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there must be thousands of my own generation in this country who shared the interest and who are now able to digest something better. The important thing is that, within the limits fixed by material shortages—which presumably will not remain rigid—publishers are free to serve an intelligent public. I believe, therefore, that no safe distinction can be made between political and cultural democracy. Political freedom is pervasive. It implies, among other things, the right of an artist to think, to write, and to publish without reference to any authority except his own integrity. I admit that if culture in a democracy fell too much into decay there would be political reactions unfavourable to writers. But if standards of taste cannot be saved while everybody—including "the farm-hand down the road"—is free to argue about them, I do not think they could be saved under an aesthetic dictatorship.

—M. H. Holcroft

FROM THE THEATRE

OF course he's right. People's taste in plays is largely formed by the diet served up to them. Left to themselves they will probably choose badly. An unrelieved soft diet induces a sluggish appetite. An audience that has never been asked to think will resist a thoughtful play with the passionless inertia of a collection of sandbags. Luckily, however, thinking in a playhouse can also become a habit, and the inclination to go to a show seems to be endemic. If undiluted soft-tack could be kept out of our theatres and cinemas I consider that the falling-off in attendance would be less marked and of shorter duration than the commercial pundits would have us believe.

I think audiences can and will develop digestions equal to hard-tack, and, having acquired the taste, will become intolerant of a sloppy diet. But it is doubtful if they will do so in our time unless some kind of control or guidance more positive than propaganda is established. And if such control were possible, who is to define the standard? Not, as Mr. Priestley rightly insists, the public. A reputable body of experts? Perhaps. But this itself will be a democracy, pulled this way and that by individual preferences, sociological and political bias, aesthetic and technical discriminations. One expert may hold that the purest and most direct medium for an actor of comic genius is the music-hall turn. Another may dislike clowning altogether and particularly the vaudeville clown. For one the box-office success must be condemned out of hand. Another may reserve his judgment. A fifth may feel that drawing-room comedies are, *ipso facto*, to be counted out. A sixth may accept them as a legitimate medium and be ready to admit them on their own merits. So they will disagree and must ballot. They will be a democracy of experts. Who will appoint them? The Government? We would then have remote control by the democracy Mr. Priestley admires over something for which he finds democratic control detestable. It's not my business to ask if the appointment of a politician, in these times, any

less than that of a dramatist, is a job for an expert, or to wonder if Mr. Priestley's farm-hand is very much more reliable in the election of the one than he is in the choice of the other. Politically I am a democrat and must assume that he is.

—Ngaio Marsh

SPACE is limited, so Priestley's article cannot be discussed in detail. All that can be done is to jot down a few of the ideas which came to mind when reading it and hope that in the finish they make up some kind of coherence. The vulgarity of the current film and radio programme is deplorable, admittedly, but this is the result not so much of a cultural democracy as of a box-office dictatorship. The general public is not so mentally moribund as Priestley would have us believe. It supported *Henry V.* and *Brief Encounter* in spite of the all-talking, all-singing, all-baloney which was showing at the same time. Shakespeare wrote for the groundlings as well as for the fine gentlemen sitting on the stage and he was appreciated by both. Priestley's farmer does not understand Beethoven because he has never had an opportunity to listen properly, not because he is incapable of interpreting the music.

Priestley, I am sure, does get more "wonder and delight" out of living than the many who know not Mozart, and, as he is an honest man, we know that his desire to share this feeling is a genuine wish to share with his fellow men something which he considers valuable and important. But this sharing will never come about if he merely says so, loudly, in the newspapers. He hints at some form of censorship, some suppression of the things which so offend him, but I do not think that he will do much by tackling the problem in this way.

The only way, as I see it, is to catch them young. To let the present generation go, for what it's worth, and to concentrate on the younger fry. We must devote more time in an already overburdened school curriculum to musical appreciation, to visits to art galleries, to the playing over and again of the accepted classics. We must discuss and ridicule all the phoney craftsmanship we see about us—the crude carvings, the pseudo art, the bad design. It will be a long and slow process needing unlimited patience and an enduring enthusiasm, but in the long run it should work. The general level of art appreciation should rise. In part anyway. Just as there are varying degrees of capabilities and intelligence there will be varying degrees of acceptance. But those who are capable of seeing—will see. For the others—well, as far as that goes, I wouldn't like a world which concentrated solely on symphonies and where dance tunes were frowned on. Me—I like to dance too.

—Isobel Andrews

[HAVE been asked to comment as "a producer of plays." This I am not—yet. If I may speak as an artist whose work has been directed mainly towards the theatre, I agree with Mr. Priestley. Were artistic criteria reduced to the lowest, or even the middle common

denominator, artists would lose even their present much debated value to the community.

Art is a lengthy business; the theatre particularly so. For in the theatre all the arts are together involved, making an artistic mechanism unique in its com-

plexity and at once, in function and effect, the most democratic of the arts.

It may seem odd to suggest that the arts, difficult, and at times incomprehensible to the layman, should become less obscure when assembled in concert.

But I believe this

to be a fact. In the theatre the arts work together, as the parts of an orchestra, to clarify the author's conception. I believe this force to be irresistible in its combined onslaught on the most democratic audience, singly and collectively, provided only, and always, that the highest standards are sustained.

"Shakespeare," says Mr. Priestley, "is acknowledged everywhere as a master dramatist." In the schoolroom and in the closed volume of the collected plays, yes—and, but for the energies of Miss Marsh, where else, in our country, in action?

Can we not redeem this neglect, accelerate the process of "discovery," and dispel the spectre of study groups protracted into eternity, by carrying a living theatre, as good as the best our combined talents can make it, to a people almost literally "exiled from worlds of wonder and delight"?

—S. M. Williams



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