligations to his job, other than writing his columns and making assignments, are apparently few. When asked if he were expected to make appearances or give any lectures, he came directly to the point: "No lectures except those which 'The Times' insists on and they are not many."36

Related activities. Gould's public activities other than those of his job are few. He reported he had written some magazine articles and a children's book, "All about Radio and Television."37 Asked if he ever engaged in activities such as little theatre work, Gould replied, "Heaven forbid that I should make theatre appearances."38 He was recipient of a Variety award in 1951, the George Polk award in 1953, Page-One award in 1953, and the Peabody award in 1957.39

Significant attitudes toward live television drama. Like Crosby, Gould too was a champion of live television drama from New York, and also like Crosby, much of what he said about his preference for live television drama was presented in columns in which he compared the two media. In an article in Broadcasting magazine in 1959 Gould answered those who had accused him of preferring live television drama to films with the retort that he was not interested in the media, but in the results, and from what he had observed, most filmed shows were cut from the same mold with a quality and idea content that was consistently low.40

Another evidence of Gould's high opinion of television drama was reflected in his few rave notices. Virtually all of his most glowing columns were play reviews, among them being criticisms of Green
Pastures, Requiem for a Heavyweight, The Taming of the Shrew, Peter Pan, Patterns, Little Moon of Alban, Romeo and Juliet, and Beauty and the Beast. These reviews will be covered in detail later.

Despite his high regard for television drama, Gould sensed its decline in 1957. He gave reasons for this at the time Robert Montgomery Presents left the air. He said that in the past years the quality of the major dramatic programs had slipped perceptibly and thought perhaps this was because the creative reservoir of many of the companies had simply run dry. He suggested that much of TV drama had drifted toward a sterile innocuousness and that many of the early writers had drifted to other media. What was needed, he reasoned, were plays that were intellectual, stimulating, and written with imagination.

After Kraft, Studio One, and Climax! had vanished, Gould explained why. He said that the ratings had slipped and the quality had also slipped. Even if the quality had remained high, Gould thought that drama would probably have declined anyway, since six or seven hours of live shows each week would have eventually exhausted all the good available material. He said that the trend was toward longer shows and that Hallmark, Omnibus, and DuPont Show of the Month, producing one show every two weeks, would assure superior quality.

III - Janet Kern

Janet Kern, Television Editor for The Chicago American, is generally considered one of the two influential women critics writing for daily newspapers. Her column appears daily in The Chicago American.
Educational background. Kern was born in Chicago in 1924 and attended public and private schools in Chicago and Evanston, Illinois. She received her B. S. degree from Northwestern University in 1944 where she majored in Sociology. Later, Kern did post-graduate work in French at McGill University in Montreal, Canada.

Professional background. Kern began her professional career in the mail room of the Grant Advertising Agency. She advanced with the Agency through jobs as Interviewer in the Market Research Department, Assistant Director of Research, Copywriter, Radio and Television Writer, Producer, to Account Executive. She worked in Grant offices in Chicago, New York, Detroit, and Toronto.

Before she was nineteen she held writing and producing positions on numerous radio shows, and was publicized as "the child prodigy of radio." One of her first shows was the Dr. I. Q. Junior Show. Later, she gained experience writing and producing for television when the medium was still in its infancy. After leaving the Grant Agency, Kern worked as a free lance writer.

In October, 1950, she began her career with The Chicago American, then The Herald American, by writing a week-day column on a free lance basis. In 1951 she became Radio and Television Editor.43

Job responsibilities. Kern’s duties as Television Editor for The Chicago American are somewhat more inclusive than the duties reported by the other critics. In outlining her duties Kern wrote:

As for the duties of a TV Editor (over and above the daily column writing) these vary considerably. There is, naturally, the routine normal for a Department Head in any big business.
In addition, the departmental editors on this paper are responsible for covering, for the mainsheet, all news connected with their beat; reviewing the outside features, stories, etc., related to their beat before it is decided whether to publish them. It is difficult to have to describe the daily routine, myriad mechanics and diverse duties of a TV Editor. I think it suffices to say that I put in very full days at the office (as you have seen) 4 or 5 days a week but write my column at home in the post-midnight hours.44

Related activities. Among the assumed obligations of Kern's job are a regular weekly television show called "In the Bag," guest appearances on other TV shows, both local and national, and free lance writing as time permits. Kern also makes frequent trips to Hollywood and New York.45

Significant attitudes toward live television drama. Kern's attitude toward live TV drama has been decidedly different from those of Crosby and Gould. In the first place, she does not share their high regard for original television plays. This was summarized briefly in 1958 when she wrote: "TV does a good job with every form of theatre known, but when it comes to original theatrics, TV falls flat on its image—orthicon tube."46 Much of her objection to originals apparently stems from her intense dislike for many of the plays done on Television Playhouse, an attitude that will be discussed more fully in later Chapters. At another time Kern said that television dramas did not warrant as lengthy a review as those given to the legitimate stage. Her implication was that television plays were simply not of enough significance.47

Another objection to television dramas was that many were considered too intellectual. What television fans wanted, Kern reasoned,
were light plays and light musicals. Proposing her own programming, she said:

I'd quickly launch a series of light, non-psychiatric, non-violent dramas on the general theme of the woman's page--boy meets girl stuff--romantic comedies. ... My drama would revolve around one family or one town so the hero would remain the same.

IV - Donald Kirkley

Donald Kirkley is Television Editor and writes a daily column for The Baltimore Sun.

Educational background. Kirkley was born in Baltimore, and attended high school there. He went to Baltimore City College and completed his education in the Business College of Johns Hopkins University.

Professional background. Kirkley was a reporter on The Sun at the age of 19. He took time out for two years of college, returned to The Sun for another year, free lanced for a time, worked a year on The Hearst American, then returned to The Sun in 1927 as Movie and Theatre Critic. He held that job until October, 1952. At that time Kirkley said:

The editors decided that the live theatre was dwindling to nothing and that TV would undermine the movies, and that most readers were deeply interested in TV. So I was transferred from Film and Theatre Editor (The Sun and The Sunday Sun) to TV Editor.

Job responsibilities. As Television Editor, Kirkley's chief responsibility is his daily column. His criticisms are often written
at home where he does most of his viewing. In talking of his job Kirkley said:

From September to April, it's a seven day grind, although I may not spend more than a few hours in watching or writing. It's always on your mind. It's worse when I go to New York, which I do about eight times a year. I usually do six to ten interviews in three days.50

Kirkley said that he keeps in touch with TV by watching a dozen shows a week--those he considers most newsworthy--by reading Variety, John Crosby, The New York Times, Broadcasting Magazine, TV Guide, articles in various magazines, press releases, and by talking to the people he meets.

Related activities. Kirkley's outside activities have been spent in theatre and television production, and in teaching. As a young man he acted in little theatres and had three one-act plays produced at the Vagabond Players and Johns Hopkins Playshop. Later he starred in several Gilbert and Sullivan revivals at the Play-Arts Guild. In 1945 Kirkley had a play, "Happily Ever After," produced on Broadway. The show closed after thirteen performances.

From February, 1948 until May, 1950 Kirkley produced and acted as master of ceremonies in an interview-type show on WMAR-TV in Baltimore.

Kirkley has taught a class in creative writing and in TV writing and production at the University of Baltimore for the past eight years.51

Significant attitudes toward live television drama. Of the four critics, Kirkley has been the most devout champion of live television
drama. He summarized his thoughts on live TV by saying: "I think it's superior to film because of its spontaneity and the chance it gives the actors to do a sustained, unified performance, with a cumulative build-up of emotions." He added:

Then, too, more rehearsal time is needed, and the entire staff and cast are obliged to concentrate on one show for weeks or more, instead of shooting one, two or even three quickie films a week.52

Such thinking is further supported by many of Kirkley's columns, particularly during 1957 and 1958 after the major drama shows had moved to Hollywood. In praising The Tale of Two Cities, Kirkley said that the triumph of live New York television over the dead Hollywood brand had been so marked that it was unkind to keep rubbing it in. "The network men and the advertising agency seers who persuaded the poor sponsors to go West are standing in the corners with dunce caps on their heads, together with their dupes."53

At another time when reviewing Hansel and Gretel, Kirkley complained that his television heroes, the New York production people, had let him down with a bad production. He reminded them that he had been fighting a battle like many other television editors throughout the country for live TV versus film and for Broadway television versus the Hollywood variety.54

As the television season drew to a close in 1958, Kirkley said that as the season waned, evidence of the superiority of live television over dead film continued to pile up.55 The same thought had been expressed earlier in the year when Kirkley reviewed The Silver Skates.
He said that the evidence of the superiority of live TV over film had been overwhelming during the current season.56

As further evidence of Kirkley's preference for live TV drama, his column reviewing *The Prince and the Pauper* in 1957 read:

... There's nothing wrong with television that can't be cured by artistic skill and integrity and live production, preferably in New York. Here again we saw what television can be when the bumbling from Hollywood are not allowed to interfere, and when the principal roles are occupied by trained actors, not the so-called stars of the movies.57

Attempting to be realistic, however, Kirkley recognized that the quantity and quality of television drama could not continue indefinitely. As early as 1955, he observed that the rate of pay for plays was rising and that in due time a playwright's income would be sufficient for him to be able to live on two or three scripts a year. The result would be a decline in the number of scripts available. From this Kirkley reasoned there would be a definite limit to the number of top-notch dramas presented yearly which was going to force repeat performances of some of the better plays.58
CHAPTER II

FOOTNOTES

1. Newsweek, loc. cit.

2. Telephone conversations with representatives of advertising agencies.


5. Newsweek, loc. cit.

6. Telephone conversations, loc. cit.

7. Newsweek, loc. cit.


11. Time, loc. cit.


15. Ibid.


26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Newsweek, loc. cit.
30. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
CHAPTER III

THE CASE AGAINST THE CRITICS AND THE CRITICS' DEFENSE

As noted in the Introductory Chapter, television critics suddenly became targets of critical appraisal from many sides beginning in 1957. The most severe reprimands came from people within and associated with the television industry. This does not imply that television critics had gone unchallenged before. They had indeed been challenged in the past, but at no previous time had censures been hurled from so many different sources in such a sustained attack. Critics were accused of many evils and, as might be expected, the critics answered their accusers with denials, explanations and counter charges. The battle continued to rage, and as late as 1960 showed no sign of letting up. While battles between critics and artists are not unusual, there are unique aspects of the fight between the television critics and the industry that should be examined if television criticism is to be understood. The scope of this chapter is an examination of (1) the case against the critics and (2) the critics' defense.

I - The Case Against the Critics

Unquestionably the most publicized evaluation of television criticism was that made by McGrady in his speech, "Television Critics in a Free Society," before the Radio and Television Executives Society.
In addition to McGrady's conclusions already covered in Chapter I, he said that a television critic needed four qualifications to be a fair judge of what he reviewed:

First of all he needs taste--a sensitivity to nuance and significance and beauty.

Second, he needs wit--meaning an operative combination of intelligence and humor.

Third, he needs heart--a kind of boldness which enables his word to survive the innumerable pressures and attacks thrust upon him.

Fourth, he needs time. He needs time for reflecting, weighing, pondering. Time in which to put his vision into a broader human context.2

With these points in mind McGrady declared that the forty-four critics he interviewed represented a wide extreme of criticism with the most forceful and subjective critics at one end and the least critical at the other end. The least critical, he observed, generally hesitated to opine, because their work load prevented them from giving a properly considered opinion. In the middle group he placed most out-of-town critics who have only a vague idea of what they are attempting to do, but managed to survive by reading the New York papers.

The third group are the very opinionated and very powerful critics, most of whom are either syndicated or located in New York. They are sure of themselves and take pride in the influence they have managed to wield over the industry.3

Admitting that generalizations frequently hurt people whom they are not intended to hurt, McGrady nevertheless risked hurting some by
saying that with a handful of exceptions, the following generalization is true of contemporary television critics and criticism:

By and large, television criticism is the fitful labor of tired writers of monumental good will, a degree of talent and a jaded perspective. As such, its effect has been profound. In instances it has been positive, but it is generally inconsistent, capricious, and of questionable value. The chief cause of this unhappy state of affairs is the critics' abiding concern with a fantastic amount of mediocre, trivial material. There is only one type of critic who has an appreciable influence on viewer preference, and that is the previewer. The regular critics influence television directly and strongly by touching the moral susceptibilities of sponsors, advertising and network officials, and station programmers.¹⁴

McGrady also charged that many critics have a pretentious habit of advertising themselves as the conscience of the industry. He felt it would be extremely desirable to have them serve as the intelligence too. He then identified seven characteristics that, in his mind, made a critic influential with people in the industry, given here in brief form:

Reputation--The single most important factor of power is a critic's reputation for being read by industry people.

Writing for a New York newspaper.
Apparent non-partisanship.
An actual desire to be effective.
Actual readership in the industry.
Association with the public interest.
Use of industry vernacular.⁵

McGrady also revealed a relationship between the critics and the industry which he found deplorable. He said that when misunderstanding had occurred, the critics had frequently resorted to critical rule by
threat and insult in order to make themselves heard. Questioning the desirability of such action in a free society, McGrady said:

... Such vitriolic unpleasantness is not characteristic of other critical relationships—in art, or in literature, or in drama, or in music. For at least in these other media the critics and the producers speak the same language. They understand each other.

There is no reason why the critics should have to resort to verbal bludgeoning to have their way. In fact, there is no reason why they should give the orders in programming. They have not the responsibilities, nor the creative faculties for the job. But that they operate in a strong-arm way is not entirely their fault.

Each side accuses the other of prejudicial subjectivity. Television's peculiar subjectivity is more easily ascertained than the critics: it is simply an abiding overriding concern with making money—the abiding, overriding concern of almost any business.

The critics' subjectivity—as seen by the industry—lies in their violent, often confused refusal to countenance money-making as an abiding, overriding concern of television.

If television and criticism are going to make more sense than they do now, this fundamental issue will have to be resolved. 6

Another attack against critics came from Eric Sevareid, chief Washington correspondent for CBS News, in a Reporter article. Sevareid admits the existence of a shocking amount of bad television, part of which he attributed to TV's confusion as to just where it ought to be going. He added, however:

I also happen to think that is partly due to the fantastically irresponsible, inconsistent pulling and hauling it is getting from the printed press.

About one review in four of a carefully constructed TV show will make real sense and teach you something you should have known, whether it's a favorable or unfavorable review. . . .

They will often indicate that: (a) The reviewer didn't have even an elementary knowledge of the subject matter or
(b) saw only part of the show, or (c) wasn't listening if he was looking or vice versa, or (d) was so preoccupied in the egocentric exercise of analyzing his own reactions that he failed to follow the objective reality in front of him, or (e) got the program confused with another program on another network.7

As a partial remedy, Sevareid suggested that newspapers departmentalize their TV criticism, with the regular drama critic reviewing drama on TV, the Washington correspondent reviewing the political panels, the music critic reviewing the musical shows, etc.

Then discussing his own chief interest, news and public affairs shows, Sevareid said that it was unfair for a critic to apply the same rules of evaluation to a non-fiction program, such as a newscast, as he did for a play or film series. He reasoned that with dramas, operas, or westerns, the critic is fully entitled to judge it on the basis of what the little screen shows him and on absolutely nothing else, "... because in the unreal world the producer, author, director, and performers have 100 per cent control over the material." But when TV telecasts a news show, or a living event program like a political convention, the producers have only partial control over the material.

To remedy this single standard method of criticism, Sevareid suggested that the critic make trips backstage to see what is going on. Such action, Sevareid felt sure, would teach the critics much and help their reviews to make sense.8

Another article by Bob Stahl of TV Guide9 attempted to evaluate TV critics by asking three questions: (1) What is the function of critics? (2) What is the value in reviewing a show after it has been
televised? (3) Do critics exert any influence over network programming? Over viewers?

For answers Stahl interviewed several people closely associated with television. Among the television people interviewed were Jackie Gleason, Ben Hecht, Steve Allen, Oliver Treyz, T. C. Clyne, Fred Coe, and David Susskind.

American Broadcasting Company Television President, Oliver Treyz, compared reviews of TV shows with newspaper editorials. "'Like an editorial,' Treyz said, 'a review sharpens your own thinking. I think TV criticism makes the public's attitude toward TV a little sounder.'" Concerning the influence of the critics over the network programming, Treyz thought that rave notices definitely influenced the network's over-all thinking; but added, "'I can recall no show ever killed by the critics--they're not that strong. But I think some sponsor renewals were eased by favorable reviews.'"

McCann Erickson's C. T. Clyne could recall no situation in which good reviews persuaded a sponsor to renew a series when the ratings were bad, but readily admitted that unfavorable criticism could speed up the cancellation of a program. He believed the importance of the critics was

"... limited to the board of directors of the sponsor and his ad agency, particularly when it comes to one-shot specials." ... if ratings on a special are good, and if management likes the show, "then they depend on the critics to bear out their reactions."

Clyne admitted, however, that bad reviews have a nuisance value too that might discourage the sponsor."
Comedian Steve Allen compares critics to sports writers:

"After the 'game' is over, the critic may give us his reactions to it. . . . Whatever his intention in presenting this reaction, there seems little question that his audience regards his statement as commentary, rather than review."\(^{12}\)

Producer Fred Coe complained that critics were more concerned with live drama than with filmed series. This, he believed, causes the critics to focus attention on the shortcomings of live drama, while filmed shows escaped attention entirely. Despite this, Coe had a kind word: "'As a whole, I think most critics are better than most of the programs they review.'"\(^{13}\)

Producer David Susskind held a similar opinion:

"I've never been a critic lover, but in the low condition television has been during the last year, the most potent voice has been the critic. He is against the shoddy and the cheap. Without the critic, I believe we would have more mediocrity than we now have."\(^{14}\)

As some indication of the influence the critics had on the general public, Stahl referred to a poll taken by TV rating service, Pulse. The service reportedly questioned 1,000 New Yorkers concerning the influence critics had on their viewing habits. Of the 1,000 polled, 54 per cent said that they selected or rejected a series because of critical comments. And among those who said they were influenced by reviews, 23 per cent indicated this happened "regularly," 25 per cent said "fairly often," and 52 per cent said "occasionally."\(^{15}\)

Additional opinions about critics were expressed on David Susskind's television program, Open End. Susskind, conducting a forum on the status of current television drama, had as guests seven television dramatists: Robert Allen Arthur, Paddy Chayefsky, Summer Locke
Elliott, James Lee, J. P. Miller, Tad Mosel, and David Shaw. The seven men represented a small group of playwrights who had given original television plays their form during the early years of the medium. Significantly however, at the time of the telecast on November 11, 1959, only one or two were still working in the medium they had all helped to create. The others had deserted television entirely for the stage and the screen.

Film Culture Magazine¹⁶ printed portions of the forum discussion. The group readily agreed that live, original teleplays were almost extinct and volunteered several reasons: over-exposure, repetition of the same theme, sponsor dissatisfaction, bad plays, agency censorship, over-concern for ratings, passing of the initial excitement of writing for a new medium, and the critics. The remarks about criticism are of primary concern here.

David Shaw, one of the playwrights, seemed especially bitter:

... When you're doing a lot of television, you're up there every few months, and the critics have a habit of watching the live show. They leave the series and the Westerns ... alone. They come after you and you can make the most honest effort in the world and they'll still dismiss you in a little black box on the back page of the Times. And sponsors read the reviews. Agencies read the reviews. They have their effect. And I think as much as anything, the critics themselves have helped kill live television.¹⁷

Arthur agreed with Shaw. He accused critics of helping to kill live drama through incredibly brutal reviews. As evidence, he referred to a review of a recent Playhouse 90 production by John Shanley of the New York Times, which he called

... an incredibly brutal dismissal ... and I think this bum thinks he's still writing obituaries, you know?
What I am concerned about is the effect that the reviews have on the regiment who reads these things and takes them as facts and says: "Ah, hah, this guy in the New York Times hated it. We'll never do anything like that again." And this happens all the time.18

Arthur concluded that television drama was in a sad state because nobody, including the critics, cared what happened to live TV drama.19

Lee saw hopelessness in the situation. He thought they were being naive in imagining that their ideas could change the critics. The others readily agreed.

Susskind admitted that he had been hurt by bad reviews on several occasions and said there was no personal upset to quite match it. "It affects the digestive tract." Trying to be as objective as possible however, Susskind praised the responsible critics who were doing two things which he thought were definitely in the interest of live drama. These were (1) paying attention to live drama rather than ignoring it as they were doing with westerns, and (2) going all out, possibly too far out, in praising good things in live drama:

... I mean, when they rapture, when they're excited and stimulated, the reviews are triumphant... but they're very quick to label the shoddy. Now, it is when they call it unsuccessful, when they call it a failure, shoddy, if you will, that you rear up in emotional torment.20

On an earlier Open End program Susskind was less objective. He said that critics were inclined to be too flippant and cursory and numbered among their sins "venom, vitriol and sarcasm." He declared ship news reporting (Crosby) and obituary writing (Shanley) poor
Qualifications for a critic, and that "... what counted was taste, experience, and education and talent." 21

Months after Paddy Chayefsky had retired from writing television plays, he was interviewed for a Detroit Sunday Times article. During the interview, the reporter asked whether Chayefsky was planning to return to television. Chayefsky said that he was not because he was scared:

I have an idea for a play which I think would be great for television, but I don't have the guts to do it. I'm scared they'll clobber me.

I don't mind being knocked when I deserve it ... that's all right. But I don't like it when I'm slugged without justification. 22

Rod Serling, another successful playwright, had something of interest to say about critics in the Foreword to a collection of his published plays, Patterns. 23 His views are especially interesting and seem well thought out:

I can't say that I "like" television critics because I really don't know many personally. But I respect them and I'm glad they're around. Their presence is a tacit assertion that the television program is an art form that warrants and merits critical analysis. The function of the television critic is somewhat different from that of his counterparts who review movies and plays. ... The television critic analyzes a play or program that is already a fact. He can bring no one in, and discourage no one to keep away. His is a critique and not a preview. It's a needle or a back-slap that can in no way affect whatever is in the record. My own feeling is that the television critic has one primary purpose. He's there to needle and prod the industry into quality. He's there as a reminder that nothing can be slipped by. His very presence sets up certain absolute standards to be aimed at. His approval is solicited, his disapproval keenly felt and pondered. When Jack Gould or J. P. Shanley in The New York Times dislikes something, this precludes the possibility of a "smash," and, conversely,
their benign approval is cause for celebration on the part of the writer and all concerned. In the case of my own Patterns, the demand for a repeat was generated by the critics and columnists. Jack Gould's calling it "... one of those inspired moments that make the theatre the wonder that it is ..." did more to make it a TV legend than the thousands of letters sent in by viewers. Critics, in short, pack weight.24

When the verbal battle against the critics was at its height, near the beginning of the 1957-58 season, Kirkley attempted to explain the situation. He said that the barrage of brickbats was probably triggered by Variety's October 2, 1957 headline which prophesied in bold type, "NEW TELEVISION SEASON--A DUD."25 This was the beginning of the 1957-58 season when the number of dramatic shows had been drastically cut, and the majority of the influential critics--among them Gould and Crosby--were in agreement with Variety's attitude. Before this Kirkley felt that the relationship between newspaper and magazine reviewers and proprietors of television had been remarkably friendly, although he granted that it had begun to cool several months before the Variety article: "Anger has been building up on both sides ever since the lean summer [1957] and growing as one new program after another has been tagged as a failure."26 The attack from Variety, Kirkley reasoned, was merely the last straw. The counter-attacks came from three sides. The first slap, as recalled by Kirkley, came from David Sarnoff, President of the National Broadcasting Company, in his monthly newsletter to television and radio editors.

As reported by Kirkley, Sarnoff took sharp issue with the critics for suggesting that their dissatisfaction with current TV fare was a reflection of the viewing public's dissatisfaction, by saying
that viewers were turning away from television in droves. Sarnoff quoted statistics to show that the number of viewers had increased each year. He readily admitted that he too was disappointed with some of the first programs of a regular series, but felt that the critics were unjust in rendering a verdict after watching only the first show. Sarnoff suggested that it would be fairer to review the first, fifth, and tenth shows of a series before rendering a final decision.27

Possibly the most vicious attack on critics was an editorial in Sponsor, a trade magazine, entitled "Critics Be Damned." It said that a small band of ex-reporters with remarkably little public influence were nonetheless one of TV's major problems. Maintaining that even the worst shows did not deserve the kind of abuse poured out by the critics, the editorial challenged the critics' qualifications as competent judges:

... As it is now, often critics who would have trouble telling a stock company apart from a Broadway cast, are in a position to panic client executives who ought to know better than listen to a peanut gallery spawned out of the police beat by way of the feature desk. The resulting hysteria among agency and network ranks makes remedial work difficult and contributes to the casualty lists.28

Possibly in anticipation of the many outbursts to follow, Jack Gould wrote what he believed to be the case against TV critics in May, 1957. He explained that he was doing this because there was an unwritten law against arguing with critics. To do so, he felt, branded one as a poor loser, while agreeing was thought of as an attempt to curry favor. The following is a summary of Gould's case against the critics:

1) The TV critic feels he is qualified to review anything and
everything. This presumption is unparalleled in any other form of criticism.

2) The TV critic is the master of a vacuum. His criticisms are written after the show is over.

3) The TV critic ignores the ordinary in television programming and concerns himself with the creative efforts in programming. Run-of-the-mill programs, such as westerns, film series, and quizzes receive only a casual examination, while the creative effort, such as original plays and specials, receive a lion's share of praise and damnation. This, in effect, stimulates mediocrity and puts a premium on cultural achievement.

4) The TV critic fails to understand or be sympathetic with the problems of the few creative people in TV. As a consequence, he is a major deterrent to the improvement of TV. He, too, aspires to higher standards for TV programming, but most often settles for less. The critics have a negative effect of discouraging those who have tried.

5) The TV critic often discourages sponsors from financing better things by being too uncompromising. Sponsors who are criticized harshly often retire to a safer show.29

The battle between critics and the industry was apparently still raging in late 1958. Leon Morse, writing for Television Magazine, the trade magazine, presented a summary of the case against Jack Gould, but admitted it was a case against other critics as well. He then asked Gould to defend himself. Morse's case was not unlike the case Gould
had already presented. Thus the allegations are presented in very brief form:

1) His approach to TV entertainment is not realistic. He demands too much of those who are required to put a program together in a few days, rather than weeks, as is true with the professional theatre.

2) He does not judge a program from the point of view of the audience.

3) He has a preference for live TV over filmed TV.

4) His personal tastes often interfere with his criticisms.

5) He pretends to support the medium, but does not make special allowances for the experimental in programming.

Yet another blow at the critics came in a *Time* magazine article titled "Measuring the Giant." The writer declared that television critics had little or no influence on the viewing public and only in rare instances had any influence on the industry itself. Written in *Time*’s rather unique style the article left much to be desired as an example of scientific research; however, the article cannot be totally ignored since it quotes several respected critics.

The article admitted that the newspaper readership was impressive. John Crosby of *The New York Herald Tribune* is syndicated in 90 newspapers; Hal Humphrey of *The Los Angeles Mirror-News* is syndicated in 87 papers; and Terrence O’Flaherty of the *San Francisco Chronicle* is reportedly read by hundreds of Californians who do not even own TV sets. Despite this, the article maintained that the critics have had little or no influence on their readers' viewing habits.
What little influence the TV critics do have, the article asserted, is generally exerted within the television industry itself by a small handful of top critics—Crosby, Gould, Humphrey, O'Flaherty, and Variety's George Rosen. These men are regularly read by network executives, program sponsors, and advertising agencies. On occasions they have been able to influence programs directly. As evidence, the article said that several blistering articles by Gould shamed all three networks into covering the United Nations Security Council debate on the Mideast. At another time John Crosby rapped CBS so badly that Board Chairman William Paley postponed an European vacation to help plan some better programs.

Such successes, however, are the exception rather than the rule, the article pointed out, and even these successes may have been questionable. Gould, for example, declined to take credit for getting the Security Council on the air, and a network vice president reported to the writer in Chicago: "A lot of network brass would say, "Oh, yes, we take the critics' opinions seriously," but they get nothing but a chuckle behind closed doors."32

As evidence of the critics' lack of influence, the article pointed out that the history of television is rife with examples of shows—Milton Berle, Lawrence Welk, I Love Lucy—that rose to the top despite critical lambasting. It also quotes several critics as questioning their influence. Gould said, "I frankly question the influence I have. At best, it's an incidental one. I never heard of a
critic killing a show." Janet Kern of the Chicago American had a similar observation:

"The whole idea of influence is one that I frankly think is a myth. When I get letters asking for my qualifications as a television critic, I have a standing answer. I tell them I have the four necessary qualifications for the job: a television set, a typewriter, a dictionary, and a job on a newspaper."33

Reflecting on the reason for the critics' lack of influence the article suggested that all too many critics were taken from often unrelated and sometimes obscure newspaper jobs, without any particular reference to reportorial ability or critical qualifications. Critic O'Flaherty agreed: "Too many of the television columnists in the country today have had little or no training for their jobs."34 An ABC vice president also agreed: "Generally speaking, they do not have good enough background: some of them are young kids just off the obituary desk; others are graduated mailroom boys."35

The article continued that as a part of journalism, television reporting was as young as television itself and in many ways suffered from the same problems:

... Still in its teens, the television medium ripened before it matured, became an overnight giant that still mistakes size for superiority, quantity for quality, and juggles its allegiance between public and sponsor. Covering this jumbled mass medium, the television critics themselves often seem confused. Should television be entertainment? Or education? Or what? Can the critical standards of theatre, or music, or art be applied to television, or does it demand evaluation on its own? The critics have not decided.36

The article found some support for this thinking from Gould:

"The weakness of the critics is their own uncertainty as to what should be their criteria."37
The article concluded: "Until the television writers grow up to meet this criticism, they will probably remain as ineffectual as the industry they cover."38

II - The Critic's Philosophy of Criticism

The television critics did not let the charges against them go unanswered. All had something to say. Gould's responses, perhaps the best organized, and definitely the most complete, are presented first. In effect, he was answering not only for himself but for other critics as well. It is hard to imagine a more articulate champion.

Gould did not think it unusual that the television critic was expected to review all kinds of programs. He asked whether there was any difference between a critic who judged all kinds of programs and a network executive who thought he could select all kinds of programs.

... Rampant expertism is part of the age. ... The viewer also thinks he is an expert. ... If TV criticism is to be comprehensive and meaningful, someone must be responsible for looking at the whole.39

He reminded his attackers, however, that he served a long apprenticeship in dramatics, vaudeville, and night club criticism. Gould described the critic as the proxies of viewers, but maintained this does not mean that viewers agreed. Rather it proved a bond of independent thinking.

Gould, aware that his reviews are printed after the play, pointed out that television must be accepted in the form that it comes in, since the alternative would be no criticism. He insisted that he was not trying to forecast the success or failure of a program. "I
don't take the 'Variety' approach to criticism. I'm not interested in box office. (More will be said about Gould's opinion of after-the-fact reviews later.)

He found some truth in the accusation that critics encouraged mediocrity by ignoring much of the commonplace, while concentrating on new plays and special programming. Gould defended this by reminding his critics that prominent television programs, such as new plays, naturally attract more attention and that as a newspaper man, part of his job was to report what was going on. "Perhaps," he suggested, "critics could do more in rechecking some of the established routine fare and pointing up its dominant force. With the sheer volume of TV material, no critic can claim that he covers everything."

The charge that critics were unsympathetic with the problems of the few creative people in television, worried Gould. He recognized that television was a forced wedding between commercialism and culture, and that even the most creative people had to make compromises. To this charge Gould replied that a critic must understand why compromises are made, but that he cannot afford to join the merry-go-round. If he did, Gould reasoned:

... The very little is becoming the big standard ...

Are the creative people thus affected truly asking for compassion and understanding or are they asking a critic's surrender ...? To each and every program must be applied the same acid tests: What is it trying to do and how well is it done? The play, not the hazards and hardships of a craft, is the main thing.
He felt that lowering standards was another slip toward encouraging mediocrity—a habit he had definite opinions about:

This insidious process of rationalizing and excusing mediocrity . . . is commonplace among the craftsmen of TV and . . . many viewers as well. The nature of TV, with its insatiable need for material, tends to make it so.\(^3\)

Gould warned that because such criterion is readily understood, it does not make it a valid one:

... Television has achieved a stature . . . where the merit of a given program no longer can be evaluated by what the rest of television may be doing. ... Today the goal for TV must be quality, not "quality for television."

... Television never should be satisfied to be only second best.\(^4\)

Gould recognized that the average writer and producer are subject to terrific pressures, but pointed out that the giants of the arts—writers, stars, and producers—are not. He felt they have the stature to ward off all pressures. Instead, he insisted, they palm off their bad materials, accept the money, and blame the sponsor for bad TV. Compromises, Gould felt, would only encourage them to repeat the same action again and again.

To the charge that bad reviews often cause sponsors to retreat to the safety of westerns and situation comedies, Gould readily admitted that many critics may secretly wish to rewrite some reviews. "But," he added philosophically, "no critic can ponder all the conceivable consequences of a review and still retain vigor and independence. . . . Heaven help the critic who worries about his personal Trendex."\(^5\)
Gould denied any bias against filmed shows. He insisted that he preferred good programming and did not care about the mechanics of reproduction. His objection to past filmed shows was based on the fact that most of them looked as though they had been cut from the same mold with consistently low quality and content.

Finally Gould had a few words for McGrady's study. He referred to McGrady's accusation that some critics had resorted to critical rule of threat and insult to make themselves heard. Gould assumed that McGrady was talking of the incidents that he and Crosby were involved in. The Gould incident occurred when he brought pressure through his column to get the networks to televise the United Nations Security Council's debate on the Suez cases; and the Crosby incident occurred when he was credited with having caused the Board Chairman of the Columbia Broadcasting Company to sacrifice his vacation so that he could launch Playhouse 90.

Gould asked whether McGrady expected him to remain mute when a world crisis threatened and the networks chose to ignore it. Regarding the charge against Crosby, Gould said that if better programming, such as Playhouse 90, could be gotten by causing board chairmen to cancel vacations, he thought it would be advisable for everyone to stay in town next summer.

Gould thought the fundamental weakness of McGrady's study, however, was his belief that day-by-day programming was the critic's major occupation. "Equally important," Gould contended, "is a continuing concern and interest over the evaluation of a brand new medium of incalculable power for good or ill in society."
Day by day reviews are concerned with individual programs, but the critic must also be aware of other problems, Gould maintained. Among these are such problems as television's overwhelming concern for making money. Such greed, Gould believed, had driven away programs attuned to the harsh realities of today's world, had brought about increasing self-censorship, and had been responsible for the slow death of television drama.

Because of such problems, Gould asserted that it was impossible for McGrady to compare television criticism with criticism of other art forms:

Television, in other words, cannot be equated with "almost any business." It isn't like any other business, and to assume to the contrary can only be a futile exercise in naiveté.

Crosby too answered many of the charges leveled against critics either directly or within his collective writings. Some candid opinions expressed in the Foreword and Afterword of Out of the Blue, a collection of his printed columns, are worth examining. Crosby explained his book as a collection of columns that had given him and his assistants the most pleasure:

They are, in short, very personal, arbitrary and capricious selections. But then that is the nature of columnists--personal, arbitrary and capricious--and they get worse as they grow older. A column is a splendid place to vent one's grievances, one's hopes, one's opinions. . . . A radio and television column is especially splendid because you quickly discover that you are emitting not only your own grievances, opinions, and hopes, but everyone else's grievances, opinions, and hopes. Especially grievances. Everyone has a grievance--usually four or five. . . . In voicing your own criticism you are airing the secret despair of a great many million people. You become their champion, their friend, their fellow victim.
He described the worst aspects of his job as trying to find something to write about run-of-the-mill programs:

... A columnist is forced to be literate about the illiterate, witty about the witless, coherent about the incoherent. ... My drawers are stuffed with notes about programs which are neither bad enough nor good enough to warrant comment of any sort. They hover, these programs, in a sort of nether world of mediocrity and defy you to compose so much as a single rational sentence about them.51

Crosby readily admitted that the most personally satisfying columns and the ones for which he had received the most plaudits, were the most savage ones; and programs which provided him the most wordage were frequently not the best programs. He found this deplorable. Recalling the ease with which he had blasted a particular program and the difficulty he had finding words of admiration for an especially good show, Crosby concluded: "I find that I--and most critics--are incoherent in our admiration but afflicted with a formidable coherence when we disapprove." He added that such is true of humans in general, not just critics. They find greater satisfaction in reporting malicious gossip than they do in talking about another's successes in civic affairs. Because of this, Crosby reasoned, it is hardly surprising that the most damaging columns are the most popular and the ones readers remember the longest.52

Crosby also had words for Mr. Sarnoff, who had accused the critics of irresponsible criticism when they had made sweeping condemnations about the new shows before the season began. Crosby admitted being one of the critics who had made condemnations and said he had done so because there were fewer specific shows then (1958) that merited criticism. Consequently, he was afraid he wouldn't have
anything to write about the next year. "After the first show, I don't know what to say about a western or a quiz show, and I don't know anyone else who does either."53

Crosby reminded Sarnoff of the value of criticism:

... Actually, the very seriousness of the criticism leveled at television and the amount of space given to TV are both complimentary to the medium. When I first started writing a column about radio, radio coverage was almost entirely non-critical, because radio wasn't considered worthy of criticism and there was a negligible amount of space devoted to it.

If television gets any blander, TV coverage is going to revert to that of radio days.54

Commenting on the McGrady study, Crosby—probably with tongue-in-cheek—said that it was useless to attempt to measure the effectiveness of television critics because television critics, like the iron horse, are becoming passe. Crosby recalled several television critics who had given up during the past year or two because they felt that TV had fallen to such a low ebb that it simply was not worthy of criticism. Crosby hoped, however, that the current situation may be just a passing fancy. He recalled when there were ten or twelve hour-long dramas on the air each week: "You could write a little essay pointing out trends in dramatic themes, style of acting, and all sorts of other reasonably critical efforts."55

Crosby's answer to Eric Severeid's suggestion that the dramatic critic cover the plays and the school editor cover the educational programs, was to the point. He said that it was impossible, since there were almost no dramatic shows that deserved reviewing, and practically no educational programs.
Crosby continued by saying that television resists criticism not because it demands too much expertness on the part of the columnist, but because "... television is beginning to resemble a church social—neither bad enough, nor good enough nor anything enough to require comment."^56

In defense of those who complain about criticism Crosby agreed that television has been subjected to some unfair and inept criticism as well as too much criticism, particularly against those shows that have aimed high: "But criticism is high compliment in itself; it presumes that the medium being criticized is entitled to opinion."^57

Referring to all the attacks on critics near the beginning of the 1957-58 season, Kirkley said that many columnists were disappointed at the timidity and self-censorship of the industry, which he said was more fact than opinion. In his opinion most of the blows were aimed at New York columnists who, he thought, were hardest to please. He commented on the specific attacks and concluded: "Nobody gains anything from this conflict and many people have their feelings hurt. . . . If the war continues, I'll act as correspondent."^58

In a 1955 column Kirkley wrote about the task of the critics in which he answered some of the charges against critics. Kirkley pointed out that no person could see more than a fraction of the available television, and to substantiate his point, he said that in Baltimore alone, there were 800 programs telecast weekly, and in New York more than 95,000 yearly. He said:

. . . If the critic undertook to cover only the dozen hour-long dramas and spectacles which show up weekly,
he'd have time for nothing else, and he'd soon be so jaded
that all the plays would seem blurred and dull.

It is the columnist's daily lot—an annoying one
if he considers himself a reporter—to try to pick
subjects which he thinks will be of the most general
interest, well aware that he can only hope to interest
sections of the readership at a time.

We can only give . . . hints, occasional tips on future
shows, . . . glimpses behind the scenes and a summation
of our own adventures before the TV set.59

In a letter dated November 7, 1958, Kirkley explained what he
thought a TV critic should be:

I think that a TV critic should be primarily a reporter
with spot reviews only a relatively minor part of his job.
He should keep abreast with series and trends, interpret
them, explore what is going on in the art and/or the industry,
call attention to good things (presumably) to come, praise
TV people who have done well and blast those who deal in
shoddy stuff. He should also act as go-between for the
viewer and the people in TV, conveying their ideas and
attitudes in sofar as they have bearing on programming.
No chit-chat of star-gazing, with interviews with pro-
ducers, writers, etc., more important than talks with
performers.

I think the TV columnist should subordinate personal
likes and prejudices, and report the facts.60

Kirkley also said that he was discouraged at the lack of origin-
ality, daring, experimentation, and cultural shows; the degradation
of classics; and the industry-wide self-justification that " . . . they
give people what they want, and that is entertainment."61

Of the controversy between the critics and the television in-
dustry Kern took a positive stand. She said that there was a degree
of power implicit in the printed word, and sponsors, networks, and
producers were influenced by what they saw. Thus critics had an ob-
ligation to guide the industry toward what the people wanted. She
implied, however, that the other critics were trying to influence the industry to produce the kind of programs that they, the critics, wanted. The true test of what the viewers want, Kern suggested, could be found in her annual popularity poll. She warned the industry that they should be guided by what the public want and should be suspicious of the powerful voices working against what the public really wanted.62

Finally consideration should be given to a new idea in television criticism that was suggested, tried, and quickly abandoned in 1958. When the fall season for 1958-59 was about to begin, F. A. Wardenburg, Director of Advertising for the DuPont Company, announced a new policy for criticizing plays on DuPont Show of the Month. As outlined by Wardenburg, the critics would see a full production of each play the day before the television presentation, with no representatives of the agency or the network present. Critics could then write reviews that would appear before the show. Wartenburg explained that DuPont was willing to take this chance. He reasoned that if the reviews were favorable, the play would attract a larger audience, and if the reviews were bad, the play would not be penalized any more than other art media which received previews.63

Gould reported that DuPont’s suggestion had set off a reaction in the industry. Several other companies reported they would follow suit and the networks admitted that such reviews would undoubtedly have a definite influence on programming. Gould was enthusiastic about the idea and brushed aside the suggestion that many changes would probably be made after the dress rehearsal. He said that critics had background to understand these problems. He said also that the fear
of a group of critics' dominating tastes was unfounded since society in
the last analysis, makes up its own mind.\textsuperscript{64}

A week later Gould reported that many network executives were
not happy about DuPont's idea for several reasons:

1) The basic economy of television is to sell goods--and where
there is a risk of driving customers away, it would be silly to give
critics that power.

2) Many programs are in a very rough state at the time of dress
rehearsal.

3) It would be impossible for critics outside the New York area
to see the previews.\textsuperscript{65}

In spite of opposition, DuPont went ahead with the idea. The
first play reviewed in advance was \textit{Harvey}. During the weeks between
DuPont's original announcement and the presentation of \textit{Harvey}, Crosby
remained quiet, which possibly led Gould to remark that some critics
had not "... concealed their distaste for the strain of abandoning
the comforts of the hearth and going out on assignment."\textsuperscript{66}

The advance reviews of \textit{Harvey} were generally good. Gould made
a point of thanking DuPont for the experimental preview and reported
that the Trendex rating of 54 per cent was the best for any DuPont
show. Again Gould noted that there were "large laments" by a few
critics who had to leave the comfort of home to preview the play.\textsuperscript{67}

Crosby was not without an answer about his views on previews.
He said that the play had been previewed to death and that the experi­
ment, in his mind, was a bad one. He expressed sympathy for the actors
who were expected to get up once for the critics and again for the home
audience: "If the play had been clobbered... it would have been terrible for actors to live it down during the performance." Crosby said that the people who had talked with him felt that the play had been reviewed too much and that it was almost like seeing something that had already taken place. He discounted a rating of 28.9 and pointed out that Harvey was the first show of the season and had been well publicized even without prior notices. To conclude, Crosby said that he did not believe people read advance notices as a guide to best plays and books:

... If this were true, TV criticism is indeed idiotic. ... people read reviews for the fun of it. If they've seen the show, they'd like to confirm or confound their opinions. If they haven't, they'd like to see what they missed. Even ... if ... the whole industry goes on tape, advance notices are going to take some of the fun and surprise and unexpectedness out of it's ... first nights. And just wait till a couple of programs get massacred in advance. After that, the prior notice will be hurriedly abandoned.68

It should be noted that Crosby is widely syndicated and his reviews often do not appear until several days after the show.

Apparently it was not necessary to wait until a show had received bad reviews before dropping the advance preview idea. Gould reported a month later that Columbia Broadcasting Company had decided to drop the experiment. He said that the network had made strong representations to the DuPont Company. Gould felt that CBS had prejudged the experiment before it really had a chance. He added that one network executive had said that advance reviews detracted from the excitement of seeing it, then Gould pointedly added: "Presumably 'My Fair Lady' is now deserving of the deepest international sympathy. On
both sides of the Atlantic it is struggling against the hardship of rave reviews."^9

If the more bitter denunciations leveled at the critics can be looked upon as the outcries of people who had been temporarily wounded by a critic's thrust, a more objective case against the critics can be summarized as:

1) He is an after-the-fact critic. By the time his criticisms appear in the daily papers, the show is over. Because of this unusual situation the television critic does not serve a major function of a true critic—to direct people to or away from a particular show.

2) He has no influence—neither with the industry or with his readers.

3) He is not sympathetic with the problems which the people of the television industry and their associates must contend with in presenting a television show.

4) He is more concerned with the "cultural shows" like Hallmark Hall of Fame and DuPont Show of the Month, than he is with the shows that the majority of viewers watch, like Twenty One and Gunsmoke.

5) He is not an expert. He is expected to evaluate such a wide variety of programs that he cannot possibly be an expert on any particular kind of program.

In answer to these charges the critics have agreed in part, denied other charges, and ignored still other charges. They have, for example, admitted that after-the-fact criticism is an unusual aspect of television criticism. Gould would like this changed and has actually campaigned to get critics the privilege of advanced previews.
He got little support even from other critics, like Crosby. The fact that Crosby was not interested in attending preview showings could possibly have been influenced by the fact that his column is syndicated, and for that reason does not appear until several days after a show has been performed. It should also be noted that Kirkley and Kern frequently gave advanced attention to shows they expected to be outstanding.

Whether critics have influence or not is an area that still needs more objective research. The McGrady report could hardly be considered a conclusive report. Too many questions remain unanswered. How, for example, do you measure the influence of a television critic on viewers over an extended period of time? Is it possible that he gradually elevates or changes the tastes of viewers? Also, can a researcher like McGrady expect representatives of the television industry and advertising agencies to admit that they have been influenced by critics? Have playwrights, actors, performers learned from reading the critics, and if so, are they willing to admit it? Until such questions are given more objective investigation, the question of the critic's influence will remain unanswered.

That critics are unsympathetic to the problems of the industry, has not been fully denied. Gould, as a spokesman for the critics, has said that it was his job to understand the problems of the industry, but that he could not lower his standards because he was aware of such problems. If he did, he reasoned, his standards would gradually become lower and lower until they were worthless. There is enough
evidence in the writings of the other critics to assume that they agree with Gould.

Nor have Gould, Crosby, and Kirkley denied that they have given more attention to what has been considered the better programs on television--plays, specials, etc. To justify this, a two-part explanation has been given. First, programs such as plays and specials have often been big budget shows and for this reason, newsworthy. Part of a critic's job is reporting the news. Second, they have said that many of the routine programs, such as a filmed series, leave them with nothing to write about after the first few shows.

The final charge that critics review so many different kinds of shows that they cannot be expected to be experts on any one type of program, has been answered only in part. Gould has said simply that expertism is the order of the day and that he is as qualified to judge a program as is a network official who passes on all shows.

III - The Scope, Limitations, and Organization of the Investigation

The five major charges which make up the case against the television critic are: (1) he is an after-the-fact critic and for that reason does not serve the major function of a critic--to direct his readers to or away from the subject of his review; (2) he has little or no influence; (3) he is unsympathetic to the problems of the industry; (4) he is overly concerned with the cultural programs; and (5) he is not an expert. The first charge seems especially damaging because of the implications that it carries. The inference that can be easily made if after-the-fact criticism is dismissed simply because
it follows a program, is that the critic's only responsibility should be a concern for the object of the moment.

The fallacy of such reasoning is that it has a tendency to reduce the status of a critic to the level of a publicity agent. Thus the book critic is evaluated by the number of books he sells and the theatre critic is judged by the number of theatre tickets he sells. When this theory is carried to its ultimate conclusion, the efforts of the television critic are worthless, because he has no opportunity to sell a particular program.

However comforting such thinking may be to the enemies of the television critic, it must be assumed that the critic of any media is more than a publicity agent. He must also be regarded as an experienced judge with logical reasons behind the verdicts that he hands down.

This implies, of course, that the critic's opinion is based on more than a mere snap judgment. It implies that his opinions are based upon some set of standards or criteria that he has developed over a period of time. It further implies that he has made his standards of evaluation known, and that as a fair judge, he has attempted to apply his standards with some degree of consistency.

Consequently, the scope of this investigation will be based on three assumptions about the four television critics under consideration. The problem will be to test these assumptions:

1) The four critics have developed a set of recognizable standards for evaluating a television program.

2) They have communicated their standards to their readers.
3) Such standards have been applied with some degree of consistency.

Certain limitations to such a study are necessary. It is obvious that all television programs cannot be judged by a single set of standards. Thus it has been necessary to select a particular kind of program for consideration. In this instance, live television plays of sixty minutes in length or longer have been chosen. There were several reasons for choosing live plays:

1) From the earliest days of nationwide television until the 1957-58 season live television plays were an important source of network programming.

2) A preliminary survey of all the columns of the four critics for a five-year period showed that they had reviewed a sufficient number of plays to give depth to an investigation.

3) Live television plays have been considered one of the unique art-forms developed by television—a combination of the living stage and the movies yet with distinct characteristics of its own.

4) After enjoying tremendous popularity for several years, the live television play almost disappeared entirely in the 1959-60 season. Many blamed the critics for this.

Plays of less than sixty minutes have been disregarded because the half-hour live drama had practically vanished by the 1954-55 season. Of the few that were presented very little attention was paid them by the critics. The long filmed dramatic show was not considered because there were very few of them until the advent of Playhouse 90 in the 1956-57 season.
Finally the investigation will be limited primarily to a consideration of the scripts. This action largely excludes any evaluation of what the four critics have said about production techniques and acting. The exceptions will be in those cases when the critics have thought that production techniques or acting had an unusual influence on the script. There are three reasons for this course of action:

1) Reviews of television plays have generally been much shorter than reviews of Broadway plays. For this reason the critic was likely to cover production techniques and acting in a sentence or two.

2) In productions of television plays it was frequently difficult for the critic to know who was responsible for what he saw. In addition to playwrights, directors, and producers, network officials and advertising agencies had a hand in shaping many plays. In some cases, such as Kraft Theatre, the producing agency had a policy of not giving credit lines to any of the production personnel.

3) For many years TV actors, especially in original productions, were virtually unknown, and for that reason were not newsworthy.

For the purpose of organization the criticism of live plays will be considered under two major headings—Adaptations and Originals. The term Adaptation applies to plays adapted from such media as Broadway plays, novels, classics, and children's stories, and the term Original applies to plays especially written for television. Adaptations are further divided into two parts—those that the critics found satisfactory and those that the critics found unsatisfactory.
With these limitations and organization in mind the following three chapters will consider reviews under these headings: Adaptations That Were Judged Satisfactory, Adaptations That Were Judged Unsatisfactory, and Critical Appraisal of Original Plays for Live Television. The objective will be to discover what standards the four critics have established collectively and individually.
CHAPTER III

FOOTNOTES

1. Patrick M. McGrady, Jr., loc. cit.
2. Ibid., pp. 3-4.
3. Ibid., p. 4.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p. 7.
6. Ibid., pp. 10-11.
8. Ibid.
10. Ibid., pp. 8-10.
11. Ibid., p. 9.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., p. 11.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., p. 9.
17. Ibid., p. 21.
18. Ibid., pp. 21, 23.
19. Ibid., p. 22.
20. Ibid.


24. Ibid., p. 40.


27. Ibid.


31. Time, loc. cit.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid., p. 78.

38. Ibid.


40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. McGrady, *loc. cit.*
48. Ibid.
50. Ibid., p. ix.
51. Ibid., p. x.
52. Ibid., p. 290.
54. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
60. Donald Kirkley, personal letter, November 7, 1958.
61. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
CHAPTER IV

ADAPTATIONS THAT WERE CONSIDERED SATISFACTORY

Plays for television were adapted from many sources during the period from 1953 to 1959. Past Broadway plays, vintage Broadway musicals, movies, short stories, and classics were the primary sources, and while Crosby, Gould, and Kirkley had repeatedly expressed a preference for original plays, they were favorably impressed with many of the adaptations. In fact, approximately 50 per cent of reviews of all the plays reviewed were favorable.\(^1\)

The division of the materials in Chapter IV and Chapter V is not rigidly fixed. Basically the criticisms of adaptations that were judged satisfactory will be considered in this chapter, and the criticisms of plays that were considered unsatisfactory will be considered in Chapter V. However, it must be pointed out that the titles of a few plays will appear in both chapters. There are two reasons for this. First, there were several plays that were considered satisfactory in part and unsatisfactory in other parts. Second, the four critics did not always agree on a particular play or on the reasons for its success or failure.

Essentially, however, an attempt has been made to include the criticisms under headings that seemingly indicate where a particular standard of criticism has been used. Where decided differences of
opinion exist over a particular play, mention will be made of this fact.

Adaptations will be considered under the headings Adaptations of Classics, Adaptations of Famous Children's Stories, Adaptations of Musicals, Adaptations of Recent Broadway Plays, Adaptations of Older Broadway Plays, and Adaptations of Novels.

I - Adaptations of Classics

Adaptations of Greek Classics. Plays in this section are identified as classics because one or more critics have referred to them as classics, and while the term was never specifically defined, the implications were that a classic play includes not only the traditional Greek, Roman, and Shakespearean plays, but also modern plays that are considered among the best of their kind.

Kirkley enthusiastically supported the classics on television. He reviewed several and seldom had anything but praise for both the plays and for the television industry's efforts in bringing the classics to the television audience. He was particularly impressed with Greek tragedies which he found ideally suited for television. A quote from his review of Antigone explains why:

The great Greek dramatists wrote for television, although they did not dream of this. Every factor of their style lends itself perfectly to the new medium. The unity of time and place, the chorus speaking directly to the audience, the big scenes in which only two or three characters participate, the relatively simple settings, all these make it possible to televise the old masters with ease and with telling effect.²

The appropriateness of Greek plays for television was again pointed out by Kirkley when he noted how well the unities of time,
place, and action, common to Greek plays, adapted to the television screen in *Oedipus Rex*. He observed also that the actors had rightly performed in a lower key than in the stage presentation in order to keep the play from being too overpowering.³

Kirkley nominated *The Iliad* as the best adaptation of the 1955 season. He was impressed with the brilliant characterization, the excellent staging and the skillful use of lights and shadowy backgrounds to suggest the city, plain, and Greek camps. Because of such distinguished production he said: "... Television is rapidly becoming the custodian of the classics." The Omnibus production "... caught up the mighty story in a free translation well within the range of television ... and without writing down to the viewers."⁴

As had Kirkley, Crosby said the classics were well suited to television. However, he had some reservations about Greek tragedy. His review of *The Iliad* told why. He awarded Omnibus a medal for attempting the classic and another for getting away with it as well as they had, but suggested that *The Iliad* has suffered the same fate as former Greek tragedies on television. It had been produced on a human rather than epic scale with not enough warriors, actors, spectacles, or personalities of heroic stature. "The heroine," he concluded, "... could have launched 200 ships but not a thousand. ... the dialogue was alarmingly colloquial at times."⁵

Praise for a classic by Kern was rare. She declared classics a bore and seriously questioned whether they should even be produced on
television. Surprisingly, however, she liked The Iliad and praised Omnibus for

... taking a classic from the schoolroom and breathing fire and life into it. It demonstrated why Homeric verse is still studied and admired. ... an exciting experience, packed with emotion, pathos, and fascination.6

Adaptations from Shakespeare. More numerous than productions of Greek tragedies were productions of Shakespeare. Those receiving critical attention were Twelfth Night, Macbeth, King Lear, The Taming of the Shrew, Romeo and Juliet, Richard II, and Othello. Generally, all were well received by Kirkley, Crosby, and Gould. Only Twelfth Night was found wanting in some respects by all three critics.

Macbeth received unusually high praise from Kirkley and Crosby. Kirkley wrote that Macbeth was as close to perfection as we are apt to get until new inventions arrive to carry forward the marvelous medium, which is television, toward new goals.7

Kirkley gave three reasons for Macbeth's success: First, the play's unique blend of violence and poetry was ideally suited for television. Second, it was produced by and starred in by Maurice Evans. Third, television's flexibility gave the play more movement and vitality than it ever had on the traditional stage.8

Crosby was equally enthusiastic about Macbeth. He described it as the most successful Shakespearean play yet produced on television. He thought the play itself was largely responsible since it was the shortest and tightest of Shakespeare's plays. This, Crosby reasoned,
gave the producers time to fully develop the plot and characterizations: "... the grand design of the play came through in all its meticulous and powerful detail."9

King Lear, an Omnibus production with Orson Welles in the title role, brought mixed reviews. None were completely favorable or unfavorable. Crosby's review was perhaps the most interesting. He said that King Lear was difficult to do in any medium because the characters were difficult to appreciate, and because the ending was difficult to handle. On television, he said, these difficulties were intensified since there was insufficient time to develop the play's fuller meaning. King Lear had come to life beautifully and the difficult ending had been handled well.10

As with Greek plays, Kern described Shakespeare more an undertaking than entertainment. King Lear was another rare exception. She thought the play was well edited, well presented, and well paced. In addition, she said that Allistaire Cook's introduction helped viewers better understand the play.11

A high point in Shakespeare on television was The Taming of the Shrew. Maurice Evans produced and starred in the Hallmark Hall of Fame presentation. The highly stylized production drew heavily from the Commedia dell 'Arte for masks and costumes. It also utilized unique, suggestive sets, such as a boxing ring for the great argument. Ordinarily the critics had scorned unusual production techniques because they felt that the story was often sacrificed. This was not true with The Taming of the Shrew. Gould wrote in high enthusiasm:

... Evans as yet undefeated as a television producer.
... the cleverest, gayest, most satisfactory Shakespearean
comedy staged in a lifetime of any medium. Evans drew freely from the style developed by the Commedia dell'Arte with much use of masks, costumes, harlequins, dance and pantomime sequences. ... a most infectiously inventive production. ... a riotous mardi gras without detracting from either the clarity or humor of the original.12

Kirkley's review of The Taming of the Shrew agreed with Gould's opinion. He particularly liked the quality of the adaptation and the style of production. He suggested the play should become part of a repertory.13

Kern's review of The Taming of the Shrew contained an interesting aside. She said that she hadn't watched the film of Richard III because she mistakenly believed nobody else would. Surprised when it was reported that forty to fifty million had watched, she decided not to miss The Taming of the Shrew. Praising it as a fast-moving ninety minutes, Kern reminded all that this was high praise when it was well known that she disliked "... Shakespeare and surrealistic, over-arty sets and staged dramatics."14

Romeo and Juliet, produced by the Old Vic Company, inspired Crosby to flights of poetic criticism:

As stripped down for television ... the action started immediately. ... It never let up. ... It moved like lightning, this wildly implausible romance, and the poetry struck sparks that lit up the sky.

... There was little wasted motion or panoply for panoply's sake or outsized dramatic gestures.

... By that [ensemble] I mean not any one actor doing any one thing, but all of them on stage at once, or in pairs, or in some group collectively acting--that's where they can give our own Actors Studio bunch lessons in theatrical effectiveness.15
Kirkley liked *Romeo and Juliet* but was less enthusiastic than Crosby. He confessed he had seen better all-around productions of *Romeo and Juliet*, but never a more brilliant Juliet than Clare Bloom, nor a more satisfying Romeo than John Neville. He thought perhaps the play had been hurt slightly because of the cutting, but admitted that the editing had been done with skill.16

The production of *Romeo and Juliet* also served to point out a fundamental difference in the philosophy of criticism between Gould and Kern. The difference arose when Kern questioned whether a program such as *Romeo and Juliet* should be telecast at peak listening hours. She contended that viewers had only a few hours of listening each evening and that the ratings clearly indicated preferences for *Twenty One* and *I Love Lucy*.17

Gould protested strongly. He defended the network for presenting *Romeo and Juliet* and pointed out that only in television are totally dissimilar attractions equated and the loser tossed aside. In other arts such as literature, fine art, and music, he reasoned, all other materials are not discarded simply because the majority of viewers like only one type; whereas in television everything must meet the single test of popularity. He granted that *Romeo and Juliet* had been badly beaten by *I Love Lucy*, but pointed out that ten to twenty million television viewers had nevertheless watched. From this Gould argued that the only way a program can be evaluated is on its own merits:

If comparative rating is accepted as the only valid measure of success, . . . there is bound to be a gradual disappearance of the finer things on TV. . . . Video advertisers live by a code . . . : how much does it cost [to reach] a prospective customer?
This code is being extended to far broader spheres of our culture: Shakespeare, literate commentary, the programs that endeavor to educate news reporting.

Economics are at the root of this cultural evil.

Television's whole concept of trying to equate unlikes should be abandoned, Gould reasoned, or everything is bound to turn out alike. The base of television will narrow and mediocrity will be prevalent. The crying need of television is for a barometer that makes allowances for initiative and individuality in programming.

One of the most strikingly beautiful columns was Kirkley's review of King Richard II. It is significant because it has some unique thoughts about television as a medium:

Two hours went rapidly by. All sense of time was lost, as the electronic pencil traced its millions upon millions of lines across the cold, gray Looking Glass. . . . On Sunday afternoon, in a darkened room we turned a dial and were transported back half a thousand years; and we watched the Second Richard endure his tragedy again, as seen through mind's eye of our foremost poet.

January 24, 1954. A wooden box masking tubes and wires and electric current coming by complicated waves from Susquehanna, a loop of metal on the roof. An image in shades of gray that seemed to move; and we were far, far back in time, sharing the sorrows of an ancestor of Elizabeth II, following the grim power politics of the nobles who de-throned him.

We were saddened, enraged, soothed, exhilarated by the thoughts and feelings stirred in us by the melodious, rolling, thundering, musing, compassionate singing words.

This is where television meets and merges with the living theatre. It is a flat, miniature stage, to be sure, but cause and effect are essentially the same. . . .

This is the thing to remember, in television as in the motion pictures: it is not the means of communication
between playwright and spectator which counts: it is the response in the spectator's mind. When the history is written, last Sunday may well be the date set down for television coming of age.\textsuperscript{20}

Adaptations of Shaw. Three plays by George Bernard Shaw were produced during 1955-56 season: Caesar and Cleopatra, The Devil's Disciple, and Man and Superman. Caesar and Cleopatra was given favorable reviews by Kirkley and Crosby, but Gould did not like it.

Contrary to the usual attitude, Kirkley believed that cutting the play had helped it. He said that many of the tired jokes had been eliminated but there was still sufficient time to develop the story and characterizations. "Shaw wrote in a gay, whimsical mood," Kirkley concluded, "and much of the whimsey and fun remained."\textsuperscript{21}

Recalling earlier plays by Shaw during the television season, Crosby said of Caesar and Cleopatra:

Shaw is getting to be one of the best writers television has to offer. The play was written in 1908 when Shaw still had some reverence for the ordinary conventions of the theatre and could still suppress the marvelous fertility of his intelligence and stick to the story.\textsuperscript{22}

Another Shaw play, The Devil's Disciple, was praised by Gould and Kirkley. Gould was impressed with the cast which included Maurice Evans, Ralph Bellamy, and Dennis King: "... All frolicked through the parts with enormous style and relish. ... for sheer fun [the play] rated four stars."\textsuperscript{23}

Kirkley's review of The Devil's Disciple recalled Crosby's remarks about Caesar and Cleopatra. He said The Devil's Disciple was written when Shaw still had enough respect for the play-goers to amuse them, while not forgetting to educate them. "The play followed the
conventional rules of playwriting," Kirkley said, "and remains fresh and charming and great fun."24

Man and Superman was equally well received. Gould said:

It was a heady wine, indeed, with fun and substance in one sparkling package. For the set owner who lives on short rations of mature wit the Shaw vehicle is a supreme relief. To hear something said, and said with vigor in a point of view, is a welcome change. . . . ninety minutes of theatre that restored a viewer's faith in a home screen. Shaw showed television that it was words that make a true spectacular.25

Kirkley thought that Man and Superman was a too literal photographic copy of the stage play. However, he admitted that the brilliant talk and expert acting were sufficient to make the play successful.26

Adaptations from other sources. A group of plays produced by DuPont Show of the Month and Hallmark Hall of Fame were also considered classics. These included The Count of Monte Cristo, Wuthering Heights, The Prince and the Pauper, The Bridge of San Luis Rey, A Tale of Two Cities, and Green Pastures. All were ninety-minute productions, or longer.

When it was produced in 1958, The Count of Monte Cristo was one of the most technically complex programs ever attempted in a television studio. The task of reducing the complex script to a coherent ninety-minute play without losing the spirit of the original novel, and staging it live in a studio, was thought to be so difficult that it might be impossible to do at all. With this thought in mind Crosby said that he had not looked forward to seeing the show. However, after seeing it, he said that he was pleasantly surprised and amazed that
live television could telescope all the costumes and scenery into ninety minutes. He wrote:

I must say I looked forward to it with rather an irritating feeling that it was going to be a bloody bore, and wound up having a wonderful time. ... [Summer Locke Elliott] reduced the script to a very coherent-type and constantly gripping ninety minutes.27

Gould too was impressed by Elliott's skill in reducing the massive novel while still preserving the main threads of the story. He thought the story had held together well and that the characterization had been preserved. He said that any liberties taken with the script involved simplification rather than sacrifice of vital points.28

Wuthering Heights, another gigantic effort, received mixed reviews. Crosby said that Wuthering Heights was as difficult an assignment as had ever been undertaken on live television. He admitted that he had thought Talent Associates Productions was inviting disaster and unfavorable comparisons, but to his relief he happily reported that the play had been a smashing success. He reasoned that the novel apparently propelled actors and producers to heights they had never before achieved:

Costigan wrote with shattering power. ... The passions are not only unbriddled, but also unrelieved. ... When [the play] is compressed to ninety minutes, the viewer is wrung dry. ... There is no let-up. There is no respite. There is no respite at all. ... Richard Burton was 100% animal, which I should say is about 10% more than Miss Bronte had in mind. Still, he lit up the tube in a way that must have left the ladies gasping with delight.29

Kirkley voted Wuthering Heights the high point of the season. He said, "It captured the dark, brooding mood with amazing vividness,
while remaining curiously moving." He acknowledged that the climax probably stretched to the limit the intimate medium of television.30

The Bridge of San Luis Rey was reviewed by all four critics. Kern dismissed it quickly, while the three men wrote rave notices. Kern wrote: "All in all, this was the kind of spectacular which makes watching television a terribly arduous way to earn a living."31

Kirkley rated the television adaptation of The Bridge of San Luis Rey better than either of the two film versions and declared that the overall production was among the best in the history of television. He lauded Ludi Clair for adapting the difficult and illusive Wilder style and David Susskind for giving the production the flexibility of a movie while maintaining the quality of living theatre.32

Crosby's review included some remarks that are worth considering. He wrote:

"The Bridge of San Luis Rey" had all the things that big television ought to have. It started with an important book. . . . It was beautifully cast with competent and frequently brilliant players who were not necessarily big names. It was done live and it was superbly directed.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

The characters were fresh, original, powerful and touched with nobility. . . . [The play] seemed terribly urgent and compelling and real. . . . I don't fully understand it, but it seems important anyhow.33

Gould also recognized that Ludi Clair had overcome formidable dramatic obstacles in giving the play theatrical cohesion. He said the problem had been to substantially rearrange and integrate the material while keeping sufficient detail to preserve the spirit of the original. In this effort Gould thought Clair had been successful. He
was also pleased with the sets which he said were appropriately lavish without intruding on the spirit of the play. 34

The Prince and the Pauper was another ambitious undertaking. It required the playwright, L. Slate, to preserve not only the spirit of the Twain novel, but also to make the make-believe believable. Obviously Gould thought Slate succeeded. He said it was

. . . meticulously faithful to the spirit of the Twain classic, yet offered all the sweep of inspired theatre. . . . adhered to the elementary requirements of true make-believe with unvarying faith in the reality of what was being done. . . . a major accomplishment of this or any other video season. 35

Kirkley expanded his review of The Prince and the Pauper to voice an opinion about the shift of video drama from New York to Hollywood. Apparently disturbed by the announced move, Kirkley said that the success of The Prince and the Pauper proved there was nothing wrong with television that couldn't be cured by such artistic productions from New York. He added that Studio One's announced reason for moving--availability of stars, writers and directors--was 'hogwash.' 36

Crosby said that he had not looked forward to seeing The Prince and the Pauper, since advanced publicity had announced that the play would use sixteen sets and would be done live. Doubtful that the feat could be accomplished, Crosby was pleased with the results. He added significantly that he was pleased the show had been done live from New York. 37

Only Kirkley commented favorably on A Tale of Two Cities, but was so enthusiastic that his remarks are worth noting. Kirkley
called A Tale of Two Cities a major triumph of epic scope and said it was better than any of the earlier movie versions. He said:

The masterful adaptation cut away the dead wood . . . and picked out the essential episodes and . . . basic characterizations. The play engendered as much emotional voltage as has been noted in any TV drama in the last decade.38

He selected for special praise Robert Mulligan's excellent direction of mob scenes, and the utilization of thirty-six sets without letting them become obtrusive. Kirkley concluded by again calling attention to the superiority of live television from New York over Hollywood.

Only Crosby reviewed a Robert Montgomery production of Great Expectations. He said that the adapter, Doria Folliat, had wisely attempted to do only a part of the novel:

... The best way to tackle Dickens is doing it in parts. The two segments selected by Montgomery and his staff were fairly self-contained dramas. ... The spirit of Dickens was well preserved. ... Dickens could provide a treasure trove for television providing producers didn't try to swallow all of his novels all in one gulp.39

The 1957 production of Green Pastures will be the final play considered under the broad heading of classics. Unfortunately, it was produced on the same night that Mike Todd gave his tremendous party at Madison Square Garden celebrating Around the World in 80 Days. Trendex gave Green Pastures six to seven million viewers and Todd twenty million. The critics had been given a preview of the play.

Kirkley said the critics who saw the preview had agreed that it was one of the most beautiful things ever staged on television. He praised Mark Connelly, the playwright and the adapter, for the
excellence of his script, and it was noted that the curtailed running
time was no great handicap. 40

Crosby thought Green Pastures " . . . as fresh and endearing
and as moving as ever. . . . The play still has its tremendous
moments. . . . The color was superb and frequently looked like a
religious painting." 41

II - Adaptations of Famous Children's Stories

Dramatization and musical adaptations of well known children's
stories were common. The basic measuring rod used by the critics was
a comparison of the adaptation with the original story. If it was
thought the spirit of make-believe had been preserved, the adaptation
was generally judged successful— if not, unsuccessful.

Unquestionably the most successful children's story adaptation
was the musical version of Peter Pan, produced on television in the
1954-55 season after an artistically successful, but financially
unsuccessful, run on Broadway. So successful was the first televi-
sion performance that it was repeated later.

As he frequently had, when a play was particularly successful,
Gould wrote two columns on Peter Pan. The first was written the day
following the show, and the second for the Sunday edition of The New
York Times. The day following the first production Gould wrote:
"Fairy dust has been sprinkled from coast to coast. . . . an unfor-
gettable evening of video theatre. . . . a combination of sheer make-
believe and broad nonsense." Gould said the sense of theatre
perspective had been amazingly well sustained and that with planned
close-ups had enhanced the feeling of association. He commended the
dances, color and utilization of space.  

The second column, written for the Sunday paper, analyzed the
success of Peter Pan in detail:

. . . Call it a sublime fusion of skill and inspiration.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

The greatness of the "Peter Pan" telecast stemmed
from a marriage of media under ideal circumstances. The
advantages of "live" television and the advantages of
living theatre were merged as one. Alone neither medium
could have offered the miracle. . .

The living theatre . . . has managed in the age of mass
media to hold on to something vital and precious: the
time to be creative. Television will never survive with­
out her.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

. . . True television is "live" video--the actuality,
reality and immediacy of a living and breathing per­
formance that happens as you see it.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

The theatre and television need each other, artistically
and economically. Happily, they already are complementary,
not competitive.  

Kirkley's review of Peter Pan can be summarized in a single
statement: " . . . The story came into your home so vividly that you
were almost in the theatre." His only reservation concerned the
production techniques. He thought the television production had been
too much a photographic reproduction of the play and was disappointed
that no attempts had been made to use special television techniques,
such as specially designed sets and a more intimate style.
Crosby extolled the earlier production of Peter Pan, but his review of the repeat performance was of more interest. He measured the success of the play from the attentiveness of his children as they watched. He noticed that the children were completely absorbed, a condition he had seldom noticed on other television shows. He attributed this to the sincerity and honesty with which the play had been done.

He also admitted that he had been wrong in assuming that the second production could not improve over the first. He noted that little bits of business had been added and that little slips of dialogue that were unnecessary had come out. He also thought that camera work and lighting were better.

Another musical adaptation of a well-known children's story that received wide publicity and a high budget production was Cinderella. The ninety-minute adaptation, with an original musical score, was written by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, and starred Julie Andrews, Jon Cypres, Edie Adams, Howard Lindsay, Dorothy Stickney, and Kay Ballard.

Of the four critics only Janet Kern wrote a "rave" review:

... It's a rare television show which leaves the professional viewer at a loss for her daily ration of words, but that about sums it up for "Cinderella." ... Just about the most delightful, enchanting, thoroughly beautiful display of entertainment magic ever to cross a coaxial cable.

Gould, Kirkley, and Crosby were less enthusiastic. Their common complaint was that the story had lost much of its warm spirit of make-believe. Gould said Cinderella was "... ninety Broadway
minutes produced with characteristic skill, dexterity and lilt. . . . a pleasant evening and at moments an enchanting one." He pointed out, however, that it lacked the warmth of the original story.48

With a note of cynicism Crosby observed that Rodgers and Hammerstein had made speeches about preserving the qualities of Cinderella and then "... modernized the hell out of it. All the changes added modernity, humor, humanness and tightened the motivation, but it drained out some of the magic."49

Kirkley called Cinderella "... a pleasant, mildly amusing version staged with elegance and taste," but added, "much of the magic was missing."50

During the 1957-58 season, Shirley Temple launched a high budget series of fairy tale and children's story adaptations called Shirley Temple's Storybook, a mixture of live and filmed shows. The initial production, Beauty and the Beast, was generally well received by the critics.

In Crosby's opinion Beauty and the Beast was actually a distillation of all fairy stories which accounted in part for its success. He praised both the simplicity of the dialogue and the seriousness with which the story was told. However, he questioned whether ninety minutes may not have been too long for a simple story. He concluded that the excellence of the production proved television could produce a simple story with great clarity and attention to detail.51

Kern called Beauty and the Beast "... a superb production. . . . a triumph of electronic beauty."52
Gould wrote that *Beauty and the Beast* was

... presented with so much charm and sensitivity that it restored a viewer's faith in the capability of video to treat a fairy tale with civilized intelligence.

... there was none of the cumbersome modernization and innovation that TV so often superimposes on a child's classic. The story ... had virtue of simplicity yet it was presented with complete earnestness. Such is the magic of the fairy tale: take the narrative seriously and it becomes enchanting make-believe.33

Kirkley's review contained an odd note. Admitting there was little question that *Beauty and the Beast* had been done well, he questioned whether it should have been done at all. He said the play struck him as a

... silly, barbaric affair and a waste of time in a critical period. ... To what extent, I wonder, do these tales of magic ... appeal to children brought up on a diet of Mickey Mouse, Gene Autry, and Popeye ... ?54

Kirkley found *Jack and the Beanstalk*, another high budget children's story set to music, the most heartening thing on television during the season: "... a beautiful blend of music, comedy, dancing, specialties and excellent writing." He especially praised Helen Deutsch, the writer, for taking her task seriously and for eliminating much of the violence and crime from the old story. He concluded that it "... proved again the medium's capacity for handling big scale fantasy at a fraction of time and money movies use."55

In a rare instance of disagreement with Kirkley, Gould disliked *Jack in the Beanstalk*. He thought the story had been too greatly distorted.56
III - Adaptations of Musicals

Judging from the opinions of the four television critics, there had been very few successful musicals produced on television. However, during the 1954-56 period, several of the vintage operettas were well received. Among these were Naughty Marietta, The Chocolate Soldier, Rosalinda, The Merry Widow, and The Desert Song.

Crosby called The Merry Widow, produced by Omnibus in 1954, "... a good-natured romp with everybody having a good time." And he added that he was pleased Omnibus had avoided the custom of updating old chestnuts. "... 'The Merry Widow' is such magnificent mallarkey that you just better not monkey with it. Just leave it alone and play it for laughs."57

In reviewing Naughty Marietta Kern called Liebman "... a master of vintage musical delights," and thought how wonderful it would be to give The Student Prince and Gilbert and Sullivan "... instead of inept musical reviews and mumified Broadway musicals."58

Kirkley gave Naughty Marietta a 21-gun salute and noted that it "... kept the pleasant, old-fashioned charm."59

Both Kirkley and Kern lauded The Chocolate Soldier. Kern called it "... a faithful translation of the old operetta gem."60 Kirkley said it had a pleasant old-fashioned charm which he was glad they resisted the temptation to update.61

Rosalinda was presented by Producers Showcase in 1956, and temporarily at least, marked the end of the old operettas on television.
Like many of the others, it was presented as a vintage piece. Rosalinda was reviewed by Crosby, Kirkley, and Kern.

Crosby found it "... unabashed smaltz and a lot of fun. ... This nonsense was done with a broad wink at the TV cameras and done well." There had been no attempt to update the show, which pleased Crosby.62

Kern called Rosalinda the best adaptation of one of the old operettas that she had seen. "The style," she noted, "was kept deliberately old-fashioned and ... was done with tongue-in-cheek, as it should be."63

Three additional musicals will be finally considered. They are Mayerling, Annie Get Your Gun, and Ruggles of the Red Gap—all high budget, widely publicized productions. The reviews of Mayerling and Ruggles of the Red Gap were of interest because of the wide difference in critical opinion. Gould and Kirkley particularly disliked Ruggles of the Red Gap. Both thought too many liberties had been taken with the story in an effort to accommodate the music.64, 65 Kern thought otherwise. She said that Ruggles of the Red Gap "... represents magnificently the new era of taste and showmanship in selection of specturals. ... David Shaw adapted the novel with consummated skill."66

In a rare instance of agreement Kirkley and Kern thought Mayerling was a good show. Kirkley found it "... a beautiful and moving teleplay. ... Litvak approached TV with feeling of respect."67

Kern called Mayerling "... a fine production of a long-to-be-remembered love story." She also added as a footnote to her column
that Ruggles of the Red Gap had been beaten badly by The Ed Sullivan Show. From this she concluded: "Habit is still the strongest viewer motivation. Sporadicism is the handicap of all spectaculars and the death sentence of most."68

Annie Get Your Gun starred Mary Martin and John Raitt. Kern, Kirkley, and Crosby gave the musical a favorable review. Much of the success of the musical was attributed to Mary Martin. "Without Mary Martin," Crosby said, "'Annie Get Your Gun' would have been an over-long and expensive musical. . . . She made the production one of the memorable experiences of this year."69

Kirkley found Annie Get Your Gun "... a pure and continuous delight. . . . no better musical adaptation for television."70

Kern described Annie Get Your Gun as a musical that provided a solid dose of rollicking entertainment of a type which seems to have disappeared:

If TV really is obliged to perform some sort of service for mankind, . . . I can't think of a better service than reminding the world and those who create the world's entertainment of the worth and wonder of this lilting, laugh-rich type of fare.71

IV - Adaptations of Broadway Plays

By far the greatest source material for television adaptations was past Broadway plays. This was especially true of the high budget, prestige television playhouses such as Producers Showcase, Hallmark Hall of Fame, DuPont Show of the Month, Playhouse 90, and Omnibus. Such television theatres broke the rigid weekly hour-long pattern of Kraft Theatre and Studio One by presenting longer plays. Except for
Playhouse 90, the new prestige theatres gave monthly performances. For greater clarity the reviews by the critics will be considered under two major headings: (1) Criticisms of plays that were either recent Broadway plays or Broadway plays still popular with summer theatres and little theatre groups, and (2) Plays that were once popular but are now only rarely produced. Primary consideration will be given to plays that two or more critics have reviewed and to reviews where a critic has written something that appears significant.

Successful adaptations of recent or still popular Broadway plays. Among the reviews that contained attitudes of significance were criticisms of State of the Union, Caine Mutiny, Blithe Spirit, The Lark, Cradle Song, Dial "M" for Murder, The Four Poster, Barretts of Wimpole Street, and The Women. The earliest of the group was State of the Union, presented by Producers Showcase in 1954. It was adapted for television by the original playwrights, Howard Lindsay and Russell Crouse. Crosby, Gould, and Kirkley reviewed the play and all liked it. All three critics made special mention of the fact that the play had been updated without having its original meaning hurt. Crosby said it was "... up-to-date as yesterday's newspaper. ... the play was about as pertinent and contemporary as anything could be. ... a tremendously honest show." Crosby also applauded the courage of the National Broadcasting Company for permitting the playwrights such wide latitude in their remarks about current politics.\(^\text{72}\)

Kirkley agreed with Crosby. He thought State of the Union fully justified its advanced billing, and that "... the adaptation was
literal and satisfying.” In explaining the success of the play Kirkley wrote: “A shrewd combination of love and politics made the play successful where only a few plays with political themes have been successful.”

Gould said, "The show had something to say amusingly and did it. . . . had genuine laughs."74

The fact that the critics found State of the Union amusing was significant. Of all the plays produced in the 1953-58 period only a very few were intentionally humorous; and of those inclined to be humorous, only a few were judged satisfactory by the critics. The few that found favor with one or more critics included, in addition to State of the Union, Blithe Spirit, The Women, and The Four Poster.

Blithe Spirit was praised by Kirkley, Kern, and Crosby. Kirkley said of Blithe Spirit that it was

... a smash hit. . . . no perceptible diminution of the comedy's effectiveness. . . . Five years of hard rehearsing went into the play and it will be a long time, presumably, before anything so hilarious comes along.75

Kern said that Blithe Spirit had always been a tremendously witty and funny play and that the television version was no exception. "The star virtue of the play," she wrote, "was the dialogue and some of the stars."76

Crosby complimented the play's high polish.77

Concerning The Women Kern wrote, "Everything and everybody involved in the program was superb."78 Kirkley agreed and was more enthusiastic than Kern. He wrote: "The degree of success of the production indicates few plays are beyond the scope of television."79
The Four Poster starred the original actors, Hume Cronin and Jessica Tandy. Kirkley praised the play, but had reservations about the production techniques used. In his opinion the television version was too much a replica of the stage play. 80

The side remarks in Kern's review of The Four Poster, which she called "... a craftsmanlike dish of pathos, romance and reality," are more significant than her thoughts about the play:

... It was particularly outstanding because of its honesty and normalcy, a rare quality in our dramatic, tawdry medium. ... neither scorns humans as psychotic cripples, nor glorifies them as demi-gods. ... The play treats marriage neither as a trap for frustrated fires or as a syrupy state of preserves. The author understands human characters without psychoanalyzing them on the stage. Sex was treated with respect. It was a delight and a relief to find a normal marriage on our screens. 81

Generally regarded as a television high light was the 1955 adaptation of The Caine Mutiny. The play was adapted for television shortly after it closed on Broadway and starred most of the original cast. Like the stage play, the television adaptation used a single interior set with the action confined primarily to the area near the witness stand. The combination of a well written script, polished performances, and restricted action were apparently the ingredients necessary for a good television adaptation.

Gould said the play could have been written for television:

... The carefully edited script retained the absorbing power and intensity of the original and in many ways further enhanced those qualities. The television camera achieved sustained and striking pictorial compositions that implemented yet never interfered. ... The artistry of television was added to the artistry of the stage.
Gould also complimented the polish and discipline of the play, which he attributed to the long Broadway run. 82

Kirkley too praised the fine script:

... The forcefulness of TV drama was never more clearly demonstrated. ... [It] quickly came to a boil and held viewers spellbound. ... [The play] was very well suited to television with one set and the conflict hinging on the clash of personalities. 83

Crosby wrote:

... For all its bareboned simplicity there is a lot of play; a good mystery play, a man's behavior in distress, an arousing sea story. ... Tension was twice as great as the actual incident. ... unfolds yards of exposition so compellingly that it becomes intensely dramatic. 84

Three plays produced in 1956, Cradle Song, The Barretts of Wimpole Street, and The Corn Is Green, brought enthusiastic reviews.

Maurice Evans produced Cradle Song for Hallmark Hall of Fame. It starred Judith Anderson, Evelyn Varden, and Siobhan McKenna. Gould wrote a rare "rave" review:

To have missed "The Cradle Song" yesterday afternoon was to have missed one of the most beautiful and deeply stirring programs that television ever offered. ... had a stirring loveliness and an emotional intensity that has seldom been equaled on the home screen. ... Mr. Evans has greatly enriched all of television. 85

Kern said that Cradle Song "... was a very gentle and moving story. ... The warm scenes did much to restore faith in womanhood." 86

The Barretts of Wimpole Street was of particular interest since it marked the television debut of Kathryn Cornell. Crosby praised Cornell's acting and the formality and richness of the dialogue. As an aside, he reminded the readers of the immensity of television as a medium when he said that an estimated 28 million people saw the play.
This was about fourteen times as many as saw the play on Broadway, on
the road, and overseas. Crosby also said that he did not think the play
had aged too much, a fault he had observed in other adaptations.®

Kirkley found the play such an exquisite love story that it was
hard for him to believe the story had actually happened. "It
achieved a degree of spirituality seldom observed on the modern
stage."®

The Corn Is Green, a play made famous by Ethel Barrymore, was
another Hallmark Hall of Fame presentation. Crosby was delighted with
the TV presentation: "The play was an hour of pure, old-fashioned
enjoyable theatre. . . . doesn't come along often." Concerning the
playwright, he said: "[Williams] has the ability to draw solid char­
acters and nice restraint in the big scenes."®

Gould said that the story had remained powerful and meaningful
with the passage of years, and that it had definite television value.
"On the screen both the poignant and triumphant qualities of the theme
were preserved."®

Shortly after the Broadway closing of The Lark, it was produced
on television starring Julie Harris, Basil Rathbone, and Boris Karloff.
The Lark was one of the few plays that all four critics reviewed. Only
Janet Kern was not completely impressed. She disliked Julie Harris' intepretation of the leading role. However, she conceded that: "If
you saw 'The Lark,' you saw a pretty good television play. If you
missed it, don't beat your head against a wall."®

Kirkley praised the show highly, and included some interesting
remarks about production techniques in his review. He thought that the
television version had not only preserved the emotional impact and
dramatic values of the play, but had also heightened them with the in­
timate close-up pictures. In comparing the staging of the television
version with that of the stage version, he wrote: "The stage version
taxed the capacity of the living theatre, but was handled smoothly
under the flexibility of television."92

Gould, too, praised The Lark. He was highly impressed by Julie
Harris' acting and by the high quality of the stagecraft as conceived
by George Schaefer, producer-director.93

Crosby extolled the acting of Julie Harris and the excellence
of the production, but then added that he thought there had been one
too many Saint Joans recently. "There is a law of diminishing returns,
after a while the wonder begins to diminish. . . . possibly a ten year
rest would help."94

Edward, My Son, starring Robert Morley, was produced by United
States Steel Hour. Crosby's review contained two interesting obser­
vations. He described the play:

"Edward, My Son" is pure, old-fashioned theatre of a sort
you don't see much any more. That is, it's a taut, professional
job in which the individual scenes are more important than the
play as a whole. On the stage these individual scenes had an
emotional impact and a dramatic force that they didn't quite
have on TV.

Crosby also expressed the opinion that stage plays have a distressing
habit of diminishing in stature before the television cameras. He
thought this was because of the close-up type of acting and directing.95

Two later plays were Dial "M" for Murder and The Time of Your
Life. The Hallmark production of Dial "M" for Murder was much the same
production that ran on Broadway. It starred Maurice Evans, Rosemary
Harris and was adapted by Frederick Knott, who did the original stage
play, the movie adaptation, as well as the television adaptation. The
reviews by Crosby, Gould, and Kirkley were very favorable.

Crosby said that he could not remember a more pleasant and ex-
pert ninety minutes of television. He noted that it was much the same
production that had run on Broadway, and that when it had been trans-
planted to television, it was "... honed and pruned and polished.
... Too bad there can't be more productions but there is not enough
time and not enough money."96

Both Gould and Kirkley wrote reviews similar to that of Crosby.
Gould added: "It was a heady luxury for television with adequate
characterizations and good lines."97 Kirkley praised the excellence
of the over-all production and gave special applause for the fine
production techniques.98

The reviews for Time of Your Life, Playhouse 90's initial pro-
duction for the 1958-59 season, were generally favorable. One point
in Crosby's review made it of particular interest. Referring to
earlier Columbia Broadcasting Company shows, Harvey, The Day of the
Wine and Roses, and The Helen Morgan Story, he called Columbia Broad-
casting Company "the drunken network." He recalled that all these
plays had explored the world of alcohol and that all of them had done
an excellent job. From this he concluded that alcohol was dramatically
powerful stuff. Of Time of Your Life he said:

... [It] had the warm, whiskeyish glow of an afternoon.
... Saroyan writes about drunks with compassion, under-
standing and solid research. ... not sure what Saroyan
had in mind, but the characters are pleasant, earthy and reasonable. The dialogue ranges from brilliant to exasperating. ... not dramatically coherent, but coherence isn’t a quality you expect to find in a bar.99

A review of The Lady’s Not for Burning concludes this section.

Crosby praised the blank verse, the play’s wit and the superb dialogue:

After a year of westerns, it was a rare treat to hear a sentence that had a beginning, middle and end. It is genuine make-believe . . . real theatre which revels in language and nobility stimulating the mind, the emotions, the eye and the ear with high aspirations. It’s a romp, but it’s an intelligent one and that is rare indeed.100

Successful adaptations of older Broadway plays. No medium has consumed scripts at the astronomical rate that television has during its relatively brief existence. Kraft Theatre alone used over six hundred scripts during the ten years it presented weekly and twice-weekly shows. During one season when fourteen television theatres were producing live plays, the number of scripts used exceeded five hundred. It is not surprising therefore, that producers quickly exhausted the more current Broadway plays and turned to the older scripts. As might be expected, many were judged outdated, a point to be discussed in the next Chapter. A few, however, apparently stood the test of time. A partial list of the older shows judged satisfactory, at least in part, included The Letter, The Winslow Boy, Reunion in Vienna, and Dodsworth.

The Letter, a Producers Showcase production starring Siobhan McKenna, John Mills, and Michael Rennie, was produced by William Wyler, the movie producer-director. Kirkley, Gould, and Crosby liked the play. They generally agreed that the story was a trifle old-fashioned, but found other virtues that compensated. Crosby said that much of the
success of the play could be attributed to Maugham's great skill as a story writer. Crosby said Maugham made you feel that the story actually happened and that the people were real people. Gould praised the acting and production techniques highly, and said that "... The script was a little creaky now and then, but essentially the story was timely."

Kirkley found the television adaptation of The Letter as gripping and effective as the original stage play.

Dodsworth, another Producers Showcase play, was generally well received. Crosby praised the excellence of David Shaw's adaptation, and the acting skill of Frederic March, Clair Trevor, and Geraldine Fitzgerald. Kirkley thought Dodsworth superior to most television plays, but not as good as the stage play or the movie. He thought the play had lost nothing with the passage of time, but he attributed the shortcomings of the play to Frederic March's interpretation of the hero.

Kern said, "'Dodsworth' is as fine a manner of good theatre as anyone could ask." She also used her review to enlarge upon what she thought good theatre was and should be:

Television offers its best and worst sides when it presents dramatic fare. Numerous shoddy, thrown-together, half-baked melodramas pass for TV "plays" and a multitude of sophomoric outpourings of rebellion and adolescent venom are palmed off as "psychological drama." But TV also offers a rich harvest of fine, professionally mature theatrical fare for our free enjoyment.

The Winslow Boy, a DuPont Show of the Month, was revised in 1958. Crosby and Gould had reservations about the play. Gould said that The Winslow Boy was "... a piece of theatre that still retains high
moral values." He added, however, that the ending was diffused and contrived.107

Crosby called The Winslow Boy a "... conversation play and a sound, careful adaptation. ... I was not deeply moved by it."

Crosby also took the opportunity to criticize DuPont for playing it safe with their choice of plays. He called for more original plays, and said that if Paddy Chayefsky, Robert Arthur, Tad Mosel, and David Shaw were too well fed to write original television scripts, David Susskind, the producer, should try some young unknown writers.108

Robert Shaw adapted Reunion in Vienna for Producers Showcase. It starred Greer Garson and Brian Aherne. Crosby and Kirkley's reviews are very similar. Kirkley thought the adaptation brought out the full flavor of the comedy, but that the period about which the play had been written was so distant that it seemed ancient history. The thing that saved the play was, in Kirkley's opinion, the wit and charm of the dialogue and the fine acting by Garson and Aherne.109 Crosby thought Reunion in Vienna had the charm of a period piece, but agreed that the theme--sympathy for disposed royalty--was no longer fashionable.110

V - Successful Adaptations of Novels

Critics have recognized that plays adapted from novels present the playwright-adapter with tremendous problems. He must condense the novel to conform to a rigid time period, yet retain a coherent script true to the spirit of original material. Only in a relatively few instances has the experiment apparently been satisfactory. A few, however, were thought to be highly satisfactory.
Without question, one of the most successful adaptations was the 1955 Kraft Theatre production of *A Night to Remember*. The critics recognized the play as a great step forward in big scale productions for live television. The re-enactment of the last hours of the Titanic employed 100 actors, 31 scenes, two 3,000 gallon tanks of water, and two detailed replicas of the ship's interior. Nothing like it had been attempted on television. Crosby called it the most complex production in television history and said that the greatest thing about the production was that it had been done at all.\(^1\) In a later column he contrasted television with the movies. He said that when television threatened the movies, the movies went to the wide screen and stories with epic proportions leaving television to do small things like *Marty*. However, with productions like *A Night to Remember*, the movies were again threatened, he thought, and would be forced to find new fields.\(^2\)

Kirkley was certain that *A Night to Remember* would go down in history as one of the most remarkable achievements to date. He pointed out that the story had a feeling of a contemporary newsreel, and that it had not sacrificed in any way for production considerations.\(^3\)

Gould's opinions were similar. He was overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude and complexity of the production. He added significantly that "... Mr. Hill had the discipline not to let this setting run away with his drama."\(^4\)

Other adaptations of novels were not on as spectacular a plane as *A Night to Remember*, but a theme runs through many of the reviews that is worth noting. One of the earliest adaptations in the time
period under consideration was a Robert Montgomery Presents production of Appointment in Samarra. Gould recognized that the adapter, Irving Neiman, had trouble adapting the novel because many of the themes—drunkenness, sex and suicide—were socially unacceptable in television dramas. In appraising the final results, he lauded the play by calling it a superb work of enlightened craftsmanship. Many themes ordinarily avoided were handled in good taste.  

Crosby said the O'Hara novel was a modern American classic and that the television version had come off very well in spite of the many difficulties. He praised the adapter for preserving the spirit of the novel and handling the plot line with great care. He said, however, in talking of the acting, that in television there was an inevitable compression of the original material which frequently directed the emphasis away from the story and to the characterizations.

Crosby's opinion in a review of Lost Weekend indicated what a good television adaptation should be. He said, "'Lost Weekend' is perfect television fare because it moves in a single straight line and deals with a single problem and a single character."  

Kirkley had a slightly different thought in reviewing Lost Weekend. He thought it was a credible and gripping teleplay, but didn't think it had the power and depth of the movie because there was not enough time to develop the desired pitch of terror and pity. He added, however:

Nevertheless, it was a good and sincere attempt and heartening evidence of the ability and willingness of television to come to grips with problems which are neither
commonplace nor petty. Few better dramas have been seen this season.  

Only one successful comedy or farce was found in all the reviews of novel adaptations. This was No Time for Sergeants, produced in 1955 from the best selling novel which was later adapted as a successful stage play and a movie.

Crosby came directly to the point. He said it was "... a pretty funny comedy, a sort of 'See Here, Private Hargrove.' ... Straight dramatic comedy is not always done well on TV, but Alex Segal, who directed it, extracted a lot of laughs."  

Kern decided that an hour was too short to do justice to No Time for Sergeants, but said: "It was sixty side-splitting minutes into which reviewers escaped and in which they lost themselves in laughter." She added that it would have a better chance as a movie or Broadway Show.

Crosby was enthusiastic about the adaptations of William Faulkner novels and eulogized the noted novelist on two occasions. In his 1954 review of An Error in Chemistry he said Faulkner's work was wonderfully well adapted to television and An Error in Chemistry "... may have been the greatest TV drama I have ever seen." Again, in reviewing The Old Man he called Faulkner the greatest television dramatist, and said his stories lend themselves to television with a shattering force.

The next chapter will consider adaptations that were, for the most part, considered unsatisfactory. At the conclusion of Chapter V
an impression of the recognizable standards of criticism gained from reading the columns of the four critics will be summarized.
CHAPTER IV

FOOTNOTES

1. Of all plays reviewed Crosby gave favorable criticisms to approximately 54 per cent; Gould, 50 per cent; Kirkley, 52 per cent; and Kern, 44 per cent.


8. Ibid.


19. Ibid.


92. Donald Kirkley, The Baltimore Sun, February 8, 1957.
CHAPTER V

ADAPTATIONS THAT WERE CONSIDERED UNSATISFACTORY

In the preceding chapter adaptations that had been judged satisfactory by one or more critics were discussed. In this chapter adaptations that were considered unsatisfactory will be discussed. When there has been a difference of opinion between critics concerning a particular play, it will be noted, as it was in Chapter IV.

The following chapter will consider Adaptations That Lost the Spirit of the Original, Adaptations That Were Outdated, Adaptations That Were of a Questionable Nature, and Kern's Approach to Adverse Criticism. (Janet Kern's approach to adverse criticism is so completely different from that of Crosby, Gould, and Kirkley, it will be considered separately.)

I - Adaptations That Lost the Spirit of the Original Material

Over the five-year period the many columns by Gould, Crosby, and Kirkley suggest that the spirit of the original material was most commonly lost in one or more of the following ways: (1) the spirit of make-believe was misplaced, (2) the intimate nature of television was unsatisfactory for some plays, and (3) concern for production techniques was given greater concern than the play's original meaning.
Plays that lost the spirit of make-believe. Adaptations of fairy tales, children's stories, and adult plays that required more than normal suspension of belief, such as fantasies, were frequently accused of misplacing the spirit of the original. A representative list of such plays produced during the 1953 through 1958 period, and reviewed by one or more critics, includes Cinderella, Jack and the Beanstalk, Alice in Wonderland, Hansel and Gretel, Aladdin, Land of Green Ginger, Dick Whittington and His Cat, The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, Connecticut Yankee, Huck Finn, Mrs. McThing and Twelfth Night.

Gould was perhaps his most searching in criticizing productions of fairy tales and children's stories. Any intrusion that was suspected of violating the play's spirit of make-believe was criticized—and frequently quite severely. He declared that fairy tales and traditional children's stories had an honesty, love of beauty, and a child-like revelation and discovery that must be carefully preserved above all other considerations. The careful scrutiny of the Rodgers and Hammerstein production of Cinderella, a musical that he enjoyed, exemplified Gould's uncompromising standards. He praised the beauty of the production, the music and the acting, but regretfully noted that the essential qualities of the story, the spirit of make-believe, had been sacrificed:

... "Cinderella" was lovely to look at, but that is not quite the same as sharing her enchanting transition from a drab and dirty kitchen maid to the radiant and mysterious princess of the ball. ... The warmth of ageless make-believe ... that elusive quality of fragile spirit that makes a fairy tale universally loved ... sometimes was submerged in the efficiency of the modern touch.\[1\]
A more severe reprimand was directed at Kraft Theatre's production of *Alice in Wonderland*. The play described as a broad, slap-stick farce, starring Charlie McCarthy, incensed Gould. He accused the producers of resorting to a slap-stick, jazzed-up style because they feared being labeled as "corny." Gould considered this nonsense:

... Something had been forgotten: simple and elementary respect for one of the all too rare pleasures of life, the story of "Alice in Wonderland." The delicacy, beauty and drollery of the fragile fantasy were destroyed mercilessly. In place of Alice with all her beguiling charm there was a vaudeville wise guy.

A love of beauty, a treasured dream of childhood, an ageless classic—these are not things that need streamlining, jazzing up and promotional hoopla. They have withstood the test of time, which television has yet to do, and are to be approached with awe, understanding and devotion.

Crassness and crudity are all about us. The few islands of untarnished thought and lovely make-believe are to be defended jealously against the uncouth hordes. There are some things, television producers will learn, that are already right and perfect.2

Apparently many parents agreed. Gould reported that the network, sponsor and agency received a flood of phone calls, telegrams, and letters from indignant parents who kept their children up late to see the play.

Further evidence of Gould's high level of expectancy was noted in his review of the 1956 production of *Jack and the Beanstalk* by Producers Showcase. The high budget show received wide advanced publicity. Helen Deutsch was hired to write the musical adaptation with considerable publicity concerning the exhausting research she was doing to assure accuracy and fidelity for the familiar fairy tale.
Apparently much was expected, and Donald Kirkley, at least, thought the production was successful. Gould did not. He granted that liberties could be taken with a story adapted as a musical, but with Jack and the Beanstalk he thought it had been badly overdone:

... It was hardly to be anticipated that they would sacrifice the story's previous qualities of child-like revelation and discovery.

Last night Jack was essentially a puzzled teen-ager escaping from reality.

... If the whole show was to have been a satire on "Jack and the Beanstalk," it should have begun that way. ... too often [it] wavered between Captain Video in a vegetable patch and a soap opera.

... The trick camera shots and the literal stage settings were very cumbersome and intrusive. An excursion into the world of imagination cannot long survive when directorial technique gets in the way.

... No amount of electronics can ever substitute for the enchantment of that everlastingly exciting phrase, "Once upon a time ... "

Hansel and Gretel, also produced as a high budget spectacular, left Gould unimpressed. He said that the show lacked distinction and accused the producers of being more concerned with production techniques than with the original meaning and delicate mood of the story.

The loss of the spirit of make-believe was not entirely confined to children's stories, however. Gould occasionally found it missing in plays for adults as well. Reviews of Mrs. McThing and Twelfth Night illustrate. Gould approved of Maurice Evans' dream-like interpretation
of *Twelfth Night*, but felt the qualities of make-believe were largely mislaid by heavy-handed production techniques:

... A delicate illusion of make-believe is not always enhanced by microscopic scrutiny of how it is created.

"Twelfth Night" labored under extremely elaborate and involved settings, which often cluttered up the screen and injected an oppressively literal note conflicting with the fantasy concept.

No viewer will want to quarrel with efforts to brighten up "Twelfth Night." Last evening's program merely reflected the usual uncertainty as to how it should be done.6

Mrs. McThing, a mixture of broad and literate farce, was adapted for television by Walter Kerr and produced by Omnibus after a successful stage run. It starred Helen Hayes and others from the original cast. Under such circumstances it might easily be assumed that the play would succeed. Gould thought otherwise. He prefaced his review by noting that any fantasy is difficult to do well, and continued by saying that Mrs. McThing was especially difficult. A complicated mixture of broad farce, literate farce and make-believe forced the combination of too many elements for television in too short a period of time.7

Kirkley reviewed more fairy tales and children's story adaptations than either Gould or Crosby, and was frequently the most severe. In reviewing *The Land of Green Ginger* he stated briefly what he, as an adult, expected of a fairy tale: "What we want is a genuine fairy tale, told with sincerity and fidelity to the one we read as children—not a sophisticated burlesque."8
This attitude is reflected in many of his reviews. Like Gould, he found Cinderella pleasant, mildly amusing and well staged. Despite this, however, he did not think the production generated much excitement since the dramatic values were dissipated when the emphasis was shifted from the story to the music and visual appeal. He concluded significantly that he seriously doubted television's ability to present such sharp contrast as Cinderella's transformation from the kitchen to the ballroom.9

Kirkley also was displeased with Kraft Theatre's production of Alice in Wonderland: "The play as a whole was out of control from the start. No coherence, no coordination, no dreaminess, very little wit." He condemned the producers to the fate dictated by the play's Queen of Hearts: "Off with their heads!"10

Kirkley was equally indignant about Aladdin, a spectacular by Cole Porter and S. J. Perelman. The opening remark of the review set the tone for the column:

Cole Porter made his television debut in "Aladdin" and flopped so hard he bounced . . .

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

. . . There wasn't a hint of that delicate fantasy which is essential to a fairy tale.

He accused the author of the unpardonable sin of writing down to the television audience.11

Probably the most ambitious attempt to produce children's stories on a major scale was Shirley Temple's Storybook, a mixture of live and filmed shows, during the 1958 season. The first production, Beauty and the Beast, was generally praised by the critics. Later
productions, however, were treated less kindly, especially by Kirkley. He called *Dick Whittington and His Cat* "... a cheap and stupid distortion of a familiar story." The *Land of Green Ginger* he said "... was a cut-rate production with cut-rate actors." He took the position that the production should be for adult level viewing as well as for children.

Perhaps Kirkley's most indignant outburst was directed at *Huck Finn*, a United States Steel musical adaptation. He called it "... an all-time low in taste and literary vandalism ... a dreadful travesty on the original. ... I am angry about this mutilation of a classic."

Crosby was apparently less concerned about the spirit of make-believe than either Gould or Kirkley. However, it was not ignored entirely. Like the others, he praised the visual appeal of *Cinderella* but doubted its magical appeal for children.

On another occasion he described *Beauty and the Beast*, which he liked as a fairy tale, and *Aladdin*, which he disliked as a production:

"... It suffered ... from disparity of purpose. ... Jumping from one [style] to another indiscriminately with the result that it was never funny enough, romantic enough or fairy-taleish enough to sweep you along with it. ... It was impossible to suspend belief."

Crosby was also disappointed with Shirley Temple's Storybook production of *A Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. He had expected a good production but called it a failure with all the sense of mystery, of brooding, and feeling of wonder dissipated.
Plays too big for the intimate nature of television. The critics have frequently referred to television as an intimate medium, but without a full explanation of the nature of an intimate medium. The characteristic of television most commonly referred to, however, when the intimate nature of television is discussed is the relatively small home viewing screen. This playing area, limited in size when compared with the broad movie screen or wide legitimate stage, had encouraged directors and producers to use the close-up and extreme close-up of the actor's face as the most important mechanical and emotional technique for telling the story. Generally critics have applauded the use of and recognized the need for the close-up, but they have also noted its limitations, especially in plays where action and background were important to the play's greater meaning.

On occasions Kirkley took the position that the small screen was simply not adequate for certain plays. He felt that adaptations of The Petrified Forest, The Royal Family and The Skin of Our Teeth lost much of their effectiveness because the audience could not see the entire stage, and as a consequence lost the significant character relationships as well as relationships between the characters and their surroundings. He summarized that idea in criticizing The Petrified Forest: On the legitimate stage we see all the characters with their interplay of emotions at one time, for a tremendous emotional impact. But, Kirkley contended, in television we wander from person to person and deal chiefly in segments of the setting.19
Reactions to The Royal Family and The Skin of Our Teeth were similar. Kirkley asserted that the humor of the stage version of The Royal Family came from seeing the family in constant motion on the stage, but when adapted for television, the action became static and the play more confusing than humorous.\(^{20}\)

Kirkley found much to praise in The Skin of Our Teeth. He was especially impressed with the acting, but again felt that the play's greater meaning was sacrificed when the audience could not see everything at one time.\(^{21}\)

While Kirkley implied that the close-up shot destroyed the effectiveness of certain plays, he questioned whether it was impossible to do anything about it with television's mechanical limitations. Gould took a different point of view. In reviewing The Petrified Forest, The Skin of Our Teeth, The Barretts of Wimpole Street, and Macbeth he agreed that the plays could be hurt by the abuse of the close-up shot, but implied that the fault lay in mechanical techniques that could be altered. A review of The Skin of Our Teeth illustrates:

> ... The close-up is an indispensable device, often essential to enhance the clarity of a drama and to emphasize each of its specific emotional peaks.

> But the close-up also can be a crude and destructive tool, destructive of a play's larger mood and meaning, its subtleties, its humor or its suspense. ... The "little picture" is swell in its place, but in TV drama it would seem time to recognize that the "big picture" also can be of vital theatrical importance.\(^{22}\)

The same basic thought again was reflected in the review of The Petrified Forest. Gould said the constant use of the close-up shot required each viewer to go on the stage and look at each actor as he
spoke. He concluded that this was a good way to hear the lines, but hardly a way to comprehend the play's true dimensions.\textsuperscript{23}

In reviewing \textit{The Barretts of Wimpole Street} Gould took a slightly different point of view. As with the other plays, he though \textit{The Barretts of Wimpole Street} was injured by the use of the close-up shot, and the close-up also emphasized the play's inherent shortcomings. The play with its romantic quality, he decided, needed a proscenium arch:

\textldots "The Barretts" simply is not a drama to be separated into parts and examined in close-ups; it needs a proscenium arch to put its romance in perspective. \textldots The intimacy of the camera tended to put the chief emphasis on the psychological narrative rather than on the larger, enveloping mood.\textsuperscript{24}

The television version of \textit{The Great Sebastians}, starring the Lunts, apparently suffered the same shortcomings. The close-up slowed the action and magnified the play's inherent weakness. Gould noted that the original play needed a full stage, a responsive audience and normal running time to be successful. When transferred to the television studio with the audience missing and less time to build the mood, it was "\textldots painfully embarrassing and merely staggered from situation to situation with little meaning or fun."\textsuperscript{25}

Gould's review of \textit{Macbeth} was interesting, particularly since he disagreed with Crosby and Kirkley. He believed the play's fuller meaning was hurt by the abuse of the close-up:

\ldots The compelling sweep of the unified whole appeared sacrificed to the demanding technical gods of TV.

\ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots
By eliminating the physical proscenium arch, the televised "Macbeth" also lost the play's unifying arch of tragic human greed. On the home screen "Macbeth" was too much the story of man against man rather than man against fate. The realism of modern television sometimes is less to be preferred than the stark emotionalism of Elizabethan drama.26

Crosby also found some plays too big for television. Generally his opinion concerning the limitations of the small screen more nearly approximated the opinion held by Kirkley than by Gould. He seriously questioned whether television, with its limited time and space, was capable of producing certain plays. His review of Tale of Two Cities reflected Crosby's opinion on certain types of plays. He thought the tremendous emotional scenes made it too much for live television. Such scenes, he reasoned, needed more time and space than television could provide. "Perhaps it is the size that I missed. I need something bigger than the twenty-one inch screen can manage."27

Crosby's criticism of Billy Budd was concerned with both space and scope. He granted the televised play had done a good job of recreating the moods and tensions aboard the sailing vessel, but voiced reservations about doing Billy Budd as a play on television or on the legitimate stage. The tremendous contrast of good and evil, he reasoned, was impossible to recreate.28

Another factor frequently commented on by the critics when comparing the effectiveness of the television play with the original material was the lack of time and space. Because of the severe handicap of the studio clock and production facilities, it was frequently necessary to omit much of the original material. Because of this the
critics said that the mood, plot, and characterizations often suffered. This seemed to be particularly true of the hour-long plays.

The reviews of Hedda Gabler were of especial interest not only because all three men reviewed the play, but also because all three held the opinion that it was impossible to do an intelligent 60-minute adaptation of Ibsen, who wrote with such craftsmanship that every line is important. Consequently, Gould concluded, when Ibsen's plays are shortened, the meaning of the play is lost or confused. Kirkley and Crosby agreed.

Crosby further believed that people unfamiliar with Hedda Gabler were probably more bewildered than entertained. The error was in trying to cut the play. Ibsen is one of the greatest craftsmen of all times, and every line, every word is polished and meaningful. Consequently, it is almost impossible to cut the play without doing considerable damage.

Kirkley's reaction was almost identical. He stated that Ibsen does not lend itself to being shortened. So much of the motivation in Hedda Gabler was omitted that viewers must have had difficulty figuring out the story.

The dramatization of The Day Lincoln Was Shot, Jim Bishop's detailed account of the hours before and after Lincoln's death, presented another problem. Gould said that much of the book had to be sacrificed, especially the author's fascinating detailed report:

... There was simply neither the time nor space to recreate the intricate mosaic that gives the book the appeal of a contemporary front page news story.
... Consequently, there were only intermittent moments when a viewer could feel a sense of personal involvement.

On the credit side, however, Gould thought that using techniques of the theatre and the newsreel may prove eventually to be one of television's major contributions.32

Closely akin to the problems of space and time was the problem of establishing relief and contrast. Frequently it was reported that so much had to be cut that what remained was on a single emotional plane with little or no relief. For example, Gould thought Wuthering Heights was too much for the television screen. While the script was faithful to the main thread of the story, it never came together as a piece of theatre. Time limitations forced the adapter to

... build emotion upon emotion, despair upon despair, and agony upon agony. When these are shown close together on a small screen, they tend to become repetitious and oppressive.

"Wuthering Heights" began at such a shrill and tense pitch that members of the cast forgot discipline in their efforts to reach up to the next crisis.

... "Wuthering Heights" perhaps is too formidable a work for television.33

While Crosby thought Wuthering Heights a "stunning success," he also called attention to the unrelieved emotional intensity and said that the viewer was wrung dry, since there was no letup during the ninety-minute production.34

In reviewing Point of No Return Crosby said, as he had on several occasions, that there was probably a logical and inevitable watering down when transferring a story to television. He praised
Playhouse 90 for selecting an important book that looked squarely at an important, contemporary problem. However, it was suggested that the television production sacrificed all of the subtlety and almost all of the urbanity of the novel causing the story to be entirely different from the original. The intensification of mood which started immediately, was perhaps necessary, Crosby felt, but "... what was gained in intensity was lost in social poise."\(^{35}\)

It was Crosby's opinion that Johnny Belinda was splendidly acted and directed with tremendous moments of truth. Again, however, the play needed some relief or contrast. "... There was too much heartache too relentlessly sustained."\(^{36}\) The same was true of The Comedian. There was high praise for the performance of Mickey Rooney, and the adapters had skill; Crosby concluded, "... There was too much hysteria and perhaps one climax too many. ... The lack of even a few wholesome moments robbed the play of the element of contrast."\(^{37}\)

Crosby did not care for Death of Manolete. The play needed relief badly, and the central character of Manolete was too single-mindedly dull and one-faceted.\(^{38}\)

Kirkley, too, believed that some plays such as There Shall Be No Night needed more time. The entire point of the play was missed because the adapter had to cut half an hour of a compact story. The extra time, he felt, was badly needed to explain the complex situation.\(^{39}\)

Opinions expressed by Kirkley in a review of King Lear, an Omnibus production, were of interest. He admired much of the play, but thought it impossible to give a final decision concerning King Lear's
fitness for television based on a ninety-minute production. With the shortened script not only did characterizations suffer, but done as it was, without interruption or intermissions, the play seemed to take place under a suspension of time, which gave it a static dream-like quality.40

The need for more time was also noted by Kirkley in two hour-long productions of Lost Weekend, One by Kraft Theatre and an earlier one by Robert Montgomery Presents. Of the Kraft version he said:

The televersion of "The Lost Weekend" seen . . . on "The Kraft Theater" was a lamentable failure . . . This story simply can't be told satisfactorily within the confines of an hour-long program.

So many vital scenes and lines, so many essential details were omitted . . . that the best values of the story were lost. There was no time for the delineation of the many secondary characters . . . 41

The Robert Montgomery version, produced earlier, was better received. Kirkley called it one of the best productions of the season, but again felt there was not enough time to develop the real pitch of terror necessary to make the play effective.42

Concern for production techniques or touches of originality at the sacrifice of the spirit of the original material frequently caused critical comments. Musicals were frequently offenders. This seemed especially true of known plays that were adapted as musicals, and older musicals with the story updated. A few such productions were A Bell for Adano, Ruggles of the Red Gap, Gift of the Magi, Heidi, Who's Earnest? (an adaptation of The Importance of Being Earnest), The
Stingiest Man in Town (an adaptation of A Christmas Carol), and The Red Mill.

Kirkley, often a defender of the classics, was bitter about The Stingiest Man in Town. He called it "... an offensive musical caricature, ... a painful monstrosity and a second rate musical comedy, from which the spirit of Dickens had completely escaped."

Crosby thought The Stingiest Man in Town was not a bad show, but certainly not an inspired one. He noted that more and more music was being written for television but without apparent success.

Gould concurred with Kirkley and Crosby. In his opinion virtually all the characterizations had to be sacrificed to make way for uninspired, modernistic songs and dances. Scrooge was practically the only character that remained. He concluded:

"The Stingiest Man in Town" erred, perhaps, in assuming that "A Christmas Carol" was just all Scrooge. It is also the people in his life who have made him immortal; they were missing last night. ... The loss was greater than the gain.

Crosby and Kirkley reviewed A Bell for Adano. The tone of Kirkley's review is fairly well summarized in a single line: "'Bell for Adano' had a crack that made it jangle out of tune." He said the plot was hurt by the music, which slowed up the action, forced the elimination of vital scenes and ideas, distorted the story, and weakened the characterizations. All that remained was the bare outline of the book.

Crosby, while favorably impressed with A Bell for Adano, doubted that the songs added much to the story.
The reviews of *Our Town* were both mixed and curious. Crosby admitted that the musical lost him for reasons he didn't understand:

"... I don't know where it went wrong on television exactly. Perhaps it needs an audience. What it doesn't need, I feel strongly, is Frank Sinatra."

I am greatly troubled by all these reflections because I find on checking around a bit among people whose opinions I respect that there is a violent disagreement about this production . . .

This is going to be a great problem for those of us who write about television. There is no common denominator even among folk who have the same tastes and inclinations. . . . There is no audience in the ordinary sense, an audience which is swept away by a great performance or a great line, or picked up and carried along. 48

Kirkley thought Frank Sinatra, the music, the sets, ruined *Our Town*. He severely criticized Sinatra, but then added:

"It's probable that the production pleased many, if not most of those viewers who had no prior knowledge of the play. Such fine writing is rare enough to attract notice in the flood of mediocrity."

It should also be added that Kern praised Sinatra's performance in *Our Town* highly. In fact, she thought he should be given the top acting award of the year. However, she did grant that *Our Town* needed music "... like a hole in the head."

Apparently Gould and Kirkley expected much from the musical adaptation of *Ruggles of the Red Gap*. What they saw, however, displeased them greatly. Gould severely criticized the alteration made in the book to accommodate songs and dances. In his opinion, the humor and poignancy of the original were lost, leaving only "... a strained situation performed with perilously little inspiration or style."
chief fault, Gould thought, was that the major character was reduced to virtually a caricature. However, he was not unsympathetic because he added, "Even if it is an old story in show business, it is still a pity because many people worked hard and much money was spent last night."  

Kirkley was more severe. It was another semi-classic completely destroyed, with a third rate score, mass miscasting and a vintage production. There was no chance to develop the original theme or characters, he thought; and whenever the plot picked up, it was stopped by a song.  

The Red Mill suffered for another reason. Fred Coe, the producer, and Delbert Mann, the director, employed a huge cast of name stars and did a complete modernization of the 1903 script. The production was played in modern costumes and the principal characters were on their way to the Brussels Worlds Fair. The attempt to update the musical was not kindly received. Kirkley called it a "sentimental mess" and wondered why Coe and Mann had attempted to update the play.  

Gould questioned the same point. He thought the producers did so out of a fear of having their production identified as "corn." "... But doing corn well and authentically is still a severer test than taking the much easier road to 'modernization.'"  

Crosby generalized on television musicals in other columns by asking whether there had ever been a good musical on television. He could think of only two: Peter Pan and Annie Get Your Gun, both preceded by long stage runs. He therefore concluded: "The record for original musicals on television is universally lousy. ... the
trail has been littered with the wreckage of huge budgets and high hopes."55

Gould severely criticized both The Mayerling and Ruggles of the Red Gap in one column. The basic weakness, as he saw it, was the story was sacrificed for the sake of the musical score. His conclusion may well be one of his basic principles of criticism:

But perhaps a valuable lesson also has been learned. The electronic age has not changed the basic rules of stagecraft. Huge productions may be conceived, hosts of stars may be signed and countless adaptations drafted. But all is for naught if there is not the companion recognition that true theatre is not only a matter of form, but, far more importantly, of spirit.56

Wonderful Town established a record for sheer expense, but it was generally regarded as a disappointment. The big fault, Crosby thought, was "... the reverence with which highly successful stage musicals are transferred to television. ... It was proscenium direction without any proscenium." This Crosby attributed to Rosalind Russell, who was reluctant to change anything from the stage hit:

... The whole idea of doing a whopping stage success on television is playing it safe in the most disastrous way. ... The most successful things on television have been done by bold, free spirits.57

Occasionally production considerations were held responsible for destroying the spirit of some plays. This was mentioned in reviews of Dream Girl, Caesar and Cleopatra, Emperor Jones, and The Skin of Our Teeth. Gould and Kirkley severely criticized Kraft Theatre's production of Emperor Jones. Gould called it "distressingly inept," and was especially annoyed because he believed Emperor Jones could have been written for television with its expressionism, quick scene
changes, dependence on mood and concentration on the disintegration of one man. "The effectiveness of the play," Gould stated, "depends on maintenance of dramatic crescendo culminating in the Emperor's destruction..." This, he believed, was not done in the television adaptation. The play got off to a bad start and never found itself. It began at such a level of frenzy that there was no place to go. The drum beat rhythm was violated, and unnecessary dancers were inserted in the play.  

Kirkley's report was brief and to the point:  

"The Emperor Jones," by Eugene O'Neill, completely baffled the folks on Kraft Theatre. Nothing about it was right; and we hope they'll . . . read those blistering reviews and try again some day.  

The other plays mentioned were criticized in much the same way. Crosby thought the producers of Dream Girl became so concerned with production that they overlooked the show.  

Gould felt much the same way about Caesar and Cleopatra:  

... There was an extremely impressive array of stars, ... and the settings were most handsomely mounted. Under the circumstances, it was rather a pity that no one thought of including Bernard Shaw's comedy.  

II - Adaptations That Were Outdated  

Crosby, Gould, and Kirkley thought adaptations of several musicals and plays failed not because the spirit of the original had been lost, but because the original source material was outdated. Either the style of production was no longer fashionable, or the theme was no longer meaningful, or both. Apparently musicals became outdated more rapidly than plays. This was especially true of a group of
musicals produced in 1954-55. Included were *Best Foot Forward*, *Anything Goes*, *Revenge with Music*, *Let's Face It*, and *Panama Hattie*.

Kirkley's review of *Best Foot Forward*, with a side remark about *Panama Hattie*, fairly well expressed the attitude of all three men:

When a Broadway musical comedy of the old school died after a long run and big profit for all, it was given a decent funeral and a place in the record book, and that was that. Very few have been exhumed for a revival, and of these only three or four ever justified the expense. Theatre people know that there's nothing deadlier than last season's big musical hits. The television people are learning this truism the hard way. Only a few weeks ago "Panama Hattie" flopped back into the grave. The risk of staging a zombie was illustrated again in "Best Foot Forward."62

Earlier he expressed a similar attitude toward *Anything Goes*. In Kirkley's opinion the musical had a cliche-ridden book full of dated humor. He suggested that television producers think twice before bringing back more old Broadway musicals, since few had survived the test of time.63

Crosby reviewed all except *Best Foot Forward* in a single column and concluded that it was time for television producers to reappraise the custom of adapting old Broadway musicals. He said that in addition to being badly dated, the productions were at such a consistent level of mediocrity that television viewers not familiar with the originals could have gotten the impression that Broadway was a great waste of time. Too much plot was noted as an evidence of age. In Crosby's opinion *Let's Face It*, typical of the others, "... had about four times more plot than a two-and-a-half-hour Broadway musical needs and about ten times too much for a one-hour TV musical."64
Gould reviewed *Panama Hattie* and *Best Foot Forward* and referred briefly to others. While praising the performances of Ethel Merman and Jeannie Carson, stars of the respective shows, he nevertheless judged both musicals television failures because the material was outdated. His opinion of *Panama Hattie* represents his thinking on both musicals. He said, "'Panama Hattie' just never was a top-drawer musical and it was less so on TV."65

Similar opinions were expressed concerning later musicals. Crosby disliked *One Touch of Venus*, *Bloomer Girl*, and *Junior Miss*. All were found dated in some way. *One Touch of Venus* "... had the smell of grease paint about it. ... Lacking the broad sweep of the stage, the musical was almost embarrassing."66 *Bloomer Girl* had two faults: it was badly over-plotted, and the songs, contrary to modern practice, did not grow naturally out of the story. "The true test of a song should be: if you pull it out of the show, part of the story will be missing."67

The musical adaptation of *Junior Miss* showed its age in another way. Crosby thought the original story was successful because of a freshness of observation about teen-age behavior during the mid-1930's. However, he noted that that was a long time ago and warned that writers of stories of current teen-agers should observe more closely current teen-age behavior.68

Plays, as well as musicals, were frequently thought outdated. Crosby observed this most often. In some instances he believed both the playwright's message and style had gone out of date.
Key Largo and There Shall Be No Night illustrate this point. Key Largo
"... had the smell of dust all over it. ... Anderson plants himself on the side of the angels and arranges his heroes and villains accordingly."

Of There Shall Be No Night Crosby wrote:

All these embarrassing anachronisms of liberal thought were still distressingly present.

... I don't think the playwriting is defensible. You set up an intolerable situation, then point your finger to the audience and say: "What are you doing about it?"

In general, Crosby liked Shakespeare's tragedies on television, but had some reservations about his comedies. He found the humor of Twelfth Night was badly dated and advanced an interesting theory concerning the popularity of Twelfth Night in particular, and revivals in general. He reasoned that Twelfth Night was still produced because Shakespeare wrote it, and because it gave a girl a chance to dress up like a boy. Enlarging upon the idea, Crosby suggested two reasons why plays are revived: There are some plays the audience cannot see often enough, and other plays the actors cannot do often enough. He concluded Twelfth Night, while dated in its humor, is a play the actors like better than the audience.

Yellow Jack was revived in 1955. Crosby praised the excellent performances and the lavish production, but questioned the advisability of presenting such a play with a theme so hopelessly outdated. Medical documentaries, Crosby reasoned, had come a long way in style of writing since Yellow Jack, but more significantly, "... There had not been a case of yellow fever in fifty years."
Gould agreed with Crosby about *Yellow Jack*. He praised the quality of the acting and excellence of the production, but like the others, he thought the script was badly dated. Since the threat of yellow fever is of little concern to present-day audiences, he concluded: "It was probably more interesting than stirring."73

Two more recent plays, *Born Yesterday* and *The Hasty Heart*, were thought by Crosby to be outdated in some respects. He said of *Born Yesterday* that the message had dimmed a bit with the years,74 and that *The Hasty Heart* had rapidly become a vintage piece.75

### III - Material of a Questionable Nature

In several columns Kirkley questioned whether a play was in good taste. This was noted in reviews of *Papa Is All*, *The Lord Don't Play Favorites*, *The Death of Manolete*, and *The Comedian*. In the first two plays mentioned he questioned the treatment of the religious theme. He felt that *Papa Is All* tended to mock and misrepresent the strict religious beliefs of the Plain People in Pennsylvania;76 and that the frivolous treatment of religion in *The Lord Don't Play Favorites* "... must have offended many viewers and perhaps shocked more than a few. ... It was in extremely bad taste and it may have been considered by some as blasphemy."77

The central character of *The Comedian* was thoroughly a fictitious character, but Kirkley doubted that it worked that way. Kirkley directed the playwright to create his characters with more good humor, fairness, and accuracy:

No matter what they do in order to confuse the issue and prevent the audience from spotting the basic model in
dramas of this kind, no matter how many small truths are embedded in the fictional structure, such enterprises as this come unpleasantly close to something known as character assassination which is worse than anything attributed in the play to Sammy Hogarth.  

He regarded the role as violent, neurotic, nasty and malicious, and doubted that insiders would have any trouble identifying the real person. He further questioned TV's cannibalistic tendency toward devouring its own people.

Kirkley called *The Death of Manolete* an ill-advised attempt to sell bull butchery to the television audience, and suggested that it failed because of the lack of enthusiasm for the subject by the television audiences.

IV - Kern's Approach to Adverse Criticism

Kern's opinions are so entirely different from those of Crosby, Gould, and Kirkley that it is necessary to examine them apart. Actually, many of Kern's criticisms are broadsides at a kind of style of play or program, rather than at a particular play. She disliked Shakespeare, egg-head programs and spectaculars that disrupted regular programs. Her attitude toward Shakespeare illustrates her point of view.

Kern consistently questioned the advisability of doing Shakespeare on television. Prior to the 1952 Maurice Evans production of *Hamlet*, she wrote that the forthcoming production would probably be successful judging from the advanced reports, but she seriously doubted that *Hamlet* would be a trend-maker:

... No matter how pious we may sound about wanting to be elevated, we are a soap opera, slick magazine, fiction
public! We want to relax, escape and be treated to light drama, light music, etc. This is what the majority really want from television and this is what they are going to get.\footnote{80}

Later, two columns about \textit{Romeo and Juliet} continued with the same reasoning. In Kern's opinion the average television viewer craved relaxing entertainment, and \textit{Romeo and Juliet} did not qualify. Because of this, she believed that the networks were making a grave error of judgment when they pre-empted the more popular shows to do Shakespeare. "... The rights of the minority should be served, but never at the discomfort of the majority and definitely not at peak listening hours."\footnote{81}

Still later Kern argued that since there were only three hours per week night when most employed people could enjoy television, it was unjust to present programs such as \textit{Romeo and Juliet} which the majority of viewers disliked. As evidence of this popular displeasure, Kern referred to the ratings which gave the quiz show, Twenty One, 40 per cent of the audience and \textit{Romeo and Juliet} only 16 per cent. From this Kern concluded:

... Those who claim to be bored by "Twenty One," but declare themselves intellectually satisfied by "Romeo and Juliet," merely display a blind acceptance to a college curricular as a mark of culture. Television can present only one thing at a time, so...

Every law of reason and economics demands that one item be what the majority wants. It is the business of television to fulfill its moral obligation to the set-buying public. The only good TV show is the one which provides good entertainment to the largest number of work-weary viewers who rely on their sets for relaxation and pleasure. If intellectual seekers mistakenly bought a television set instead of an encyclopedia, that's no fault of the poor network.\footnote{82}
Kern's remarks about Richard III—although it was a film—represent a significant attitude toward Shakespeare. Kern admitted that she did not watch the film in a mistaken belief that nobody else would and was surprised at the Trendex rating of 19. The only way she could account for Richard III's high rating was (1) people who watched were probably not glued to their sets, (2) many students watched because it was an assignment, and (3) many people lied rather than admit they were not watching something cultural.  

At another time Kern grudgingly admitted that King Lear, the Orson Welles production for Omnibus, was done well, but then complained that Shakespeare was more an undertaking than entertainment.  

The nearest any Shakespearean play came to receiving a favorable review was The Taming of the Shrew. Kern called it a fast-moving show, and then added significantly, "That's high praise when it is remembered that I dislike surrealistic, over-arty sets, and staged dramas."  

Probably the most complete case against the egg-head intrusion was a 1957 column condemning The Seven Lively Arts, a program that offered a variety of styles and types of shows, including some drama, and a program for which Crosby acted as one of the hosts. Kern first defended the networks against attacks that they had failed to be creative, then added:

The fact that TV has "failed" ... to be "creative," original and courageous to the point of daring ... is no great condemnation of the medium.

Triteness of plot, cliche-ridden writing, conservatism of goal ... are far from ruinous to such fare.
Moreover, "Seven Lively Arts" can be recorded in the annals of TV as the perfect example of what happens when you combine every flaw to which so-called "egghead" programming can fall victim.

In summarizing the case against The Seven Lively Arts, Kern gave four reasons why she thought the program was a failure:

1) The chief flaw was television's inability to set its audiences' sights on the same line as its artistic goals.

2) The program's preoccupation with sex.

3) The substitution of personal ego for intellectual and artistic qualification on the part of the programmers themselves.

4) The program lacked creativity.

Kern's review of The Skin of Our Teeth took still another jab at television's intellectuals, but from a slightly different viewpoint. Before the play there was considerable talk in the paper about viewers not being able to understand Wilder's fantasy. It was recalled that many people walked out on the Broadway production. Kern said that she had never found the play difficult to understand until the television production. For this she blamed the production staff. Her charge reveals an interesting attitude:

For a long time I've harbored a more than sneaking suspicion that there's a crowd of cultured folk, with cultivated tastes, who delight in honoring whatever most people don't understand . . . and, conversely, there's a jealous group, snobish about their cultivation, which wants to make sure "art" is NOT understood by "the masses."

One or the other of these groups must have had a hand in . . . Thornton Wilder's "The Skin of Our Teeth"--beautifully acted but miserably TV-adapted.

Another grievance by Kern was against television spectaculars or specials. While other critics welcomed them as a relief from monotony,
Kern objected to them because they were an intrusion on the more popular shows; they were too long. "... It takes a heap of entertaining to make ninety minutes more a show than a chore."89

Calling attention to the increasing number of spectaculars during the 1957-58 season, Kern wrote several columns questioning the advisability of disrupting a viewer's regular viewing habits with shows that were one-shot programs. The columns were climaxed with an informal poll to discover how many people remembered spectaculars. There were no indications given of the number of people questioned, but from her research Kern said that the average viewer could recall only two of the more than two hundred spectaculars with anything more than a vague picture.90

Kern also had strong opinions about plays she considered as grim and morbid. This was noticed as early as 1953 when she was the first of the critics to criticize the original psychodramas produced by Fred Coe for Philco-Goodyear Theatre. Kern called them grim, morbid, and psychiatric. Later the psychodramas, which she disliked so much, became a standard of reference for adaptations with a similar theme.

Kern criticized Dream Girl as "... grim and morbid. Producers apparently think ... an evening of the theatre or TV drama is counted a total loss if you don't leave it thoroughly depressed."91

Giving a favorable review of Dodsworth in 1956, Kern prefaced her review by saying:

TV offers its best and worst sides when it presents dramatic fare. Numerous shoddy, thrown-together, half-baked melodramas pass for TV "plays" and a multitude of sophomoric outpourings of rebellion and adolescent venom are palmed off as "psychological drama." But TV also
offers a rich harvest of fine, professionally mature theatrical fare for our free enjoyment.

The four critics have repeatedly reminded playwrights, producers, and their readers that television has certain limitations as a medium for presenting plays, that must be taken into consideration. Further, they have pointed out that these limitations must be given even more thought when presenting adaptations, since it is inevitable that the television version will be compared with the original material. Among the limitations most frequently mentioned were:

1) The size of the television screen—because of its small size, when compared with the stage and the movie screen, the television screen forced compromises. Most often the problem had been resolved through the use of the close-up shot at the sacrifice of width.

2) Rigid time limitations—television people have been called the slaves of the plot.

3) The mechanical and physical limitations of the television studio and equipment—in earlier shows, in particular, space and equipment were serious limitations to the quality of a program.

4) The cost—dollars have been a problem in television productions. When the quality of a television adaptation had been compared to the quality of a movie or a stage play that cost thousands of dollars more to produce, the television adaptation had inevitably suffered.

5) Television was both an entertainment and advertising medium.

6) A living room audience—television was denied the psychological advantage of having an audience in a darkened auditorium under certain controls.
With these limitations as a background, the four critics have, in general, introduced the following questions as important criteria, or as recognizable standards of criticism:

1. Has the spirit of the original material been preserved?
   A. Was there an inevitable watering down of the original material because of television's limited facilities—small screen, rigid time requirements, mechanical and physical limitations of the studio, and cost?
   B. Was the playwright faced with such formidable obstacles that he was defeated before he began—the original was so big and cumbersome that it was impossible to reduce it to a coherent hour-long drama?
   C. Did the playwright exercise careful selectivity in his choice of materials? Did he improve on the original? How?
   D. Did producers and directors use television techniques to their advantage—intimacy, immediacy, greater flexibility than the stage?
   E. Was there sufficient time and space to fully develop characterizations, mood, and to include the important elements of contrast and relief?

2. Should the play have been done at all?
   A. Was it still timely?
   B. Did it have values for present-day audiences?
   C. Did the play have values that were difficult to present in any medium?
3. Could the production be justified knowing that the majority of viewers would watch other programs?

4. Were there questions of morality that made critics exercise a kind of censorship?

It is important to note that the above list of standards of criticism is a composite list—an impression gained from a consideration of the criticisms of the four critics. For this reason it would be unfair to assume that each critic has applied all the standards with equal force. A summary of the way each of the four critics has used the collective standards will be considered briefly.

Jack Gould has consistently asked three of the four questions which make up the major standards of criticism: (1) has the spirit of the original been preserved? (2) should the play have been done at all? (3) could the production be justified in view of the relatively light ratings? He has ignored questions of morality.

There is little question that Gould's major concern when reviewing adaptations has been whether the spirit of the original has been preserved. His attitude has been that someone must protect the works of authors and playwrights from which adaptations are made, and since it is apparent that no one in the television industry will accept this responsibility, the critics must. Gould has been especially searching in his consideration of classics—both modern and ancient—and well-known children's stories.

Gould has not been especially severe in questioning whether a play should have been done, when there was some question whether the
play still had values for modern audiences. However, he has asked the question frequently enough to conclude that it was one of his standards of criticism.

Gould left no doubt about his conviction that plays should be done despite their relatively low ratings. He said on many occasions that it was only in television that everything was equated against the most popular programs. He found this very wrong and roundly condemned the practice.

Despite his being accused of being the conscience of the industry, Gould has been very reluctant to exercise any degree of censorship. There were only two occasions when this was noted and in both cases an explanation was given. In one instance, Gould questioned the advisability of using the kidnapping of a child as a subject for a play. He objected because he felt that the use of the subject matter might encourage criminals to engage in kidnapping, since the play was virtually a blueprint in how to carry out a kidnapping.93 The other instance concerned original plays and will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.

Like Gould, Crosby has consistently used the first three of the collective standards of criticism, and also like Gould, he has virtually ignored the fourth. However, there have been differences in the degree of application of the standards between the two critics.

While Crosby has been as firm in his conviction that the spirit of the original material should be maintained in television plays adapted from other media, he has been more willing to accept compromises than Gould. Crosby's attitude—one stated on several occasions—
has been that a watering down of the original material, when adapted for television, was inevitable. He has said that television's limitations as a medium--small screen, limited budget, and rigid time restrictions--forced many compromises. For this reason he approached many of his reviews with the expectation that the show would be poorly done. When he found that he was wrong, he was pleasantly surprised. On the contrary, Gould seemed to have set a level of expectation in advance and was unwilling to accept compromises.

Kirkley has not applied the first three of the collective standards of criticism with any significant difference to require detailed explanations. He has been as vigorous as either Gould or Crosby in maintaining the spirit of the original material. He has been particularly sensitive to adaptations of classics and children's stories.

The major point of difference between Kirkley's criticisms and those of Gould and Crosby, has been his use of a kind of censorship. However, this too has been only to a limited degree. His most frequent use of censorship has been in adaptations in which he thought religious themes were being treated lightly, and in plays where it could easily be assumed that a character in the play was actually a thinly disguised interpretation of an actual person.

Kern's philosophy of criticism has already been explained in detail. The most significant aspect of her application of the collective standards is perhaps her strong difference of opinion with the other three critics. This difference is most noticeable in consideration of whether plays should be done in view of their light ratings.
While Gould, Crosby, and Kirkley thought television networks should produce plays despite relatively light ratings, Kern thought otherwise, and she was especially critical of doing classics during prime evening viewing time.

Unlike either Gould or Crosby, Kern was not reluctant to exercise a kind of critical censorship. She objected strongly to many types of plays and often resorted to bitter sarcasm in denouncing the play and the people associated with the play. Kern was particularly repelled by plays with grim and morbid themes. She saw no reason why they should be presented.

The next chapter will consider what the four critics have said about original plays for television. As explained in Chapter III, original plays are treated separately from adaptations, because a preliminary survey indicated that the standards of criticism for evaluating original television plays were significantly different from the standards used to evaluate adaptations.
CHAPTER V

FOOTNOTES

23. Ibid.
40. Donald Kirkley, The Baltimore Sun, October 20, 1953.


87. Ibid.
CHAPTER VI

CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF ORIGINAL PLAYS FOR LIVE TELEVISION

Criticisms of original plays for television are treated separately from criticisms of plays adapted from other media for two basic reasons. First, it was apparent when considering criticisms of adaptations, that a concern for the spirit of the original material was paramount. Thus, a comparison with the original material was a significant part of most criticisms. Second, television was a medium in its own right with distinctive characteristics, and because of this, it was reasonable to assume that plays written especially for television had a far greater chance of being tailored to the medium than plays adapted from other sources.

Before considering specific criticisms, however, an understanding of the background of the brief but unique history of the original play for television is helpful.

During the late 1940's and early 1950's when television was experiencing its tremendous expansion as a major entertainment medium, live television plays became an increasingly important source of network programming. For each of several seasons new hour-long dramatic programs were added to the network schedules. During the 1953-54 season, there were nine hour-long dramatic programs. This was increased to twelve during the 1954-55 season and finally reached a high
of fourteen during the 1955-56 season. In addition, there were many special programs presenting original plays on an irregular basis.

Play scripts were being consumed at a fantastic rate. In 1955 Kirkley estimated that all television dramatic programs—hour-long dramatic programs, half-hour live dramatic programs, special shows, and filmed shows—were using scripts at the rate of six thousand yearly. He added that Kraft Theatre alone used more than six hundred scripts during its ten years on television, and that repeat performances had been very rare.

It is hardly surprising therefore, that the supply of old Broadway play scripts suitable for television production was soon exhausted and that a source of new material was avidly sought. To help supply the need for new scripts, an astonishing group of young playwrights, most of them still in their twenties, wrote with incredible energy and speed. It was not unusual for a single playwright to have ten to fifteen original plays produced in a single season.

Rod Serling, one of the most successful and most productive of the new playwrights, provided a dramatic example of the fantastic rate with which these young men were writing. Serling sold his first script to Lux Theatre in 1951 and ten more to the same theatre in 1952-53. During these years, he held a full-time job as a script writer with a Cincinnati, Ohio, television station. In 1953 he moved to New York and began writing full time. He achieved his first major success with Patterns on January 12, 1955. By this time Serling had sold ninety hour-long scripts to the networks. Following the success of Patterns, twenty more Serling plays were produced in 1955—three in a five-day
period. By late 1955 Serling had also sold two plays to the movies. Very few of Serling's hour-long plays following Patterns, however, met with the success he had received with Patterns, and after only four years, he was considered by many to be through as a television playwright.

But when Playhouse 90 began its series in 1956, Serling wrote the first original 90-minute TV drama, Requiem for a Heavyweight, for the new program. It was considered a brilliant success. This was followed by The Comedian, A Town Has Turned to Dust, and Rank and File, a group of plays that earned him the title of television's "angry young man." Following Rank and File, Serling declared that the struggle against censorship and sponsor interference was too great and he accepted an assignment to write a filmed series, The Twilight Zone. 3

Thus Serling is credited with over one hundred scripts written and produced in eight years, ninety of which were written in a four-year period.

Others of this group of successful young playwrights included Paddy Chayefsky, Reginald Rose, J. P. Miller, Wendell Mayes, Louis Patterson, Gore Vidal, James Lee, Summer Locke Elliott, and Robert Arthur.

Then more suddenly than it had developed, the original play for live television was almost a thing of the past. The number of television theatres producing regular weekly plays dropped from a high of fourteen during the 1956-57 season, to seven in 1957-58, and finally to a single regular weekly program in 1958-59. The three oldest dramatic programs left the air during the 1956-57 and 1957-58 seasons.
Robert Montgomery Presents quit in 1957 after seven seasons; and Studio One and Kraft Theatre, after first moving to Hollywood, quit in 1958 after ten years.

With the demise of the veteran television theatres only Playhouse 90 remained as a regular weekly live drama in 1958-59. This reduced dramatic fare was supplemented by United States Steel Hour and Armstrong Circle Theatre on an alternate weekly basis, and Hallmark Hall of Fame and DuPont Show of the Month on a monthly basis. Only Playhouse 90 and United States Steel Hour continued to produce occasional original scripts. The monthly shows were primarily adaptations. Armstrong Circle Theatre presented documentaries.

Many of the people who had made a name in television—playwrights, directors, and producers—drifted to other phases of theatre. Hollywood claimed many playwrights, and the New York stage attracted many of the producers, directors, and other of the playwrights. The nature of television entertainment had changed tremendously.

Crosby, Gould, and Kirkley were unhappy about the sudden disappearance of the television theatres and were critical of the flood of quiz shows and westerns. They were especially concerned about the disappearance of original plays, but their position was somewhat paradoxical. While they were demanding more original plays, they had also been guilty of giving many original plays bad reviews.

This chapter will examine reviews of original plays under the headings of Chayefsky-type Plays; Problem Plays; Plays Based on Actual Situations; Comedies, Farces and Humorous Plays; Plays with Questionable Themes or Subject Matter; and Plays by Robert Sherwood.
I - Chayefsky-Type Plays

Any consideration of what the four critics have said about original plays for live television must inevitably consider a kind or type of play developed by a group of young playwrights under the guidance of producer Fred Coe for Television Playhouse (known also as Philco-Goodyear Theatre) and Playwrights '56. This school of play writing was alternately known as the "Slice-of-Life" school, the "Gloom" school, the "Life-Can-Be-Hell" school, the "Psychodrama," but probably most accurately as the "Chayefsky-type" play.

The form of the play had been fairly well crystallized by 1954. Crosby gave evidence of this by advising aspiring playwrights how they should write for television in December, 1953. He revealed that Producer Coe was receiving forty-five to fifty-five scripts weekly from aspiring playwrights, but that few were acceptable. Most were terribly overplotted, while others required the combined production facilities of a major motion picture company. Crosby suggested that would-be playwrights watch the Television Playhouse for several weeks. He said they would find that the plays were characterized by simplicity of plot, scarcity of humor, and strong characterizations. In addition, there were clear and honest delineation of characters.

Crosby further revealed that Coe had established a stable of writers who were expected to supply a total of thirty to fifty scripts yearly at $1200 for each script—approximately $400 more than the base scale generally paid. The playwrights included Paddy Chayefsky, Robert Allen Arthur, Horton Foote, Tad Mosel, and Harry Muheim.
Of the playwrights mentioned by Crosby, there seems little question that Chayefsky was considered the most important. The critics used his plays as a benchmark in appraising the works of the other playwrights, and when a particular kind of play was discussed, Chayefsky was either credited with or accused of being its creator. Consequently, when critics wrote about Chayefsky and his plays, they frequently generalized to include other playwrights who wrote in a similar style.

Of the four critics, Crosby gave Chayefsky the greatest attention. He stated often that television needed original plays and in Chayefsky he had found a playwright who was writing for the medium. Crosby expressed this simply in a review of Bachelor Party:

... TV needs original stories. It is not at all happy with adaptations from other media. ["Party"] was far too slight a tale for the theatre or the movies. If anything, it resembled a short story—but even there the resemblance is limited. It was, in short, a television tale, intimate, limited in scope and strangely effective.5

Crosby found the dialogue of Chayefsky plays especially suited to television. He called it an intimate style of writing that sounded as though it had been written while looking through a key hole. He observed that the dialogue unfolded gradually and as it did, it revealed bit by bit the private hell in which each of Chayefsky's characters lived. Another aspect of Chayefsky's writing also concerned Crosby—a concern that was to become increasingly evident with the passage of time. He said that Chayefsky's characters had a habit of understating their misery and warned that the playwright might be forever trapped in understatement.6
As early as 1955 Chayefsky was near the end of his career as a television playwright. He was already turning to the screen and the stage. Some critics, particularly Kern, were finding Chayefsky's recurring theme of loneliness, lack of emotional satisfaction, and psychological studies somewhat depressing. He was also being accused of rewriting his first big hit, *Marty*, over and over again. Despite such accusations, Chayefsky still commanded respect from Crosby. When *Catered Affair* was presented, Crosby readily admitted that the play was only second-rate Chayefsky, but added meaningfully: "... Even second-rate Chayefsky is better than first-rate somebody else. ... Chayefsky never does anything badly. His sense of theatre, scene by scene, is unerring. His people are human."  

Oddly enough, Crosby's most thorough analysis of Chayefsky's style was included in a review of *Middle of the Night*, his first Broadway play, rather than a television play. Crosby described Chayefsky as a master of small, inconsequential dialogue which helped reveal the deep conflicts of his characters with great honesty. In Chayefsky plays, Crosby pointed out, there is never a villain nor a strong dramatic crisis. The people are good people with only conflicts of motives and desires. "Since they seldom change," Crosby logically concluded, "there is nothing to climax about. When the point is reached where a character would logically change, twist, or emerge, the playwright backs away."  

After Chayefsky had been out of television for several months, Crosby wrote that his influence was still being felt. He explained that Chayefsky was still being held responsible for every incomplete
sentence and that all plays of a particular type were being referred to as Chayefsky-type plays. Such plays, Crosby said, were dramas of the lower middle class:

... studded with ... the have-a-piece-of-fruit dialogue.

... This drama is peopled with protagonists who suffer from a ridiculously small ambition. ... Nevertheless on television it has done quite a lot of mileage.9

As the style began to vanish in 1956, Crosby wrote an appropriate obituary. He recalled that the Chayefsky school had arisen out of necessity when producers had little money with which to work and playwrights planned accordingly. They found butcher shops, back alleys, and saloons a "congenial habitat." Sets were inexpensive and actors, writers, and producers seemed to know their way around from personal experience. All concerned accepted the limitations they worked under and produced an art form.10

Kirkley too found much of early Chayefsky praiseworthy. He said the playwright reminded him of an early Clifford Odets, but without Odets' sentimentality or social crusading. However, like Crosby, Kirkley had certain reservations about Chayefsky plays. For example, while he described The Mother as only a fair play, he thought it was still worthy of praise because of Chayefsky's ability to build a story and characters in terms of action, tremendously realistic dialogue, and sharp contrast. These qualities, Kirkley said, made exciting theatre.11

Kirkley's review of Catch My Boy on Sunday a short time later trumpeted a note of warning that was also being sounded by Gould and Kern. While praising Chayefsky's powerful and unique style, he
questioned whether it was not too bleak and disagreeable, and contained too much needless repetition of dialogue.\textsuperscript{12}

The \textit{Catered Affair} was Chayefsky's final effort for TV. Kirkley called it second-best Chayefsky, but added pointedly that Chayefsky still had "... an amazing ability to take ordinary crises and deliver plain and sometimes unpalatable truths in dramatic form."\textsuperscript{13}

Gould liked \textit{Marty} and early Chayefsky, but had reservations about the school of playwriting Chayefsky had founded. He said \textit{Marty} was a "... theatrically valid and moving hour. It had an austere and tender artistry and caught a poetic mood. The dialogue caught the pathos of the pair of lovers." He thought, however, that the play was a little uneven and at times redundant because the playwright did not have enough to say for a full sixty minutes. Then referring to other plays of the same type, Gould warned that dramas about the problems of little people can often be tedious.\textsuperscript{14}

Another playwright closely identified with the Chayefsky-style drama was Wendell Mayes, also a contributor to Television Playhouse. Crosby called him "the champion of the inarticulate," and observed that the absence of dialogue was characteristic of many current original plays.

Crosby suggested that Mayes had carried his inarticulate style to the point where language had almost disappeared in \textit{No Writers}, and questioned whether it could be carried any further:

... But in fairness to Mayes it should be pointed out that in spite of small amounts of dialogue, the viewer knew a great deal about the characters when the play ended.\textsuperscript{15}
Again in *Most Blessed Woman* by Mayes, Crosby discussed the inarticulate style. He said this was an age of inarticulatesness and that at no time had the inarticulate had more champions. Among these were included television playwrights Mayes, Chayefsky, Serling, and Peterson and Novelist John Steinbeck. Crosby called them the "spokesmen for the speechless." He then added a criticism of Mayes' play structure that he had begun to find in other original plays. He said the play had no climax because there is nothing to climax about. "It was an example of a play with a good beginning, no middle, and no end."16

By late 1956 even Crosby, the champion of the Chayefsky-type play, was apparently beginning to have mixed emotions about the inarticulate or slice-of-life drama. Describing Joey as typical of such dramas, he wrote that it was a play

"... in which ordinary folk suffer their ordinary dreams in prose of such extraordinary ordinariness that it has a sort of reverse impact."

This particular drama inches along from the commonplace to the obvious. ... Aspiration is cast at the lowest level of human desire, and when any one achieves anything, it is a moment of triumph.

Peterson writes with great honesty and integrity, but there is only a limited emotional satisfaction. ... The real appeal, I guess, is to the sense of superiority it arouses in a mass audience, any one of whom could hardly avoid the conclusion that he could handle life much more capably. ...17

This change in attitude toward original plays of the Chayefsky-type can also be found in the columns of Gould and Kirkley. In most reviews, however, it can be sensed that the critics had conflicting
emotions. They wanted to champion original drama, but at the same time found many plays to which they could not honestly give good reviews. The recurring themes of loneliness, lack of emotional satisfaction, faulty play structure, and lowly aspirations could not be indefinitely endorsed. Almost reluctantly, it seemed, the critics began to find more and more that was unsatisfactory in many original plays.

If the men were reluctant to criticize originals, however, Janet Kern was not. She took a position as early as 1953 against most originals,18 and continued to give them poor reviews or ignore them completely until the original play had all but vanished. A remark in a 1958 column seemed to sum up fairly well Kern's attitude toward original plays. She wrote:

... TV does a good job with every form of theatre known, but when it comes to original theatricals, it falls flat on its orthicon tube.19

The closest that Kern came to giving a Chayefsky play a favorable review was after his 1953 production of The Sixth Year. Kern said that it was a gloomy play, and that gloom improperly handled could be depressing. However, she admitted that gloom properly handled—as it was in The Sixth Year—could inspire tears. Kern called Chayefsky the master gloom handler and said that he had written some of Television Playhouse's best plays.

Perhaps this qualified review should have been recognized as a battle cry, because by 1955 all of Kern's admiration for Chayefsky, Coe, and Television Playhouse had obviously vanished. In what appeared to be a personal vendetta Kern attacked Television Playhouse, Paddy Chayefsky, Fred Coe, and New York critics who had given Chayefsky
favorable reviews. Kern observed with considerable satisfaction that some New York critics had given *The Catered Affair* bad reviews. She interpreted this as a hopeful sign. She reminded the critics that she had questioned Television Playhouse's preoccupation with grimness, misery, and family disunity for years, while they had continued to praise the program and make Paddy Chayefsky their favorite literary genius. She wrote:

... His [Chayefsky's] grim, tawdry, amateur, psycho-analytical dramas about people who don't live in pent-houses and therefore are shallow and miserable, have been taken to heart by TV's dilettante circles.

But with the unfavorable reviews of *The Catered Affair*, Kern reasoned that Chayefsky's term as America's literary lion was about to run out.21

In fairness to Gould, Crosby, and Kirkley, however, it should be pointed out that they had questioned certain aspects of the Chayefsky-type play all along. At the time of *The Catered Affair* their dissatisfaction was becoming more positive.

When Gould reviewed *The Rabbit Trap* in 1955, he recalled that Television Playhouse had been accused by many as being preoccupied with depressing slice-of-life themes, and while he agreed that producers should resist being dictated to, he suggested that stark human anxiety was getting a good going over. "Type programming," Gould warned, "is as bad as type casting."22

By late 1955 Gould apparently had seen enough. A Sunday column read: "A great deal of television drama is sick." He accused many
originals as being nothing more than true confessions wired with sight
and sound. He wrote:

There's been much talk about how television is
giving birth to an exciting new crop of writers. Well,
there may be a few but not many more. . . . The TV
medium is spawning a bunch of psychoneurotics . . .

. . . Let's face it, there's only one dominant theme
on TV: Life is hell.

First, there is the leading character. He must always
be The Little Person in a Little Job in a Little Office
who lives in a Little Home with a Little Wife and Little
Children. . . . Mankind's highest aspiration: failure.
. . . his most sturdy crutch: loneliness.

. . . TV's neuropsychological kick is getting to be a
big bore.23

The same thought was repeated in a review of The Undiscovered
Country. Gould described the play as an unrelieved, clinical
examination of an ill man and suggested that Coe and Playwrights '56
". . . open the nearest window and breathe deeply."24

Another blow at plays with a psychiatric theme was delivered
at The Army Game. Gould said the play was only too characteristic of
contemporary video drama and suggested that Kaiser Aluminum Hour should
avoid over-use of TV psycho-drama, since there was already too much of
it.25

Crosby voiced a similar complaint about The Army Game. He said
the show was characterized by unpleasantness and added that " . . .
slice-of-life dramas were often gritty and exasperating."26

In summary it must be said that the Chayefsky-type plays had a
definite impact on television critics. All recognized and praised in
varying degrees the skill of Chayefsky and his contemporaries. They found much in their plays that was ideal for the medium of television. Plots were simple, characterizations strong, dialogue realistic and intimate, contrast and relief well planned, and themes were developed with honesty and integrity. However, certain objectionable features gradually overshadowed the plays' merits. Among those things to which critics voiced increasing objections were stories filled with gritty and often unpleasant aspects of life, repetition of the same theme, structures that were poorly planned, and a preoccupation with psychiatry.

II - Problem Plays

Another type of original play that received attention from the critics was the problem play. This type of play was ordinarily concerned with some controversial topic such as racial desegregation, freedom of speech or censorship, treatment of prisoners of war, and narrow-mindedness of small communities.

The problems involved in presenting such a play were apparently tremendous. One has only to read the introductory remarks to the various collections of television plays of Chayefsky\textsuperscript{27} or Serling\textsuperscript{28} to get some understanding of the battle the playwrights waged to get plays with controversial themes presented.

The basic conflict, the critics pointed out, stemmed from television's unique status as an entertainment medium. The playwrights looked upon television as an art medium and reasoned that any art form should have freedom of expression. Representatives of the industry saw
television as an advertising medium. They reasoned that the sponsor advertised to sell products and anything that offended any segment of the viewing audience represented a potential loss of sales. For a while compromises were possible, but as the cost of advertising increased, the agencies and the sponsors exercised increasing control.

Kirkley braced and explained the history of television censorship in 1956. He said that from the beginning television executives wanted to avoid the external censorship problems like the state censor boards which the movies had faced. To avoid this they had created the National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters, which had incorporated all the film restrictions and many of its own. But self-censorship does not stop there, Kirkley explained. The industry also gets unofficial censorship from other areas—advertising agencies, sponsors, producers, and directors. These, of course, are not enforcement in the legal sense, but as Kirkley indicated, they are more effective than any legal enforcement could be since they have control of the money, the script, and the production.

Many of these people may be interested in artistic values, but they want total acceptance of the sponsor's product even more and will not risk offending anyone. Because of this, Kirkley concluded:

... The sponsor, director, producer, station manager, and so forth, won't bother to consult the code; if in the judgment of any responsible individual, the idea under consideration will give offense to a segment of the audience, out it goes. Obviously, this put an author or comedy writer under a tremendous handicap ...

... Neither the broadcasters nor the movie-makers had courage and foresight enough to fight for their own version of freedom of speech and expression.
As another example of the industry's self-censorship, Kirkley revealed the unique experience suffered by the Fund for the Republic. In 1955 the Fund offered $29,000 in prizes to encourage new writers. The entries had to deal with loyalty, security, freedom of speech and conscience, racial desegregation, or due process of law. Nineteen prizes were awarded, but not one play script was sold. Kirkley explained why:

... You haven't seen many—if any—television dramas which come to grips with such problems and you're not likely to. ... No matter how objective an author may be, whenever he plunges into a theme of "social significance" ... he's going to split his audience wide open and give his sponsor a severe headache.

It's not enough for the writer to be neutral: if he doesn't take either side, he'll alienate both. The theatre ... can afford to start a controversy, but the television sponsor can't. ... Since he pays heavily to advertise his product, he'd be foolish to present something which might hurt his sales.

As Paddy Chayefsky was to the "slice-of-life" drama, Rod Serling was to the problem play. Several of his plays, despite necessary compromises to satisfy television's self-censorship, were regarded by the critics as television masterpieces. Two plays in particular, Patterns and Requiem for a Heavyweight, were regarded as milestones in television drama. Both, however, were less controversial than other of Serling's plays such as Noon at Doomsday and A Town Has Turned to Dust, The Rack, and Rank and File.

Kirkley described Noon at Doomsday as a powerful drama and "... an effective tale of human beings in deep trouble." He acknowledged, however, that the play suffered from "... the concealed blight with which the medium is plagued--self-censorship." He
then added a prophecy: "Self-censorship in television is a stiffling thing, and it is going to become more so: and the sad part is, there's very little that can be done about it." Kirkley said that when Serling wrote Noon at Doomsday, he had the Till murder in Mississippi in mind, but it was apparently impossible for him to say so. The locale scrupulously avoided anything which might give offense to a potential customer.31

Gould said of Noon at Doomsday that he was glad to see a play that gripped with a potentially compelling theme. However, he thought the play was a series of implausible events coated with so much emotion that the play could not be genuinely powerful.32

Both Gould and Kirkley reviewed A Town Has Turned to Dust, an indictment of narrow-mindedness of a small town. Gould described it as a raw and tough play with excellent dialogue and sound situations. He thought Serling had expressed the theme—vicious contempt of fellow beings leads only to self destruction—with inspiration and fine determination. Gould noted that Serling had to fight executive interference in the story line.33

Kirkley called A Town Has Turned to Dust the most powerful case against lynching since the Ox-Bow Incident. He described it as "raw, uncompromising, horrifying stuff" and admitted that it required strength to stay with the story. He described Serling as an angry man but one who knows how to discipline his anger. Kirkley also praised the sponsor for allowing the play.34

The Rack was a 1955 play by Serling. It dealt with the treatment of American prisoners of war who were thought to have given
information to the enemy under threat of physical torture. Crosby said Serling had taken one of the most important, most neglected controversial and most difficult themes of our times and handled it well. He called The Rack a strong and powerful story.35

Kirkley was enthusiastic about The Rack. He said that it was not easy to write such a play because much of the question about how the problem should be handled was debatable.36

Another champion of community and social responsibility was playwright Reginald Rose, who wrote Thunder on Sycamore Street, Crime in the Street, and Tragedy in a Temporary Town. Crosby gave an interesting insight into Rose's style by comparing him with Chayefsky. He said that Chayefsky's recurring theme was loneliness, while Rose's theme was community and social responsibility reflected through the institution of justice, and the pressure of the times upon the people who live them. As Chayefsky dealt with few characters, generally from the same class environment, Rose liked to paint on a broader canvas in order to show social stresses between classes, and to bring as much of the community as possible into focus. Referring to Rose's style, Crosby said:

... There is also about many of his plays a stark and satisfying unity of time... His plays have artificial breaks to permit commercials... but actually no time break elapses in the story and this fixity of time and place is peculiarly appropriate to TV hour-long dramas... 37

Gould too voiced respect for Rose's skill as a writer of problem plays. Suggesting to his readers that Rose was a writer to watch, Gould said that Thunder on Sycamore Street was a drama of uncommon sensitivity, craftsmanship, and valor that did not rely upon the message
alone but rather upon a dramatic situation. Gould described the climax as having a quality of religious poignancy. He concluded: "Seldom has the Golden Rule been reaffirmed with such power and suspense." 38

Crime in the Streets was concerned with teen-age gangs. Gould called it a social drama of enormous power and human insight that avoided the temptation of using sensationalism. He said that Rose became a reporter and displayed in the detail, maturity, and vividness of his dialogue an ear for speech that gave the play a frightening reality. 39

Tragedy in a Temporary Town received considerable publicity that was probably not intended. The star, Lloyd Bridges, was to denounce a mob intent on lynching. Bridges used language that the playwright had not included in the script. The event was well covered in the press the following day, and Mr. Bridges made a public apology. Gould called it one of the most violently melodramatic climaxes in the annals of television drama. He found the mob scenes very powerful, but he thought the play needed more contrast and relief. He said the play started off at such a high pitch that the playwright had no place to go. He concluded:

"Tragedy in a Temporary Town" was longer on violence than craftsmanship. If the two factors could be brought into better balance, the play undoubtedly would make quite a movie. 40

One of the earliest of the problem plays was P.O.W. by David Davidson. The plot concerned a prisoner of war faced with the decision of giving information to the enemy or facing torture or death. Crosby, Gould, and Kirkley gave the play good reviews. Gould said P.O.W. was a notable achievement, "topical theatre of pertinency and power." He
praised the dialogue and characters but thought the resolution weak because too many things happened at once and too rapidly for credibility. This he attributed to the rigid time requirement of TV.\footnote{41}

Kirkley called P.O.W. moving and forceful. He said that Davidson marshalled his facts like a documentary, and it gave the drama a well-articulated, hard-boned quality with characters that were believable. Kirkley thought the suspense with a gripping and surprising twist at the end was well planned.\footnote{42}

Crosby described P.O.W. as a tremendously exciting and disturbing adult drama. He admitted that it was not a pretty drama, but suggested that it was marked by a seriousness of purpose. He praised Davidson for his skill in picturing the character's inner turmoils in dramatic terms.\footnote{43}

Writing a satisfactory ending for a problem play was apparently difficult. The problems of censorship and time limitations were contributing factors, but there were others as well. A common complaint by the critics was that the playwright had thought of a good beginning but had failed to write an ending.

In reviewing Anatomy of Fear, Crosby generalized about unsatisfactory endings with many original plays. He said the play had a powerful opening, but about half way through it ran out of gas with no place to go. This caused the ending to be weak, which Crosby said was characteristic of many original shows. Crosby admitted that writers were underpaid, but they still had the responsibility for writing a complete play. "Too many TV plays," he concluded, "have the beginning
and the middle, but no ending. . . . It's a frustrating experience, and it leaves me with a feeling that I've been wasting my time." 44

Murder of a Sand Flea was a play about the problems of a new Army recruit's attempt to adjust to life in the Armed Services. Gould accused the playwright of poor play structure. He said the play reflected a fault all too common in television drama. " . . . Instead of resolving itself, the play hid behind the flag. The result was a disappointing and strained climax of convenience." Gould said that life in an Army barracks was skillfully detailed and purposeful, but the entire validity of the play was ruined by an ending that did not resolve the play. "The denouement came so quickly," Gould added, "that it might have been written by a recruiting sergeant . . ." 45

Kirkley agreed that Murder of a Sand Flea had been ruined by the ending. He said the play was very timely and for two acts it was tense, engrossing, and powerful, but the climax was contrived, unmotivated and reached much too easily to be convincing. 46

Problem plays were not always faced with censorship, however. Gore Vidal found a partial solution in Visit to a Small Planet. He resorted to satire and wrote a play about a man who came to Earth from another planet, where civilization had advanced many centuries beyond current times. With tongue-in-cheek the man from outer space was able to take some jibes at our modern society that many might have questioned in a dramatic problem play. Kirkley, Gould, and Crosby all mentioned this and in effect, encouraged other playwrights to do the same thing. Few playwrights, however, apparently thought it was worth a try.
Crosby admitted that satire was difficult to write, but suggested that it was worth the effort. He was surprised that many of Vidal's thrusts on current American attitudes got on the air. Crosby believed the sermon became a little ponderous, but called it "... a very gay romp with wonderfully witty lines."  

Kirkley said Vidal was trying to put bite into the backbone of TV drama despite the taboos and self-censorship, and he succeeded in delivering a scorching satire on the human race by using the science fiction twist. "In concept," Kirkley wrote, "it was worthy of Voltaire."  

III - Original Plays Based on Actual Situations

The various television theatres, especially Armstrong Circle Theatre, had some critical success with dramatizations based on actual events and biographies. Armstrong's approach was considered both unique and successful. All of the program's plays were a kind of documentary, and generally the critics praised the program.

After an early Armstrong production, Crosby suggested that the program was a trend worth watching. He said The Third Ear, a dramatization of wire tapping, proved that the program could take current events and dramatize them in an exciting way but with great honesty. Crosby said the program was using the element of immediacy in a way that neither the stage nor the movies had been able to do. "It was as fresh and interesting as a current newspaper," Crosby concluded.

In a later discussion Crosby declared that Armstrong had proved that truth was often stranger than fiction, but added there had been
problems along the way. Armstrong's most difficult problem was to find stories that were probable, but at the same time not too improbable. Some stories had to be passed up because they seemed too much like soap opera. In other instances the story was good, but it simply did not fill the requirements of a television drama in some way. The story would not fit the rigid time requirements; the story had a villain and the villain was still alive; the story had a point of view, and it was seldom that two people saw the story from the same point of view; and finally, some stories were too good to be true. Crosby also informed his readers that after a few months of production, Armstrong had begun to use composites: several stories pieced into one. He concluded that the trend toward actuality was a healthy thing, providing enough of the actuality stayed in the story. In the case of Armstrong Circle Theatre, he believed the producers and writers were treating facts with great honesty.50

Kirkley greeted the new Armstrong program as a welcome addition to the hour-long dramatic shows. He said the producers were pledged to present verified reproductions of actual situations with as little deviation from the truth as possible. He considered this a healthy trend, but questioned whether actual situations would be as interesting as regular plays since they were more likely to be narrative than dramatic.

Apparently The Strange War of Sergeant Krenzer convinced Kirkley that the program had dramatic values. He found in the production overtones of tragedy, a surprising amount of humor, and a great deal of human interest.51
73 Seconds into Space, a dramatization of the problems of space flight, was also praised. Kirkley said dramatizations of real life events had paid off again with such a ring of truth that it gave the viewer the feeling of looking over the shoulder of a scientist.52

Gould reviewed Armstrong's production of Ward 3, a script based on actual events in the women's ward of a hospital. He said the play succeeded in presenting a penetrating and authentic study of characters without resorting to sensationalism.53

On occasions other television theatres also attempted dramatizations of real life situations. While only a few were reviewed, it is apparent that those in which the playwright showed great respect for detail and avoided sensationalism were given the best reviews. Two reviews illustrate: Robert Montgomery Presents gave One Minute to Ditch, a dramatization of the events leading to a passenger plane's being forced down at sea. Gould praised the play. He said the play was a true and factual account of the incident and praised the playwright for having avoided excessive melodrama by concentrating on the preparations for ditching the plane. The excellent climax was attributed to the playwright's careful attention to details.54

A Playhouse 90 show, Portrait of Murder, based on the life of Donald Keith Basler, a convicted killer, was highly praised by Crosby. The play traced the killer's life and was climaxed in a scene showing him headed for the gas chamber. The script incorporated a tape recording of the dead man's actual voice made just before his death. Crosby said the story was carefully and convincingly written and it succeeded because of the playwright's great attention to details.55
Similar to plays based on actual situations were plays based on biographies. Over the years several biographical plays were attempted, but only a few were judged successful. The shortcomings of many such plays were summarized by Gould in reviews of two plays, *The Life of Cardinal Mindszentz* and *Portrait of a Man*. Gould said *The Life of Cardinal Mindszentz* failed because the producers attempted to use a technique borrowed from radio—the radio documentary technique. An asset of such a technique was that tremendous time segments could be covered in a short period of time. Gould thought the technique was well suited for radio, but wrong for television. The program attempted to cover so much in such a short time period that the episodic quality gave the play almost a reportorial detachment. As a result, Gould felt that viewers never had an insight into the man and that they probably felt they were watching a tragedy rather than sharing it. Gould also felt the play was hurt because the playwright had not personalized the enemy. Instead the Communists had emerged as stereotyped villains.56

*The Portrait of a Man* was an attempt to portray the life of Albert Einstein with an emphasis on the human side of the man rather than the scientific side. Gould said that like many such television biographies, the leading character never had appeal or depth. He found many of the instances over-theatrical, poorly staged, and presented in a confusing sequence and with dubious accuracy. Gould warned that it was impossible to hurry such subject matter.57

In 1957 Omnibus produced *The Life of Samuel Johnson* as prepared for television by James Lee and starred Peter Ustinov. While not an original play in the full sense of the word, Lee's interpretation
nevertheless represented research from many sources. Gould said the most rewarding aspect of the play was Lee's careful consideration of the many facets of Dr. Johnson's character, with no effort to varnish the course nature of Johnson's appearance. It was significantly pointed out that the elaborate scenery had a purpose and was not there only to give the viewer something to look at.58

Crosby was less enthusiastic about *The Life of Samuel Johnson*. Granting that the play had its interesting moments, Crosby felt the playwright had tried to get all of 18th Century London into the script. The effect was that of visiting a museum. He said Lee was more a researcher than a dramatist.59

Shortly after, Robert Briscoe, Mayor of Dublin, visited the United States in 1957, and Playhouse 90 presented an original play, *The Fabulous Irishman*, based on his life. It was written by Eleck Moll and starred Art Carney. Kirkley praised the play highly. He said it was among the season's best and that it had dignity, substance, honest feeling and touches of humor:

... It had meaning and purpose. ... Dramatized something of the past which is important to the present. ... A remarkable story about a remarkable man. ... A brilliant climax for a brilliant season.60

**IV - Original Comedies, Farces, and Humorous Fantasies**

Original comedies, farces, and humorous fantasies were seldom attempted on television, and the few that were produced were seldom judged successful. In fact, when a critic gave a comedy a favorable review, it was so unusual that he generally called attention to it.
Crosby touched on the problems of writing television comedies in a review of *Daisy, Daisy* by Summer Locke Elliott. He said the play was a good contemporary comedy with a strong central idea and excellent touches of satire. He added, however, that while the play amused, it was not funny in the sense of a good stage comedy. "Everything was there but the high polish ... that final explosive phrase that sets you howling." He found this a fault common to many television comedies.61

Three comedies or farces to which Crosby gave favorable reviews were *The Huntress*, *The Money Tree*, and *The Gentleman from Seventh Avenue*. *The Huntress* starred Judy Holliday and Tony Randall. Crosby described it as the most delightful hour of television he had experienced for some time. He said *The Huntress* showed how good comedy should be done.62

Reviewing *The Money Tree* Crosby observed that the pressure of writing television drama had driven writers to greater and greater flights of fancy. Some, like *The Money Tree*, Crosby suggested were not only good, but a welcome change from stark realism.63

*The Gentleman from Seventh Avenue*, a Playhouse 90 production, starred Walter Slezak and Sylvia Sidney in a comedy set against the background of the New York garment industry. Crosby said it was a thoroughly professional job of entertainment--bright and funny, and it did not tear you to ribbons emotionally. "It was," he concluded, "a good comedy--almost unheard of on TV."64

Gould reviewed *Adapt or Die*, *The Huntress*, *Goodbye Gray Flannel*, *The Boarding House*, and *The Tale of St. Emergency*. *Adapt or Die*, a
play about the publishing business, was described by Gould as a topical satire with a real story. He thought such qualities were extremely rare on television. He suggested that a stronger ending would have improved the play.65

Gould was not impressed with The Huntress. He thought the plot was strained by too many convenient coincidences. He agreed that farce was badly needed, but warned that it must be carefully planned.66

Goodbye Gray Flannel, a comedy about two sophisticated New Yorkers who had deserted Madison Avenue for farm life in Vermont, struck Gould as an above average comedy. On the negative side he thought the dialogue lacked tang and that the couple seemed only to be explaining their situation rather than living it. "More attention to characterizations," Gould suggested, "and less to narrative would have made a big difference."67

Gould's review of The Boarding House revealed a standard of criticism that Gould talked of frequently. He said the virtue of the play was that it did not try to do too much, and through this economy gave viewers an opportunity to know everyone. Part of the success Gould credited to the director, Dan Petrie, for having avoided too many close-up shots, thereby preserving the viewer's sense of being part of a thoroughly interesting group of people.68

The Tale of St. Emergency was a fantasy about two disguised angels returning to Earth in an attempt to help solve the political entanglements of a small town. The play received considerable publicity because Jackie Gleason, the television comic, was given credit for having thought of the idea. Gould described the play as not quite
great, but strangely effective. He applauded the attempt at doing some­thing different, but suggested that had the play been staged more on the side of the angels and had become less involved in the town's politics, it would have been more effective.69

Fortunately for the sake of comparison, Kirkley and Kern also reviewed The Tale of St. Emergency. However, neither critic liked it. Kirkley thought the script was contrived and amateurish, and seriously questioned whether it would have been produced had Jackie Gleason's name not been associated with the play. Kirkley also objected to the play's treatment of religion. He said that religious fantasy was a risky business and such stories, when attempted, should be founded on sound, theological principles and beliefs, and the characters must be plausible and convincingly human. "The fundamental fault," Kirkley concluded, "was that the sins of the community were not well founded or substantial."70

Kern said that The Tale of St. Emergency was sensitive but sadly unperceptive:

... It was a remarkably muttled bit of daintily con­structed moralizing. ... No doubt there was a profound idea hidden somewhere, but it completely escaped me. The only moral seemed to be ... an honest, drunken bum is better than a pack of crooked politicians.71

Shortly after the success of Patterns, Rod Serling attempted a farce, The Man Who Caught the Ball at Cugan's Bluff. Only Kirkley reviewed it, and while he actually had little to say about the play, his review had some interesting observations on television playwriting during the 1955-56 season. Kirkley recalled that The Man Who Caught the Ball at Cugan's Bluff was the third of Serling's plays to be
produced on television in a six-day period. He said that while Serling's plays are generally of high quality, this one was below standard and suggested that Serling was being asked to do too much. Kirkley concluded that the supply of writers was never great enough to supply the approximately two thousand scripts television used annually. He then added:

... As the rate of pay increases, writers can afford to write less and this will further diminish available scripts. There is going to be a definite limit to the number of top-notch dramas presented each year. Repeat performances are going to be a must.72

Perhaps Kirkley's thoughts could almost have been viewed as a prophecy for the number of top-notch dramas being presented each season was certainly cut tremendously within two seasons.

V - Original Plays with Questionable Themes or Plots

Gould, Crosby, and Kirkley occasionally exercised a form of censorship by questioning the advisability of certain themes or stories. Apparently this was done with some reluctance. All three men had championed the playwrights' struggles against censorship. Kern did not share their reluctance, however. As has already been noted, she exercised considerable censorship regarding the Chayefsky-type plays, and it is perhaps unnecessary to say that she objected to a wide range of other themes.

One type of story that was apparently overdone was the backstage story--particularly with a comedian as a central character. Backstage or behind-the-camera plays were especially popular in 1957. Observing this in a review of The Great American Hoax, Crosby said that
stories of alcoholics, dope addicts, and comedians were the stories of the moment. He asked what had become of homosexuality as material for a story. The Great American Hoax starred Ed Wynn, and was concerned with the personal life of an unsavory comedian. Crosby objected. He said that through such plays, television viewers were getting too much inside dope and too much backstage gossip. Because of this, he reasoned, comedians were becoming objects of concern rather than figures of fun. He warned that if playwrights continued to bare the souls of comedians, they would no longer be fun.73

Kirkley also questioned backstage stories, but for other reasons. He objected because he felt that such plays invariably lead people to believe that the playwright had a particular star in mind when he wrote the play. Good Old Charlie Faye and Man on a Tiger, both reviewed in the same column and both stories of backstage heels, were unquestionably fictitious, Kirkley thought, but he reasoned that many viewers would nevertheless assume that the characters were based on real people.74

In other instances like The Singing Idol, Kirkley objected because he said the principal characters were only thinly disguised characterizations of the rock and roll singer, Elvis Presley, and his manager, Colonel Parker. He wondered if the real characters would take offense.75

While not an original show, The Comedian by Rod Serling, was a searing portrait of a television comic. The play starred Mickey Rooney and was a prize winning play. Kirkley praised Rooney's acting, as did the other critics, but he found fault with the playwright for
having disguised his main character so thinly that the entire television industry knew who it was. While it was generally denied that the playwright had anyone in mind, Kirkley thought the characterization represented the most flagrant kind of irresponsibility.  

Playhouse 90 produced *The Helen Morgan Story* in 1957. It starred Polly Bergan, and Miss Morgan's mother acted as a consultant. Miss Bergan's performance and the music were highly praised by the critics, but despite the praiseworthy aspects of the play, Kirkley felt that the story should have remained untold. He could not recall one redeeming virtue of the script and found fault with the mother for having permitted the play.

Another backstage story was *The Mother Bit* presented by Studio One. Crosby said that it was a thinly disguised story of a well-known comedienne and suggested that "... show folk were certainly catching hell this year."

The last of the backstage stories of the period was Kraft Theatre's 1958 production of *Battle for Wednesday Night*. It was a story of a struggle between a television comic and a popular singer for the evening's best rating. Generally the story was thought relatively weak, but the reviews made some interesting comments. Gould said that the thought behind the show was to remind viewers of recent friends so they could associate it with real people. He added that Jack Oakie, the star, was a refreshing change from the usual derogatory characterizations of comedians. He found the play most effective when showing how TV's gigantic publicity apparatus could fan a backstage spark into a front-page conflagration.
Kirkley said *Battle for Wednesday Night* was far fetched but amusing and agreed with Gould that it was most effective when showing the backstage of television. He added, however, that it shed no light on ratings—television's biggest fraud.®

Crosby's review was perhaps the most interesting. He said that we were coming to a new breed of backstage dramas, but that the behind-the-television-camera dramas would probably never solidify into a classic design, because things change too fast in the television industry.®

Additional plays with objectionable features included *Strange Deaths at Burnleigh, Two Test for Tuesday*, and *The Plot to Kill Stalin*. Kirkley said that *Strange Deaths at Burnleigh* was a thinly disguised story about a British doctor's recent trial for murder. In the actual situation the doctor was declared innocent, but in the television version he was found guilty. Kirkley questioned the implications of such procedures.®

Crosby included some interesting theories on playwriting in reviewing *Two Tests for Tuesday*. The play had as a theme the idea that each case of cheating in college examinations should be dealt with according to individual motivations, and in some cases condoned. Crosby accused the playwright of being unethical, since the plot was loaded in favor of the college student. He thought the play had elements of tragedy, but violated the basic idea of tragedy. He explained that in all great tragedies the central figure generally has a difficult time, frequently caused by circumstances outside his control. Despite this seeming unfairness, however, retribution catches up with him.
because it has to. The nature of tragedy, Crosby reasoned, demands certain penalties for certain transgressions. When the playwright makes exceptions for whatever reason, he weakens the moral of his play. The obvious outcome, Crosby concluded, was that

... In each viewer there is a little weakening of his moral fiber. ... All of us from day to day have to withstand temptations of some sort. If we see weakness condoned for whatever reason, it pulls the rug from under us.83

Probably the most publicized reaction to a play resulted from Playhouse 90's production of The Plot to Kill Stalin. The story, written by David Karp, virtually accused a Russian official of having murdered Stalin. Gould immediately questioned the wisdom of accusing the head of another state of murder at a time when the relationship between Russia and the United States was at a low ebb. He wondered how Americans would react if a foreign play had accused our President of murder. Gould thought it would have been better to suggest the idea in dramatic form rather than use the form of a dramatic documentary with actual names. He accused the playwright of seeking sensationalism and wondered whether there would not be reaction from Russia.84

Crosby said the play was interesting and educational, but not distinguished, and taking an entirely different point of view from Gould, he said the play was quite restrained and unsensational. However, Crosby could not help but wonder how the Russian Embassy had reacted.85

The anticipated reaction came quickly. The Russian government ordered the Columbia Broadcasting Company correspondent out of the
country and sent a note of protest to the United States Government. It should be mentioned, however, that the Television Academy of Arts and Sciences awarded The Plot to Kill Stalin top honors for original plays during the 1958-59 season.

Gould also questioned the advisability of presenting plays with religious undercurrents. In reviewing The Devil As A Roaring Lion, he said that attempting a play with strong religious undercurrents in an hour's time was a precarious undertaking. He explained that the demands of the clock may dictate an expedient conclusion that inadvertently refutes the moral principles enunciated earlier. He thought this was what happened in The Devil As a Roaring Lion. The oversimplification of the narrative was fatal to its validity, Gould said, and consequently made the play susceptible to serious misinterpretation. It was necessary for the leading character to compromise on fundamental moral issues in order to conclude on time. 86

VI - Plays by Robert Sherwood

One experiment in original television play writing created so much advanced interest, and failed so badly that it will be considered separately.

Early in 1954 the National Broadcasting Company, in an announced effort to improve the quality of original television plays, contracted with Robert Sherwood to do a series of eight plays at $25,000. Not only was the price fantastic for that time, but other terms of the contract were equally sensational. Sherwood was given absolute control over the script, castings, and all phases of production. There was to
be absolutely no interference from the advertising agencies or the network. Such unusual arrangements naturally received much advanced publicity, but the nature of Sherwood's plays was kept a well-guarded secret.

The first play was *Backbone of America*. It was given an expensive production with a cast of name stars from the stage and screen. The play's theme concerned the curse of conformity among Americans. The reviews were generally unfavorable. Gould praised the theme as a good idea, but thought it lacked a point of view and as a consequence, had slipped through Sherwood's fingers. The script was described as routinely contrived, and Sherwood was accused of having wavered between satire and protest. Individual character delineations were missing and there were far too many sub-plots.

Gould was especially disappointed in Sherwood. He said that most television playwrights were forced to make compromises, but Sherwood had been given the opportunity to say something of significance. When he failed, Gould reasoned he had not only let himself down, but other television playwrights as well. He could have opened the door.87

Crosby too pointed out that Sherwood had missed a real opportunity. "It set my teeth on edge," Crosby stated right from the start. He agreed with Gould that Sherwood's theme was a good one, but thought that he had failed to develop it. Generally sensitive to dialogue, Crosby said that the dialogue sounded more like first-draft Sherwood than first-rate Sherwood.88
Apparently Sherwood had voiced some misgivings about his ability to cope with television, because Kirkley said in his review of Backbone of America that Sherwood's own forebodings were amply justified. Kirkley found the play neither fresh nor stimulating and expressed the opinion that Sherwood had been guilty of writing a typical, average teleplay when the viewers had been led to expect more. Without Sherwood's name on the script, Kirkley believed the play would have passed as just another fair family situation play.  

The second Sherwood play was Diary, a story about juvenile delinquency told through a series of flashbacks. Kirkley and Crosby reviewed Diary, and their differences of opinion point up an element of subjectivity in criticism.

Kirkley could not understand why Sherwood had failed again. "Why can't this very fine writer of stage dramas adapt his style and thinking to the new medium?" Kirkley asked. "It's a puzzlement."

In particular Kirkley could not understand why Sherwood had used a flash-back technique. In his opinion it had not only been overdone in the movies, but it had also failed on television. He declared that the use of a diary was a sickening Hollywood cliche that made the play more a narrative than a true drama. "It was more suitable for true story magazines than representative of a foremost dramatist."  

By contrast Crosby declared that Sherwood had tackled juvenile delinquency with sympathy, intelligence, and stunning dramatic effect. He praised the flash-back technique and the play's surprisingly suspenseful quality.
The third and final Sherwood play was *The Trial of Pontius Pilate*. Kirkley reported that shortly after it had been produced, Sherwood had admitted that he was baffled and afraid of the new medium and asked to be released from his contract. Of the play, Kirkley said simply that it did nothing for the author's reputation. The weakness, he said, was that Sherwood could not decide whether to treat Pilate with sympathy. Kirkley suggested that an hour's time was not sufficient for Sherwood to develop a theme of such magnitude.

In summary it can be said that Gould, Crosby, and Kirkley have been persistent champions of original plays for television. They argued that television was a medium in its own right and had characteristics of its own, and for that reason, material written especially for television had a far better chance of success than material adapted from other media.

From the materials which have been presented in this chapter, it seems safe to conclude that the three men conscientiously tried to understand what a good original play for television should be, and with this understanding attempted to guide playwrights, producers, directors, and actors toward better original plays through a set of standards of evaluation which they had developed over a period of time.

This cannot be said of Kern. As early as 1953 her columns reflected a hostility toward original plays. Her greatest dissatisfaction centered around the Philco-Goodyear Playhouse and the Chayefsky-type play, but quickly grew to include most original plays. Perhaps Kern's attitude is best summarized in her 1958 declaration that TV
had succeeded in every kind of theatre but had fallen completely on its face with original theatrics.93

Consequently, the standards of criticism which follow must be considered those of Gould, Crosby, and Kirkley, and while these may be considered as a collective impression, the three men actually used them with such consistency that it is unnecessary to consider the extent to which each man used them separately.

1) The play must have a good beginning, middle, and ending. The critics frequently thought that original plays had excellent beginnings, but poor endings. This, they attributed to rigid time limitations and self-imposed censorship.

2) The plot should be simple with no distracting sub-plots. Because of the intimacy of television, the critics reasoned that a complex plot tended to confuse the viewers, weaken characterizations, and destroy mood.

3) A play is best with few characters. Too many characters weaken characterizations and hinder the forward movement of the story.

4) Close unity of time, place, and action is desirable. Observation of the unities helps tighten the story and compensates for the intrusion of commercials.

5) Violent action often destroys any possibility of the important quality of relief and contrast.

6) The dialogue must be realistic and honest--particularly in the deep psychological studies that have been popular on television. The intimacy of television forces many close-ups, thus dialogue is emphasized. Understatement is frequently desirable.
7) Characterizations must be carefully formed. Again the intimacy of television brings the characters under close observation. Qualities of humanism and warmth are desirable.

8) The story and characters should build in terms of action.

9) The play must have emotional satisfaction. Honesty and integrity of writing are desirable, but not completely satisfactory in themselves.

10) Deep psychological studies of human beings under stress make good television plays, but over-use of this type of play becomes offensive and dissatisfying after a time.

11) Plays dealing with problems of current society are desirable. However, the ending must not be sacrificed because of self-imposed censorship.

12) Comedies and fantasies need a high polish that apparently takes more time than TV playwrights can, or are willing to give.

13) Plays based on actual situations make good television plays, since the playwright can make use of the sense of immediacy denied the stage and the screen. However, complete honesty in handling the facts must be observed.

14) Censorship should be avoided, but the playwright must exercise taste in selection of materials. He should avoid offensive religious themes and character assassination.
CHAPTER VI

FOOTNOTES

1. The 1956-57 season represented the beginning of a sharp decline in the live television theatres. By the 1959-60 season only three remained, and it had already been announced that one of those would not return for the 1960-61 season.


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46. Donald Kirkley, The Baltimore Sun, October 12, 1956.
60. Donald Kirkley, The Baltimore Sun, July 1, 1957.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

From an evaluation of the collective criticisms of Jack Gould, John Crosby, Donald Kirkley, and Janet Kern, it must be concluded that the four critics have recognizable standards for evaluating live television drama.

To accept this generalization, however, it is necessary to make three basic assumptions. First, it must be assumed that such standards of criticism are neither absolute nor rigid laws, but rather guiding principles through which the critics attempt to communicate to their readers—what presumably include those in the television industry—what they believe good television plays are and should be. Second, it must be assumed that differences of opinion concerning the merits of a particular play or kind of play are inevitable, even when all critics appear to use the same standards of criticism. What is more surprising than the differences of opinion are the instances of agreement. Third, it must be assumed that each critic has certain standards which are unique to his particular philosophy of criticism. In instances where such differences have been apparent, attention has been called to that fact.

As a backdrop for their standards of criticism, the four critics have frequently discussed the characteristics of television as a
medium. These characteristics, they have implied, should be taken into consideration before writing or producing plays for television. Among the characteristics most often discussed, three are mentioned here:

1) Television is an intimate medium.

2) Television is both an entertainment medium and an advertising medium.

3) Television has an appetite for material unknown to any other media.

What the critics meant when they identified television as an intimate medium was never discussed in detail. Any explanation must be arrived at by the process of putting bits and pieces of implied explanations together. Among the things which were attributed to television when its intimate nature was discussed, were its sense of immediacy and actuality, the small home viewing screen, and a small home viewing audience. In a live television play the viewer has the impression that what he is seeing is actually happening. The small screen brings the viewer closer to the scene of action and forces the use of the close-up shot. The result is that the viewer comes into intimate contact with the actor. The camera, acting as the viewer's eye, magnifies the most intimate details. The sense of intimacy is further enhanced by the fact that the viewer is watching from his own living room. It is almost as though what he is seeing and hearing is actually taking place in his own home.

The fact that the critics recognize that television is a forced marriage between entertainment and advertising indicates that they recognize some inherent limitations imposed on live television drama.
Unquestionably, the most significant aspect of this situation is a strong competition for the viewer's time. The advertiser measures the success of a program by the number of viewers that watch. A second limitation is cost. The sponsor pays the bill. The viewer does not buy a ticket. This factor places realistic limits on what the sponsor can spend. A third limitation is the fear of offending any segment of the viewing audience. The sponsor wants to sell his product, not offend viewers—no matter how few. Finally, there is the inevitable intrusion of commercials that must be recognized.

Television's appetite for material needs no further discussion. Even the most casual viewer is aware of this. Possibly the most significant result of this need is reflected in the television pattern of duplication of successful material. Success breeds success. If a new program or a play type succeeds, many imitations will soon follow until the program type or play form is worn out.

As indicated in the body of the text, Crosby, Gould, and Kirkley have a strong preference for original plays over plays adapted from other sources. Kern did not. However, the standards of criticism used by the three men were, for the most part, relatively uniform. The approach most commonly used in considering adaptations was to ask questions about the quality of the adaptation. Among the most persistent of these questions, four are mentioned here:

1) Was the spirit of the original material preserved?
2) Was the original material suited to a television play?
3) Did the original play still have values for present-day television audiences?

4) Was the TV play in good taste?

The concern for the spirit of the original overshadowed almost all other considerations, or at least made them of secondary importance. The critics became self-appointed guardians of the works of other authors and playwrights. This was especially true when adaptations of the classics were attempted. Gould, Crosby, and Kirkley, and to a lesser degree Kern, voiced respect for the plays and novels of the Greek playwrights, Shakespeare, Shaw, and Ibsen, as well as the works of more recent authors. Since the term "classic" was used loosely to describe a wide range of materials, the critics took the position that many of the authors could no longer protect their own works and, this being the case, they would act on their behalf. Adaptations of well-known children's stories were subjected to careful scrutiny. Intrusions on the spirit of make-believe were viewed with suspicion and alarm.

Closely associated with the concern for the spirit of the original was a concern for television's mechanical limitations as they related to producing a live play. Here, all the characteristics of television were considered, as well as its rigid time limitations, limited scope of the television camera, limited studio space and the tremendous task of compressing material from another source. It was very rare that a television critic found the adaptation as good as the original.
Possibly the most subjective of the four standards was the one which attempted to measure whether the original material still had meaning and values for present-day audiences. Nevertheless, it was frequently done, and many plays were judged unsatisfactory because they were thought to be out of date.

Whether the play was in good taste was seemingly asked with reluctance. Crosby and Gould were opposed to much of television's self-imposed censorship, and it was only on very rare occasions that they questioned whether a play was in good taste. Kirkley and Kern did so more frequently, but with approaches that were considerably different.

As indicated in an earlier chapter, a different set of standards was used to evaluate original plays for television than was used for evaluating adaptations. This seems quite natural. It is logical to assume that material written especially for a medium would take into account the characteristics of the medium, and consequently be more suited to it.

Of particular interest to the critics was the structure of the original play for television. They said a television play must have a beginning, middle, and ending; the plot must be relatively simple with no distracting sub-plots; too many characters are likely to cause confusion; close unity of time, place, and action improves the play; violent action is apt to destroy the quality of relief and contrast; dialogue must be realistic; and the story and characters must be built in terms of action.

Further, the critics have said that plays must have emotional satisfaction in addition to having honesty and integrity; plays dealing
with the problems of current society are desirable, but must be valid; comedies must have a high polish; and self-imposed censorship is deplorable.

Consequently, it seems valid to assume that the criticisms of the four television critics are not worthless, as many spokesmen for the television industry would like us to assume. It is evident that the critics have made every effort to communicate to writers, producers, and network officials what they believe good television plays to be. It also seems logical to assume that a playwright's chances of writing a successful play would be improved if he gave serious consideration to what the critics have said.

In conclusion it is perhaps worthwhile to recall what Serling, the playwright, said about the TV critic:

... He's there to needle and prod the industry into quality. He's there as a reminder that nothing can be slipped by. His very presence sets up certain absolute standards to be aimed at.¹
FOOTNOTES

1. Serling, loc. cit.
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