



BLIND HORSE BOOKS

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DELAND, FLORIDA

THE BRECHT CRUSADE IN AMERICA

Eric Bentley, Bertolt Brecht & Ben Raeburn

A Publisher's Working Archive of Correspondence, Inscribed Material, Theatrical Programs & Ephemera

Spanning the 1950s through the 1960s, the material brings together inscribed and annotated publications, correspondence, theatrical programs, invitations, and related ephemera from a formative period in the American reception of European modernist theater. Rather than representing a collection assembled retrospectively, the material survives through Bentley's direct relationship with Ben Raeburn and the publishing and theatrical activity surrounding their work.

At its center is Eric Bentley, one of the principal interpreters of Brecht for the English-speaking stage. Bentley's engagement with Brecht was unusually broad: translator, critic, adaptor, director, and advocate. The archive documents not only that intellectual relationship but the practical theatrical network through which Brecht's work reached American audiences.

THE ARCHIVE AT A GLANCE — 8 ITEMS / 14 PIECES

The archive brings together a focused group of Bentley material preserved in the files of his publisher, Ben Raeburn, including:

- **Bentley's *Orpheus in the Underworld*** — inscribed 'To Ben — From Eric,' with Bentley's manuscript additions, alterations, and handwritten press quotations.
- **1961 Columbia Players program** for Brecht's *The Exception and the Rule* and Gogol's *The Gamblers* — including Bentley's introductory essay, his translation of *To Those Born Later*, and the 1950 photograph of Bentley working with Brecht during *Mother Courage*.
- **Bentley correspondence with Ben Raeburn** — including the substantial August 27, 1965 letter discussing publishing, criticism, and current and prospective theatrical projects.
- **HB Playwrights Foundation material** — including the 1967 *Commitments* announcement documenting Bentley's work with Herbert Berghof and Uta Hagen.

FROM BRECHT'S ASSISTANT TO BRECHT'S AMERICAN INTERPRETER

Bentley's relationship with Brecht was personal as well as literary. A photograph reproduced in the 1961 Columbia Players program shows Bertolt Brecht and Eric Bentley together in 1950, when Brecht was directing *Mother Courage* and Bentley was serving as his assistant. The image provides an unusually direct visual introduction to the relationship underlying much of the material preserved here.

That Columbia Players program is itself a significant document. It records a New York production pairing Nikolai Gogol's *The Gamblers* with Brecht's *The Exception and the Rule*, both in English versions by Bentley. Bentley contributed an introductory essay explaining the pairing and the contemporary relevance he found in the two works. The program also prints his translation of Brecht's *To Those Born Later*.

The production brought together a striking group of postwar theatrical figures: Isaiah Sheffer directed, while German-American modernist composer Stefan Wolpe supplied music specifically for the Brecht production. The program therefore documents more than an individual performance; it captures the collaborative network through which Brecht was being interpreted for the New York stage.

FROM AUTHOR TO PUBLISHER

The archive is equally revealing about Bentley's relationship with Ben Raeburn, founder and publisher of Horizon Press.

Perhaps its most immediately personal object is Bentley's libretto for Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld*, inscribed across the upper cover:

'To Ben — From Eric'

The association does not end with the presentation inscription. Bentley used the copy as a working document, adding manuscript material to the printed text. Among the annotations are press quotations copied in his hand, including notices attributed to the *New York Journal-American* and *New York World-Telegram*, together with a textual alteration and additional manuscript commentary.

The result is considerably more than an inscribed presentation copy. It preserves Bentley's continuing engagement with his own adaptation after publication and provides physical evidence of the movement between author, theater, critical reception, and publisher.

THE CORRESPONDENCE

Bentley's correspondence with Raeburn carries that relationship beyond the printed material.

A substantial **August 27, 1965 letter from Bentley to Raeburn** discusses prospective theatrical work, publishing, criticism, and Bentley's continuing involvement with the New York stage. Bentley refers to *A Man for All Seasons*, *The Dramatic Event*, his work

as a critic, and possible future theatrical activity, writing candidly about projects and professional circumstances rather than composing for a public audience.

Such correspondence gives the archive a dimension that published books and programs alone cannot provide. Bentley appears not merely as the established critic and translator represented by his published work, but as a working theatrical figure discussing projects while they were still active possibilities.

THE POSTWAR NEW YORK THEATER

The surrounding ephemera extends the record beyond Brecht and demonstrates the theatrical environment in which Bentley worked.

A **1967 invitation from the HB Playwrights Foundation** announces performances of Bentley's *Commitments*, with Part One directed by **Herbert Berghof** and Part Two by **Uta Hagen**. The document places Bentley within another important center of postwar New York theater and among a company that included established and emerging actors, directors, and playwrights.

Seen together, these documents connect Bentley with several overlapping worlds: Brechtian theater, Off-Broadway experimentation, modernist music, theatrical criticism, independent publishing, and the actor-director community surrounding institutions such as the HB Playwrights Foundation.

A PUBLISHER'S WORKING FILE

The significance of the archive lies partly in this accumulation of relationships.

An inscribed libretto by itself records an association. A theatrical program records a production. A letter records a conversation between author and publisher. An invitation records another theatrical project. Preserved together in Raeburn's files, however, the pieces provide a more substantial record of the professional world in which Bentley's work circulated.

They document **Bentley as translator and interpreter of Brecht; Bentley as playwright and adaptor; Bentley in correspondence with his publisher; and Bentley participating in the network of directors, composers, actors, critics, and publishers that shaped postwar American theater.**

The material also demonstrates the continuing importance of the publisher's archive as a documentary source. Raeburn's files preserved objects that were inherently ephemeral—programs, invitations, correspondence, and working copies—which acquire greater meaning when their original relationships remain visible.

BRECHT, BENTLEY & THE AMERICAN STAGE

Brecht's influence on American theater was not transmitted by publication alone. His work required translation in the broadest sense: linguistic translation, certainly, but also interpretation, advocacy, production, criticism, and adaptation to a theatrical culture very different from the one in which the plays originated.

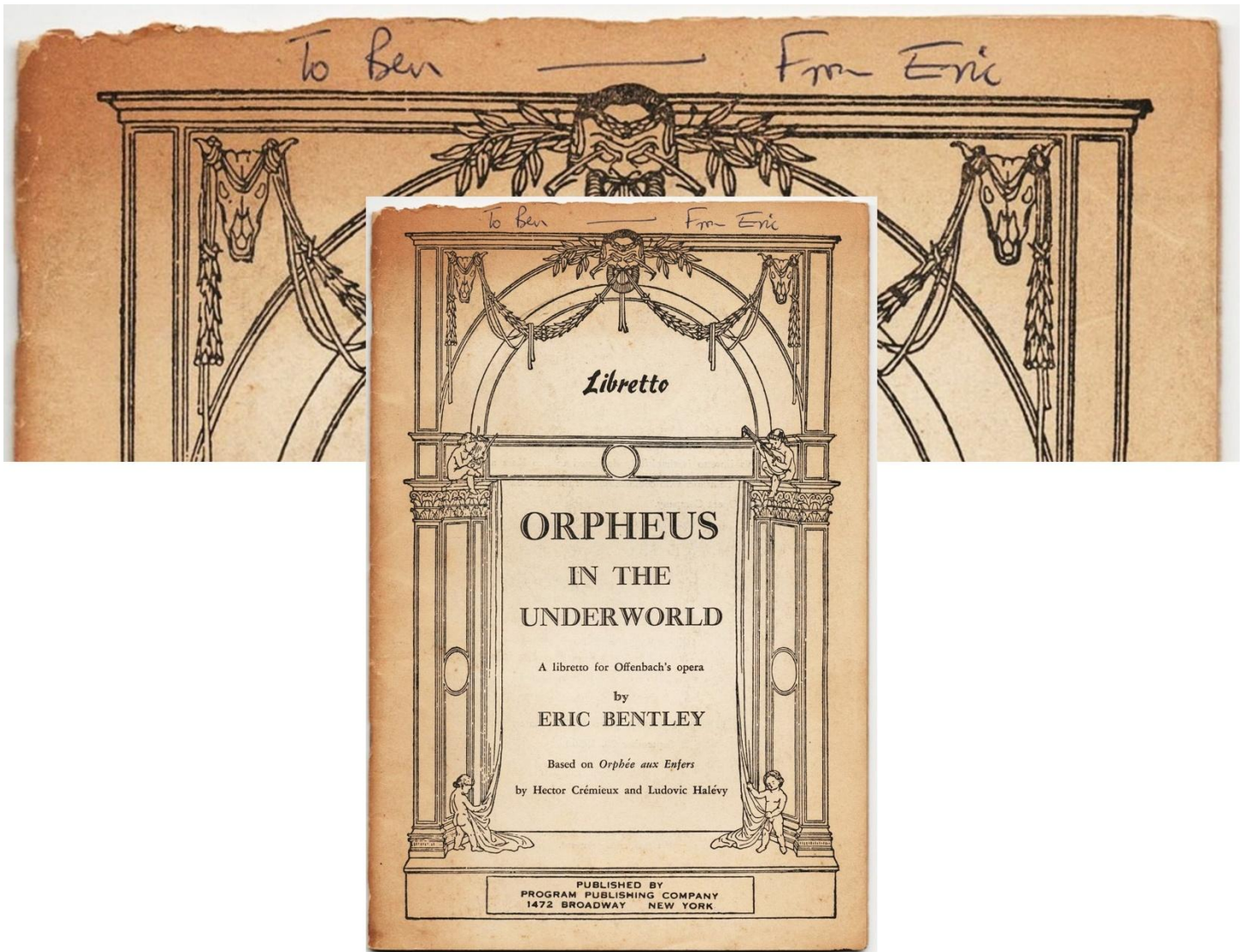
Eric Bentley occupied an unusual position within that process. His direct experience with Brecht was followed by decades of translation, criticism, theatrical production, and publishing activity devoted to Brecht and modern drama more generally.

The documents preserved here provide a compact primary-source record of that larger undertaking. They move from Bentley and Brecht working together to Bentley's efforts to put Brecht before American audiences, and from the public world of programs and performances to the private exchange between Bentley and his publisher.

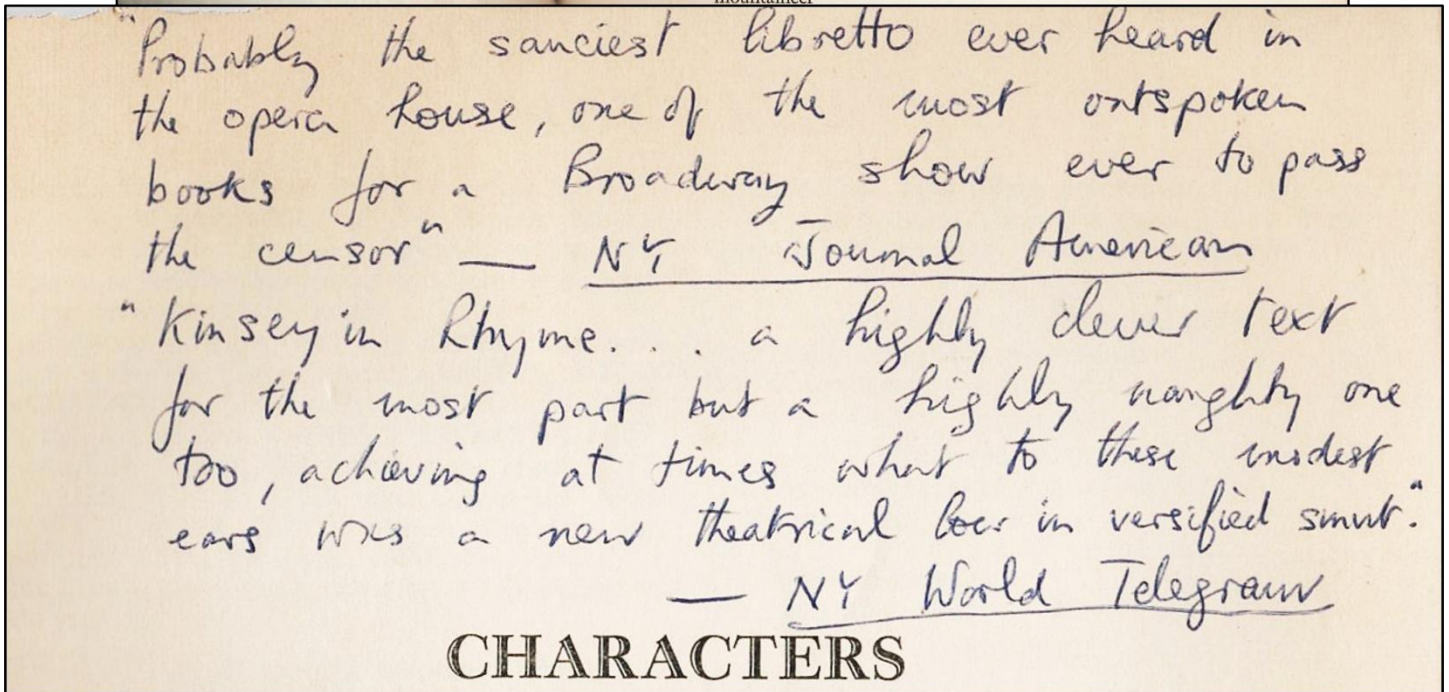
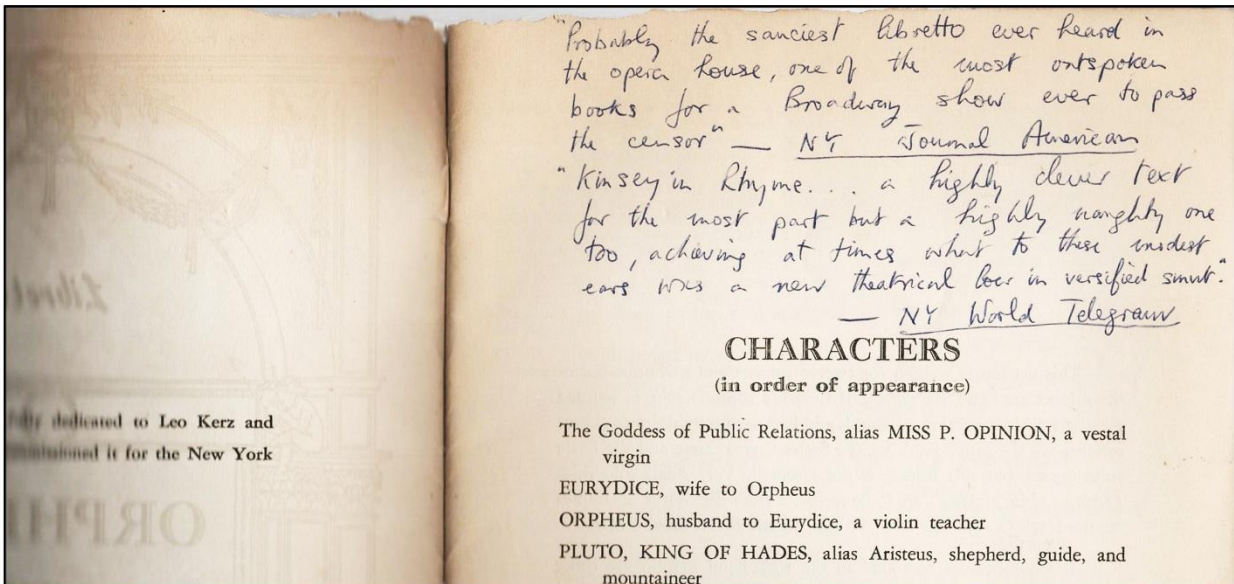
What survives is not simply a group of Eric Bentley ephemera, but a working documentary record of the people, publications, and productions through which Brecht became part of the American theatrical conversation.

THE ARCHIVE

Individual Documents, Descriptions & Transcriptions



Bentley's *Orpheus in the Underworld* — inscribed 'To Ben — From Eric,' with Bentley's manuscript additions, alterations, and handwritten press quotations.

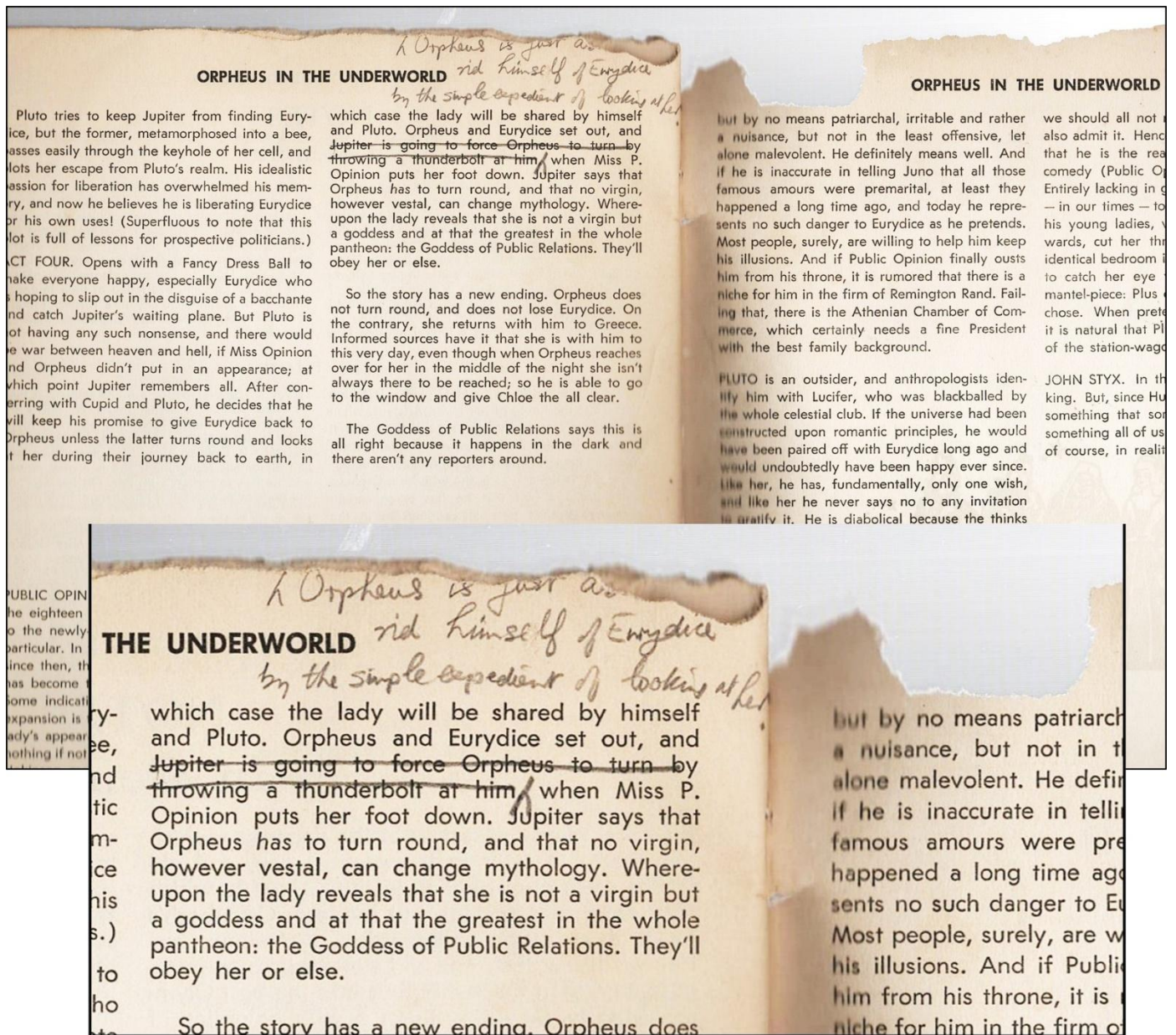


1956 LIBRETTO: TRANSCRIPTIONS & ANNOTATIONS

Page 3 (Opposite the Dedication) — Contemporary Critical Reception

Two prominent New York press reviews are transcribed in Bentley's hand at the head of the Characters in order of appearance.

- *Probably the sauciest libretto ever heard in the opera house, one of the most outspoken books for a Broadway show ever to pass the censor* — *NY Journal American*
- *Kinsey in Rhyme... a highly clever text for the most part but a highly naughty one too, achieving at times what to these modest ears was a new theatrical low in versified smut.* — *NY World Telegram*



Page 35 (Final Page of Text) — Manuscript Corrections & Textual Loss

The final leaf preserves manuscript alterations and commentary within the working copy.

- Pencil Correction: In the right-hand column under the synopsis for Act Four, a neat pencil line strikes through the printed text: *~throwing a thunderbolt at him~* and replaces it with an inline pencil correction reading: *is going to force Orpheus to turn*.
- Ink Annotation with Corner Loss: At the top edge of the page, a contemporary ink note provides a biting summary of the myth's adaptation, partially lost to the chipped upper corner:

Orpheus is just as [...] rid himself of Eurydice by the simple expedient of looking at her.

THE COLUMBIA PLAYERS

present

NIKOLAI GOGOL'S

THE
GAMBLERS

and

BERTOLT BRECHT'S

THE
EXCEPTION
AND
THE
RULE

:

English Versions by ERIC BENTLEY

Directed by Isaiah Sheffer

Music for THE EXCEPTION AND THE RULE by Stefan Wolpe

Settings: Paul Gorrin

Lighting: Donald Sussman

Musical Director: Eric Regener

Assistant Director: Jane Dexter

Costumes supervised by: Lisa Lyman

A Message from Eric Bentley

The unparalleled success of *The Threepenny Opera* in New York has brought with it a growing interest in all the work of its author, Bertolt Brecht.

I was happy to be able to arrange for Columbia Players to give the first public performance in New York of a Brecht work that was written a couple of years later than *The Threepenny Opera*: *THE EXCEPTION AND THE RULE*.

We are lucky to have been able to persuade the eminent German-American composer, Stefan Wolpe, to make a score especially for this production.

THE EXCEPTION AND THE RULE runs for about an hour. It was not easy to think of the right companion play to make up the double bill. Something less somber was certainly needed; yet I also wished to provide a play that was not unrelated to these, I was reminded of Gogol's plays when I came upon this passage in his novel, *Dead Souls*:

Why call him a scoundrel? These days we don't have scoundrels; we have nice people, well-meaning people. As for doing anything that might lead to your getting your face slapped in public, who among us would risk such a scandal? Well, maybe there are a few who would, two or three perhaps — but even they are busy talking virtue. Not a scoundrel, then; at worst, let us call him acquisitive; for it is acquisition that is the root of evil.

Gogol's *GAMBLER*'s will also be receiving its first public performance in New York in this production by Columbia Players. Privately it was put on several years ago, under my own direction, at the Herkert Berghof Studio. I also directed a performance outside of New York with Mr. Morris Carnovsky as Ootsh. During and after the work on these two little productions, I made changes, some of which no doubt, reflect the spirit of our own time and place. If the audience of 1961 enjoys the 1961 version, the ghost of Gogol may forgive the liberties taken.



Taken in 1950 when Brecht (on left) was directing *MOTHER COURAGE* and Eric Bentley was his assistant.

These are, indeed, dark
To speak without guide or
To have an unswerving
immediacy.
A man who laughs is one
Who has not yet learned
The frightful news.

Times in which someone
finds a crime
Because it includes others
What times these are?
That man there, calmly
Is he perhaps beyond
desperate need?

True, I still want a living
That's an accident, believe
Nothing I do gives me
I have been spared by it
If my luck gives out, I

Eat and drink, they tell
But how can I eat and
I take what I eat from
and when
Someone, who's thirsty
of water?
Yet I do eat and drink.

How I wish I were wine!
It's in old books what
To keep out of world's
To pass the short space
To survive without men
To return good for evil.
Not to fulfill one's wishes
This is what War means.
All of which I cannot do
These are, indeed, dark

I came to the clinic in a
When hunger reigned
I came among men in a
And I rose up with the
So passed the time that

1961 Columbia Players program for Brecht's *The Exception and the Rule* and Gogol's *The Gamblers* — both in English versions by Eric Bentley. Includes Bentley's introductory essay, his translation of Brecht's *To Those Born Later*, and a 1950 photograph of Bentley working with Brecht on *Mother Courage* — direct visual evidence of the working relationship behind Bentley's later role as Brecht's American interpreter and advocate.

Directed by Isaiah Sheffer, with music composed specifically for *The Exception and the Rule* by German-American modernist Stefan Wolpe, the production documents the collaborative New York theatrical network through which Bentley brought Brecht to American audiences.

Aug. 27, 1965

Dear Ben: There was a delay of many months between my asking if you'd be interested in a Bentley on Theatre and you're answering that you would. In the interim there were developments, such as Vintage asking for a revised edition of In Search of Theatre. Previously I had assumed they were letting the book die and so you and I could raid it without interference.

How would you see the problem of Beacon? The original contract for What is Theatre is with them, and the book is not yet out of print. Between them, Knopf and Beacon could make the project impossible for you: would they?

The only body of material you own is The Dramatic Event.

Those are the "external" worries. If the project comes to seem feasible, then I have to sit down and solve the "internal" problems. What would be the best occasion and date for a Bentley on Theatre? One nearly arose lately and then didn't -- this was a tie-up between me and the new Lincoln Center people -- which then fell thru. But you see what I mean by an Occasion? I am not Dead -- that would be a superb occasion but I am not intending to oblige. I am not Retiring. I have not completed 50 years with the New Republic. I have not even been, like several of my friends, invited to replace Howard Taubman. Above all I have not, as of this date, written something on theatre in the Sixties to bring myself up to date.

Here then ends my interim report.

Thanks indeed for sending me Kostelanetz. This comes out as a more interesting book than our Arts at Mid Century and should attract much more attention. Occasionally it bogs down in omnibus reviewing, a genre I detest. But it does give an impression of something going on, and this I applaud. Pity you can't have included Nathan Cohen's essay on American Drama Critics. Try to get ahold of it anyway. It appeared in Toronto in Tamarack Review. Cohen is an editor of the Toronto Star, as you doubtless know. Meanwhile congratulate Kostelanetz for me: he did an excellent job.

We hope to return to NYC around Sept. 12. See you soon.

Best as ever

Eric

Bentley correspondence with Ben Raeburn — including the substantial August 27, 1965 letter discussing publishing, criticism, and current and prospective theatrical projects.

TRANSCRIPTION ANCHOR: ERIC BENTLEY TO BEN RAEBURN (AUGUST 27, 1965)

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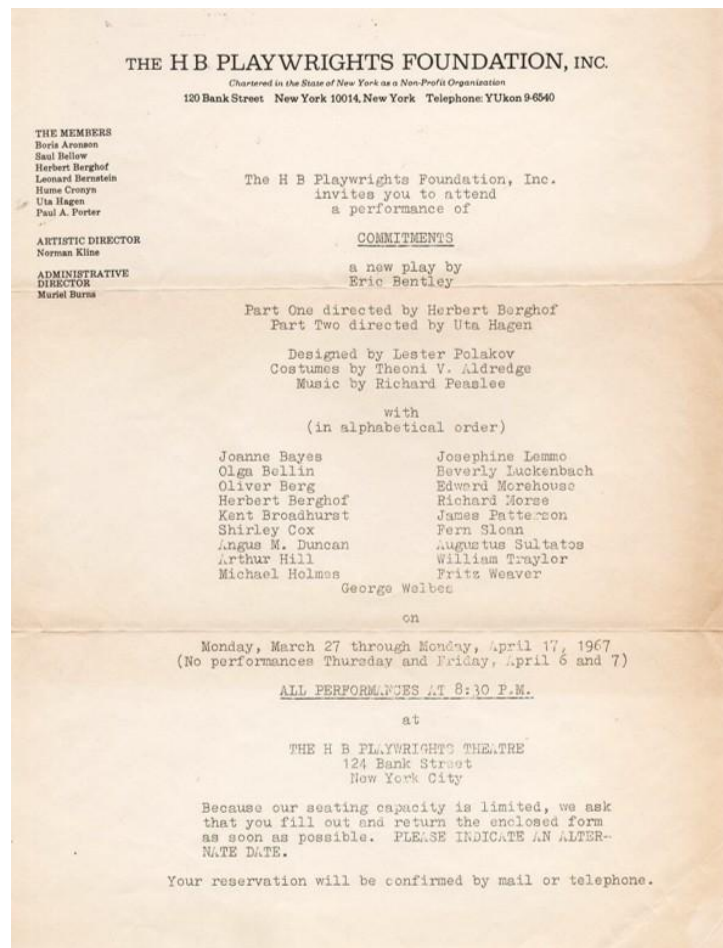
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