

OH DAD,
POOR DAD,

MAMMA'S
HUNG YOU IN THE
CLOSET AND I'M FEELIN'
SO SAD

WRITTEN BY ARTHUR KOPIT

AUDIENCE GUIDE

WRITTEN & COMPILED BY JACK MARSHALL





*Theater you can afford to see—
plays you can't afford to miss!*

About The American Century Theater

The American Century Theater was founded in 1994. We are a professional company dedicated to presenting great, important, but overlooked American plays of the twentieth century . . . what Henry Luce called “the American Century.”

The company’s mission is one of rediscovery, enlightenment, and perspective, not nostalgia or preservation. Americans must not lose the extraordinary vision and wisdom of past playwrights, nor can we afford to surrender our moorings to our shared cultural heritage.

Our mission is also driven by a conviction that communities need theater, and theater needs audiences. To those ends, this company is committed to producing plays that challenge and move all Americans, of all ages, origins and points of view. In particular, we strive to create theatrical experiences that entire families can watch, enjoy, and discuss long afterward.

These audience guides are part of our effort to enhance the appreciation of these works, so rich in history, content, and grist for debate.

The American Century Theater is a 501(c)(3) professional nonprofit theater company dedicated to producing significant 20th Century American plays and musicals at risk of being forgotten.

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The Playwright: The Surprising Arthur Kopit

—Jack Marshall

Arthur Kopit was born Arthur Lee Koenig on May 10, 1937. He went to Harvard convinced that he would come out with a nascent career path into science or business, but contracted the deadly theater bug when he took a modern drama workshop and developed the habit of writing short, strange plays with outrageous titles. In the summer of 1959, after he graduated with a degree in engineering, Kopit entered a playwriting contest.

Five days of furious writing produced a *sui generis* one-act about a monstrous but oddly appealing woman who keeps her husband's body in her bedroom and her grown son imprisoned in their various hotel rooms as she travels the world with two giant Venus Flytraps and a carnivorous fish. Kopit finished the play in Europe, where he was traveling on a fellowship, and submitted it to the contest. When he learned he had won the \$250 prize and that the play would be produced at Harvard, Kopit has said that he was relieved that he was out of the country. He was certain a play featuring a talking, kitten-eating fish and a man-eating plant and sporting the title *Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad* would prove unproduceable, unwatchable, and an embarrassment for all involved, especially him.

ODPDMHYITCAIFSS was, however, such a popular success in its student production that it was moved into another campus theater for a longer run. Then, improbably, for this almost never happens, the student production spawned an Off-Broadway version, where the young and shocked Kopit's lark was staged by none other than Jerome Robbins.

It garnered rave reviews, ran for more than a year, toured for eleven weeks, and ended with a six-week run on Broadway. Kopit, still in shock, received a Vernon Rice Award and the Outer Critics Circle Award for best new play of 1962, as critics and everyone else argued about his play and its meaning, including the very

real question of whether it had any. The play was generally assigned kinship with the then-emerging Theater of the Absurd, best represented by such playwrights as Eugene Ionesco and Samuel Beckett, but also the recently-stirring black comedy movement and other modern, form-busting plays, thus linking the accidental toast of New York with other successful pioneers of the time like Jack Gelber (*The Connection*), Jack Richardson (*The Prodigal*), and Edward Albee.

Instead of struggling in a garret, starving and going through the character-building failures that forged the characters and careers of most Broadway playwrights, Kopit was a hit out of the box, the rare playwright whose first play isn't merely a sensation, but an iconic charades challenge, too. It also cemented a lucky relationship with Roger L. Stevens, the veteran Broadway producer and chairman of the Kennedy Center, whom Kopit had met through a classmate while still a Harvard undergraduate. Stevens produced most of Kopit's subsequent works until his retirement and served as Kopit's patron and hero, helping him through various financial crises and creative dry spells with generous advances and commissions.

Indeed, it was a long time between *ODPDMHYITCAIFSS* and his next successful play, *Indians*, which arrived in 1969. "A lot of the period from *Oh Dad* to *Indians* was spent waiting for something to seize me," he told a New York Times critic. The seizure occurred at last when Kopit read a newspaper item about a shooting incident in Saigon, sparking a previously unexplored metaphor for the playwright that converted the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement into the Indian wars of the American West. Out of this came *Indians*, Kopit's sprawling, cynical, epic tragi-comedy that used Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show to explore the black-and-white mythology that too often drives American foreign policy and political ideology.

Attacking or seeming to attack American involvement in Vietnam was a reliable way to curry favor with reliably left-of-center theater critics, and it worked: even those who had found *ODPDMHYITCAIFSS* grotesque praised *Indians*, which won Kopit his first Tony nomination. Still it closed after only ninety-six performances, the beginning of a career trend. Kopit took the \$250,000 he got for selling the play to the movies off to Vermont, where he waited nine years to complete the next play suitable, sort of, for commercial audiences.

He continued to think about expanding the options of theatrical presentation—Indians was as much a pageant and circus as a play—and experimented in various approaches ranging from street theater to carnival to *avant-garde*. In 1972, he staged a fantastic outdoor theater piece involving a whole Vermont town and later, while teaching at Wesleyan College in 1975, created a wild, daylong, Bicentennial pageant called *Lewis and Clark: Lost and Found*. Kopit also completed a cycle of plays, almost never professionally produced, beginning with *The Discovery of America*, a full exploration of Kopit's reflections on American history and theatrical spectacle.

Finally, he completed *Wings*, his most challenging play. Commissioned by the National Public Radio drama series *Earplay*, it was inspired by personal tragedy: Kopit's father suffered a stroke in 1976 that rendered him almost mute. Kopit, himself so dependent on words and communication, began to brood about the terrors of language dysfunction and the emotional isolation of stroke victims. *Wings* combines dialogue, interior monologue, sounds, images, and garbled speech, a challenge for performer, director, designers, and most of all, audiences. The Broadway production had a Tony-Award-winning performance by Constance Cummings, in the lead role of a former aviatrix suffering the aftereffects of a stroke, and is a brilliant stage piece. So is the musical adaptation, which Arlington's Signature Theatre produced superbly, directed by Eric Schaeffer.

Naturally, the play lasted only three months on Broadway.

Five years later, in 1982, Kopit participated in his most lucrative project, writing the book for the hit musical *Nine*, an adaptation of Federico Fellini's film *8½*. Like all of Kopit's shows, the movie adaptation was a box office disappointment (the film version of *ODPDMHYITCAIFSS* was an all-star disaster).

In the thirty-two years since that odd artistic detour into song and dance, Kopit has worked at his characteristic pace—slow—and written just five plays and one musical (his own adaptation of *The Phantom of the Opera*), only some of which have been produced, none particularly successfully. His last work was *Y2K*, fourteen years ago.

Is he through? You never know. It depends on whether something “seizes” him again. It has taken this long before.

Of Kopit, critic Don Shewey wrote (in 1984):

One thinks of a playwright as someone with a stack of blank paper making it up as he goes along. Kopit's method is more physically involving, creating a maelstrom of paper to dive into each day, making a mess, then straightening out what's there, obsessed with documentary accuracy. At the same time, this . . . is a symbol of the quality in Kopit's plays that strikes some critics as studious rather than imaginative. Kopit doesn't have Lanford Wilson's gift for creating rounded characters, Sam Shepard's trust in idiosyncratic dramatic structures, David Mamet's way with an overheard expletive, or the madcap spontaneity of Christopher Durang.

But Kopit has other strengths. His playful fascination with language invests individual words with unusual resonance. Oh Dad is a purposely silly Gothic-Absurd vignette. But the characters' names—Madame Rosepettle, Rosalie, Rosalinda, Commodore Roseabove—has the eerie insistence of an Ionesco game; they bring the image of Woman as Something Beautiful but Dangerous to the surface and then mock it with the repetitive echo of Gertrude Stein. Indians is so fraught with Buffalo Bill's paranoia and performance anxiety that words like "heroism" and "patriotism" sound rancid. Wings chases the mystery of words, the very source of language, into the life-or-death chasm between coherent speech and gibberish. End of the World lingers lovingly on the Pentagon's genius for inventing euphemisms such as "discontinuity" and "anticipatory retaliation" to describe repellent concepts.

These are verbal effects, and Kopit is as fond of them as he is of theatrical effects. His imagination is focused not on the page (his plays are difficult to read) but on the live event, the historical moment as well as the theatrical moment.

Shewey also opined that it is hard to imagine Kopit's plays being revived, often or at all, since they are both difficult, risky, and, he believes, locked in their own time. Yet he is an important and courageous 20th century playwright, and with *Oh Dad*,

Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad especially, a cultural prophet.

Don't bet against Kopit suddenly bursting into the ranks of 21st century playwrights any day now.

He's surprised us, and himself, before.



Theatre of the Absurd?

When it was first viewed by critics and the public, Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad was pigeon-holed as an example of American "Theatre of the Absurd." I have never viewed it as such: it makes sense to me. As I wrote in the program notes:

"Arthur Kopit's Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad is the scream of the Fifties begging to be let out of its sterile, gray, restrictive, black and white room into the psychedelic and violent Sixties to come."

But then, I am not a literary critic, a social critic, or a scholar. What do I know? Here is the description of the form by Ashraf Ahmed, who is those things, from a longer treatise. After you've seen the play, you can decide for yourself.

*" 'The Theatre of the Absurd' is a term coined by the critic Martin Esslin for the works of a number of playwrights, mostly written in the 1950s and 1960s. The term is derived from an essay by the French philosopher Albert Camus. In his *Myth of Sisyphus*, written in 1942, he first defined the human situation as basically meaningless and absurd. The "absurd" plays by Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, Harold Pinter and others all share the view that man is inhabiting a universe with which he is out of key. Its meaning is indecipherable and his place within it is without purpose. He is bewildered, troubled, and obscurely threatened.*

“The origins of the Theatre of the Absurd are rooted in the avant-garde experiments in art of the 1920s and 1930s. At the same time, it was undoubtedly strongly influenced by the traumatic experience of the horrors of the Second World War, which showed the total impermanence of any values, shook the validity of any conventions and highlighted the precariousness of human life and its fundamental meaninglessness and arbitrariness. The trauma of living from 1945 under threat of nuclear annihilation also seems to have been an important factor in the rise of the new theatre.

“At the same time, the Theatre of the Absurd also seems to have been a reaction to the disappearance of the religious dimension from contemporary life. The Absurd Theatre can be seen as an attempt to restore the importance of myth and ritual to our age, by making man aware of the ultimate realities of his condition, by instilling in him again the lost sense of cosmic wonder and primeval anguish. The Absurd Theatre hopes to achieve this by shocking man out of an existence that has become trite, mechanical, and complacent. It is felt that there is mystical experience in confronting the limits of human condition.

“As a result, absurd plays assumed a highly unusual, innovative form, directly aiming to startle the viewer, shaking him out of this comfortable, conventional life of everyday concerns. In the meaningless and Godless post-Second-World-War world, it was no longer possible to keep using such traditional art forms and standards that had ceased being convincing and lost their validity. The Theatre of the Absurd openly rebelled against conventional theatre. Indeed, it was anti-theatre. It was surreal, illogical, conflictless, and plotless. The dialogue seemed total gobbledygook. Not unexpectedly, the Theatre of the Absurd first met with incomprehension and rejection.

“One of the most important aspects of absurd drama was its distrust of language as a means of communication. Language had become a vehicle of conventionalized, stereotyped, meaningless exchanges. Words failed to express the essence of human experience, not being able to penetrate beyond its surface. The Theatre of the Absurd constituted first and foremost an onslaught on language, showing it as a very unreliable and insufficient tool of communication. Absurd drama uses conventionalized speech, clichés, slogans, and technical jargon, which it distorts, parodies, and breaks down. By ridiculing conventionalized and stereotyped speech patterns, the Theatre

of the Absurd tries to make people aware of the possibility of going beyond everyday speech conventions and communicating more authentically. Conventionalized speech acts as a barrier between ourselves and what the world is really about: in order to come into direct contact with natural reality, it is necessary to discredit and discard the false crutches of conventionalized language. Objects are much more important than language in Absurd Theatre: what happens transcends what is being said about it. It is the hidden, implied meaning of words that assumes primary importance in Absurd Theatre, over and above what is being actually said. The Theatre of the Absurd strove to communicate an undissolved totality of perception—hence it had to go beyond language.

“Absurd drama subverts logic. It relishes the unexpected and the logically impossible. According to Sigmund Freud, there is a feeling of freedom we can enjoy when we are able to abandon the straitjacket of logic. In trying to burst the bounds of logic and language the Absurd Theatre is trying to shatter the enclosing walls of the human condition itself. Our individual identity is defined by language, having a name is the source of our separateness—the loss of logical language brings us towards a unity with living things. In being illogical, the Absurd Theatre is anti-rationalist: it negates rationalism because it feels that rationalist thought, like language, only deals with the superficial aspects of things. Nonsense, on the other hand, opens up a glimpse of the infinite. It offers intoxicating freedom, brings one into contact with the essence of life, and is a source of marvelous comedy.

“There is no dramatic conflict in the absurd plays. Dramatic conflicts, clashes of personalities and powers belong to a world where a rigid, accepted hierarchy of values forms a permanent establishment. Such conflicts, however, lose their meaning in a situation where the establishment and outward reality have become meaningless. However frantically characters perform, this only underlines the fact that nothing happens to change their existence. Absurd dramas are lyrical statements, very much like music: they communicate an atmosphere, an experience of archetypal human situations. The Absurd Theatre is a theatre of situation, as against the more conventional theatre of sequential events. It presents a pattern of poetic images. In doing this, it uses visual elements, movement, light. Unlike conventional theatre, where language rules supreme, in the Absurd Theatre language is only one of many components of its multidimensional poetic imagery.

“The Theatre of the Absurd is totally lyrical theatre which uses abstract scenic effects, many of which have been taken over and modified from the popular theatre arts: mime, ballet, acrobatics, conjuring, music-hall clowning. Much of its inspiration comes from silent film and comedy, as well as the tradition of verbal nonsense in early sound film (Laurel and Hardy, W. C. Fields, the Marx Brothers). It emphasizes the importance of objects and visual experience: the role of language is relatively secondary. It owes a debt to European pre-war surrealism: its literary influences include the work of Franz Kafka. The Theatre of the Absurd is aiming to create a ritual-like, mythological, archetypal, allegorical vision, closely related to the world of dreams.”



What Makes an American Century Theater Show? Twenty-three Roads to Obscurity

—*Jack Marshall*

If and when The American Century Theater joins The Group, The Mercury Players, and other fondly remembered and improvidently daring theater companies in that great theatrical museum in the sky, there will be a book to be written. It will be an examination of all the factors that make great, important, and interesting plays disappear from the American professional stage repertoire, or, to put it another way, how a show ends up being produced by The American Century Theater. *Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad* is a 20th century classic of sorts that fulfills several of the categories that TACT's forgotten or neglected plays fall into and provides a good opportunity to consider why good stage works fall out of favor and into obscurity.

These are the major categories TACT has identified to date. There are twenty-three of them:

1. Unfortunate titles. *Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad* has a title that is hard to forget (good) but that is also so long that it is hard to advertise or put on posters (bad) and misrepresents the play (worse). There are many sub-categories under this one, like Foreign Titles (*Machinal*), Dull Titles (*The Country Girl, Biography*), Titles That Tell Nothing About The Show If You Don't Know The Show Already (*The Tenth Man, The Second Man*) and Misleading Titles (*Paradise Lost, Bang the Drum Slowly, Serenading Louie*), Generic Titles (*U.S.A.*), and Titles That Are Too Exotic For Their Own Good (*Eccentricities of a Nightingale*). The lesson to playwrights: Be careful what you call your play.

2. Bias. There is a commercial and critical bias against older plays generally, on the theory that audiences will not relate to the language, attitudes, and characters of an earlier time. Rare is the case when a good production well-conceived is unable to obliterate these fears, but with most older plays, the opportunity is never provided. A few, perhaps fifteen, certainly less than twenty, plays older than twenty-five years are regular features of the professional theater scene in this and other regions every year or so; they are the anointed ones, and other, equally excellent works (or better), often by the same playwrights, are dismissed as "dated."

Examples *The Show-Off, The Best Man, Life with Father*

3. Genuine datedness. Some plays and musicals are truly dated, either because what they were about and what made them interesting and entertaining at the time no longer exists and isn't even within the average playgoer's experience and knowledge. This may not mean that they are not worth seeing again, but it does create daunting problems for any company that attempts to produce them. Updating them is usually a bad idea and unfair to the author and work; TACT by policy discourages this. The best solution is to modernize the presentation while finding the aspects of the work that still engage. Such plays also can serve as fascinating time capsules.

Examples *Call me Mister*, the Harold Rome musical revue written to coincide with the return of G.I.s from the Second World War; *MacBird!*, the 1968 political satire casting LBJ as Macbeth, *A Flag Is Born*, the Ben Hecht

pageant written as propaganda to award Israel to the Jews, and *The Cradle Will Rock*.

4. Political correctness and controversy. Theaters shy away from shows that were brazen about topics that are considered inherently offensive today. Race, sexism, anti-Semitism, spousal and child abuse, and the portrayal of ethnic minorities have unjustly buried some otherwise wonderful shows. *MacBird!* has a minstrel act performed in blackface; *Uncle Tom's Cabin* contains a constant stream of racist epithets. Gender stereotypes are common in many, if not most 20th century shows.

Examples *The Boys in the Band, Native Son*

5. Cast size. Modern budgets have made casts exceeding ten performers rare, and many of best plays of the last century require fifteen, twenty, or more. Simple economics dictate that such shows seldom justify in box office what they are likely to cost, especially if the show has not been done frequently and the title is no longer familiar.

Examples *Marathon '33, Abe Lincoln in Illinois, The Time of Your Life*

5. Senior actors, child actors, and animals. Any play or musical that requires any of these in key roles is likely to be passed over. The pool of senior actors is always small, and they often have special difficulty memorizing lines. Large roles in long runs are physically demanding. Child actors involve the presence of sometimes obtrusive parents, and again, finding professional caliber talent is difficult. Animals—TACT has had productions with live dogs, a rabbit, birds, a cat (almost), and a goat—require care and feeding between shows, creature understudies, clean-up contingency plans, and crossed fingers.

Examples *Visit to a Small Planet, Mister Roberts, Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad*

6. Guns. Gunshots were regular features of plays and even musicals in the 20th century. Modern audiences and quite a few actors and directors tend to be gun-shy. (I love them.)

Examples *Cops, The Children's Hour*

7. Smoking. From the Seventies back, many plays and musicals have characters whose nicotine habit is key to the portrayal. Now, audience members have been conditioned to rebel at the sight of a lit cigarette, no matter how brief the time. Rather than undermine the show's integrity (a jury room in the Fifties would be clouded with smoke) or deal with annoyed tobacco-phobes, many companies just find smokeless plays.

Examples *That Championship Season, Twelve Angry Men, Agnes of God*

8. Classic movies. A play with a more famous film often labors under the public perception that the movie is so good that there is no reason to watch the play. In some cases, the film has obliterated any memory of the original play at all, even when it was a major Broadway hit. This is especially unfair when the movie bears little relation to the play except its title.

Examples *Stalag 17, Mister Roberts, Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?, The Seven Year Itch*

9. Bad or unsuccessful movies. Nothing kills a good play surer than a misbegotten film version of the show. When a movie adaptation stinks (or, as is often the case, gives a mistaken impression of what the stage version is like), the play's reputation is grievously injured. After some time has passed, seeing a live production of the play becomes impossible, and all that is left is the video of the movie . . . and the death cycle continues. Thus a terrific comedy like *Visit to a Small Planet* is thought of as a bad Jerry Lewis movie.

Examples *The Pirate, Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad*

10. Community theater warhorses. Some plays were so frequently produced by community theaters and high schools (and thus associated with amateur and amateurish productions) that everyone thinks they are sick of them, when in fact professional productions have been increasingly rare, to the vanishing point. Theater companies, in reaction, think of these plays as passé and boring, in part because the only versions they have seen (or been associated with) were also in amateur settings.

Examples *The Crucible, Picnic, Tea and Sympathy, Spoon River Anthology*

11. Plays that critics have never liked. Some successful dramas, a few comedies, some musicals, and both well-regarded flops and legendary hits labor under the burden of a pile of poor reviews, and the reviews still haunt the shows into obscurity once the shows are no longer current.

Examples *Hellzapoppin', I Do! I Do!, Hotel Universe, Life with Father*

12. Identification with one performer. The most prominent example of this odd problem is *Lady in the Dark*, one of the greatest American musicals that was so identified with Gertrude Lawrence that for decades no actress would dare to risk comparison with her. Of course, that show, which The American Century Theater became the first professional company in America to produce in a full theatrical run since the original in 1941, is also in another category...

13. Daunting production requirements. This is another problem with *Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad*, which, among other things, requires a giant fish tank and two visible and gigantic Venus fly traps. Shows that scream production problems will scare most companies off if they have not been produced anywhere recently with notable success: Why risk doing a play nobody remembers if it will be unusually difficult to produce, too? *Lady in the Dark* required, in addition to a huge cast and an orchestra (you are not allowed to do it without a full orchestra), such outlandish props as a 20-foot rose and a rifle that converts into a painter's easel. Then there is Saroyan's *My Heart's in the Highlands*, which TACT produced in its second full season. The novelist-turned-first time playwright gave the lead role to a nine-year-old boy, another key role to an eighty-year-old man who plays the bugle so beautifully that it moves people to tears, includes one character who speaks only in Armenian, and a trained dog. To do *Hellzapoppin'* justice, a production must have up to ten performers posing as audience members throughout most of the show. Faced with these kinds of challenges, most companies just pick something else.

14. Bad luck. Some excellent shows were flops in their original incarnations because of sheer bad luck. *Hollywood Pinafore*, for example, received good

reviews but opened during an ice strike in New York while a heat wave was settling in over the city. No ice, no air-conditioning . . . no audience.

15. Trend-setting shows. One variety of datedness that is both unfair and crippling is when a play breaks new ground and its key innovation is, as a result, imitated and expanded upon over the years to the point that a show that was truly original looks like a pale imitation . . . of its imitators. The classic example is *Mister Roberts*, which caused a sensation on Broadway after World War II with its—then—unprecedented portrayal of armed services private life, out of combat. Then came *The Wackiest Ship in the Army*, *Hogan's Heroes*, *McHale's Navy*, and many more that took what *Mister Roberts* started and raised the ante. Now much of the comedy in the show, once full of surprises, looks derivative and familiar.

Examples *The Voodoo MacBeth*, *Hellzapoppin'*

16. One-act plays and plays without intermissions. Once evenings of one-act plays were standard Broadway fare; no longer. Doing multiple plays strains budgets and set requirements, and reviewers almost always split the difference and pronounce one show as better than the other. There are many wonderful one-act plays but no safe way to produce them, other than in festivals.

Examples *Hello Out There!*, *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You*

17. Comedies. Comedies tend to be based on current tastes and events and have a shorter shelf life than dramas. Some shows literally are no longer funny or even feel like what we now think of as comedies, though some of these are worth seeing because what remains is still thoughtful and engrossing.

Examples *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds*, *Mister Roberts*, *Luv*

18. Lesser known plays of celebrated playwrights. When one of a playwright's works is well known, frequently performed, and regarded as the "best," there is a tendency to measure his or her other works against that rather than against the library of plays as a whole. The thinking is, "Why do this play, when we can do the one everyone knows?" Philip Barry wrote plays almost as good as *The Philadelphia Story*, and we would see different Edward Albee plays produced if he hadn't written *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolfe?*

Examples *The Second Man, Come Blow Your Horn, Paradise Lost*

19. Eugene O’Neill. With at least two dramas in the canon of American plays that get produced frequently and well every year, O’Neill, who is America’s Shakespeare, finds his other excellent works passed over, and, over time, forgotten or ignored. Some are also in the categories above, with large casts and daunting production requirements (a gorilla in the climax of *The Hairy Ape*, for example). His plays are meant to be performed rather than read (unlike, say, Tennessee Williams), tend to be long (*The Ice Man Cometh*, his greatest, is five hours uncut), and are widely feared by audiences because of their usually (but not always) gloomy themes. At least ten, probably more, of O’Neill’s seldom-produced works stand with the best plays Arthur Miller or Williams wrote.

20. Terrific shows with fatal flaws that were never fixed. Some plays are really potential classics sunk by initial miscalculation by the playwright, director, or casts. Fix the problem and the brilliance shines through . . . unfortunately, the original production didn’t survive its fatal mistake, and the licensing requirements often make it difficult and indeed illegal to fix them later, once the playwright has died.

Example *Moby Dick Rehearsed*

21. Plays without scripts or with rights held in strange places. It is amazing how often this problem occurs. When TACT did the screenplay version of *Twelve Angry Men* rather than the terrible stage adaptation (by another author) that was the only legally obtainable script, we had to get verbal permission from the real playwright, Reginald Rose. Some plays no longer have full scripts at all, or have too many of them, with alternate versions competing with each other.

Example *Call Me Mister, Hollywood Pinafore, A Flag Is Born, Marathon ’33, The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window*

22. Verse plays. Plays written in verse were once standard on Broadway, especially those written by Maxwell Anderson, who was a master of the form. Now they are regarded as quaint and difficult to perform. The last great verse drama to be successful was William Alfred’s *Hogan’s Goat* in the Sixties. TACT

has even been frightened off by the form and needs to bring our audiences more of them, like *Hogan's Goat* and *High Tor*.

Examples *Moby Dick Rehearsed, Spoon River Anthology*

23. History. Just as Americans have increasingly become both ignorant of and uninterested in history, playgoers no longer find historical plays appealing. Once, it was a popular and ubiquitous form, following in the footsteps of Shakespeare. To younger audiences especially, "history" is synonymous with "dull," and because more recent generations are not as well educated regarding events prior to Vietnam, they often lack the perspective necessary to appreciate dramas about earlier periods and historical figures.

Examples *Home of the Brave, The Andersonville Trial*

For the record, *Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad* labors under the handicap of falling into a whopping eight of the categories above: 1,2,5, 9, 13, 15, 16, and 17.

Perfect.

