(cf. his characterization of Vanessa Redgrave as resembling "a vulnerable baby giraffe," his description of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? as "a microcosm of a microcosm," his objection to the Absurdists' "pervasive tone of privileged despair").

Bentley, as I have indicated, has to some extent escaped the suspicions attached to Tynan, since both his style and manner indicate that he is a serious person attending to serious matters. He is by no means devoid of humor, but much of it is subtle, and often so scolding in tone as to make it sound like a rather harsh gravity. He is also a man of very nearly encyclopedic knowledge, and few readers can fail to be impressed by the immense breadth of his reading (although he must nonetheless be a constant source of intellectual embarrassment to some of his Columbia colleagues, like Lionel Trilling and W. H. Auden, who have repeatedly and publicly avowed their total lack of interest in and respect for the theatre as an art form). Tynan, by contrast, is scarcely a cultural clod, but he wears his learning — like his adjectives — so jauntily that it is easy to dismiss his wide-ranging literary and historical references as examples of Sophomore Survey Course superficiality. However, a man who sees that the proper epigraph for a review of After the Fall is a quotation from Goethe may be many things, but he is not superficial.

It is also true that good critics — like good actors — are fertile mines of surprises, and here neither Bentley nor Tynan is a disappointment. Bentley, for example, is peculiarly excellent on the subject of 19th Century French farce. A couple of Tynan's best reviews are of Francois Billetdoux's Chin-Chin and of Lerner and Loewe's Camelot, the score of which he describes as "all sugar and fatty degeneration" (a comment reminiscent of his earlier characterization of an unhappy Shakespearean actor essaying Hamlet, as "a born Horatio").

In short, and despite my previous strictures concerning both these volumes, there is much of value — even if one follows my advice and guts both books, preserving only a handful of loose pages from each. This is perhaps not "God's plenty," but it is more than we have a right to expect in a theatre world where a kind of showbiz Know-Nothing-ism seems all too often to be the established religion.

It may sometimes seem that, if the mind is a muscle, it is in dire danger of atrophy within the show-shops of Broadway and the West End, as well as in the critical writings about them, but as long as Bentley and Tynan are with us the dangers of atrophication are appreciably reduced.

For which, praise be.

BORDER COUNTRY IN POLAND

by Albert Bermel

Six Plays by Slawomir Mrozek; Grove Press, 1967. $1.95.

A story has it that a trapper happened to build a two-room cabin astride the 49th Parallel. He was visited by a surveyor from the provincial government of Manitoba who told the trapper he had a choice. He could move his bedroom a few feet to the south and become a citizen of the United States, or push his living room north into Canada. "I'll shift the bedroom south," the trapper said quickly. "I could never take those Canadian winters."

The story (with a little straining on my part) has some bearing on the theatre of Slawomir Mrozek. For a start his latest play is actually called Home on the Border. It tells of a household that is suddenly bisected by an international frontier. But the theme of Home on the Border speaks incidentally about Mrozek's work as a whole. Like other outstanding comic dramatists of the past 20 years, Mrozek perches, at times uneasily, on the boundary between satire and allegory. Harold Pinter, for example, after stumbling into the bleak allegorical terrain of The Dwarfs, a radio play ill-adapted to the stage and television, recovered his balance magnificently with The Homecoming in which satire and allegory fortify each other. Pinter is lucky.
He has two gifts as a playwright — for comedy and for suspense. Mrozek has one, for intellectual farce, but it is so commanding when he is in form, so violently funny, that few writers since Shaw can touch him at this type of humor. His three best short plays, The Police (1958), The Martyrdom of Peter Ohey (1959) and Out at Sea (1961), have lately appeared in Nicholas Bethell’s lumpy English translations, together with Charlie (1961), The Party (1962), and Enchanted Night (1963) as a collection, Six Plays by Sławomir Mrozek. The expectations set up by the first trio are not quite met by the others, which seem to have fallen over into allegory (much as Ionesco’s Le Piéton de l’air and Le Roi se meurt have done).

The Police, though, stands as a peak of comic invention. Its story takes place in a state whose only criminal, a political prisoner (and aren’t all criminals political, in a manner of speaking?) declines to resist taking the oath of allegiance any longer. He now looks forward to “a joyful and calm conformity, an eager hope in the future, and the peace which flows from full submission to authority. . . . Today I sign the paper that you have been trying to persuade me to sign for ten years. I will then go out into the free world and support the government. What is more, I will send an open letter to our Infant King and his Uncle the Regent — the most humble letter that has ever been written, filled with the deepest devotion and love.”

The Police Chief cannot induce the Prisoner to change his mind and undergo a little more torture, not even when he offers him official help with his stamp collection: “We’ve got secret agents in many interesting foreign countries who send us reports. We could soak the stamps off and give them to you for your album. Outside it’s not so easy to get good stamps.” But the Prisoner will not relent from becoming a model citizen. He signs the statement of unquestioning loyalty and departs, a free man, knowing only too well that the police now have no function left.

The second part of the play turns its attention to a police sergeant. We have already learned that the Sergeant is a full-time agent-provocateur whose duty is to wear civilian garb, mingle with the populace, and try to induce people to say something unpatriotic so that he can arrest them and keep the police in business. Despite his best efforts, he has had no success; in fact, when he shouted nasty things about the Infant King and his Uncle the Regent, the public-at-large beat him up. The Sergeant is a man of absolute, impersonal principle. As his wife observes, “He reported me to the secret police and I reported him. That’s how we got to know each other.” The Sergeant even dreams that he is divided into two men, “one in uniform and another in civilian clothes.” The dream customarily ends when “the I that’s in uniform arrests the me that’s in civilian clothes.” This is the man chosen by the Chief to save the police force from extinction. He will impersonate a criminal, “an act which is not without a certain poetry of its own.” That is, as obedient provocateur, he provokes himself into crying out, “Our Regent, the Uncle of our Infant King, is a dirty swine.” The Chief promptly draws his sword and arrests him.

By the beginning of the third part of the play the Sergeant has performed his role as a threat to the state so effectively that the police have “been granted funds for rebuilding the prison, recruiting new personnel and strengthening the patrols” to keep him incarcerated. At the same time, he is starting to believe in his new role. He has had plenty of time to ponder the slogans on the prison walls left by former inmates. He has looked out of his cell window and seen the newly-built crematorium which, he argues, is “a non-productive investment.” The Chief indignantly comes back at him: “Would you deny atheists the right to dispose of their bodies as they like, with their own sort of funeral? If you are against religious tolerance how can you have the nerve to criticize the government’s record in that respect?” But the Sergeant has already been corrupted by his role, it will eventually convert him into an all-out revolutionary who can yell, “Long live Freedom!”

The original Prisoner returns. He is now an aide to the General at whom he threw a bomb that failed to explode many years before — the act for which he was imprisoned. The General feels that “everybody some time has to throw some bomb at some general or other. . . . I have
complete confidence in my new assistant precisely because he has all this behind him." This concluding segment of the play goes into power maneuvers too intricate to summarize here. The upshot is a stalemate in which the Chief of police, the former Prisoner and the General place each other under arrest.

The pattern of the plotting is particularly interesting. By plotting I mean, not the action or story, but Mrozek's disposition of the characters by scenes. Of the four principals, two are representatives of authority in a closed society, the Chief and the General; they remain relatively fixed as personalities throughout. The other two, the Sergeant and the Prisoner, not merely alter, they virtually swap roles: the Sergeant was an associate of the Chief and he becomes a prisoner; the Prisoner was an enemy of the state and he becomes an associate of the General, a figure of authority. How do they do this? By accepting opposing parts that are given them, yes, but also by consenting to a vocabulary of thought and language that is innately alien to them. I stress this point because it recurs in most of Mrozek's other plays: men become slaves of a system because their initial subservience leads them ultimately into active consent: they talk in the terms proposed by their rulers. (The Sergeant subsequently discovers his own vocabulary and so discovers his freedom even as a prisoner.)

The Martyrdom of Peter Ohey concerns a humble paterfamilias who is informed that a tiger is hiding out in the bathroom of his house. He has to pay a tiger tax, to play host to a succession of officials who come to examine the imagined animal, and to accommodate a circus in his living room. Finally, when he begins to believe that the tiger exists (when he lets himself be persuaded into joining in the ludicrous situation and dialogue), he must act as the prey, to draw the tiger out from the water pipes where it is supposed to be hiding, so that a maharajah can hunt it. The hero is then shot in his own bathtub.

Out at Sea is ostensibly a variation on the old tale of three men on a raft without provisions. Two of them try to browbeat the third into suicide; he will become the provisions. At first he argues, then he pleads, but he is doomed as soon as he conforms with their logic. He ends by proudly sacrificing himself for the general welfare of the raft. Mrozek appears to say that there is no hope for him once he accepts the raft as a legitimate society, instead of an accidental community in the founding of which he has had no say.

The other three plays in the collection are also about people who talk themselves into strange or embarrassing situations. Mrozek evokes these situations with a grim terseness. Parody of a sort is still in evidence but it is less informed by humor and by Mrozek's meticulous dialectics. In consequence Mrozek loses a certain particularity in his portraits of the characters; he lapses into almost pure allegory and since this is not one of his talents the plays tend to be predictable and to lack edge. Charlie is about an oculist whose premises are invaded by two men looking for somebody called Charlie whom they wish to shoot; the oculist saves his skin by informing on his customers and letting these "Charlies" be shot in his place: Quislings are made, not born. The Party deals with three farmers who come to a hall expecting to take part in a celebration and find that they have to make their own; in the course of it they don masks, dress up as women and get involved in those voluntary games of sex and death so beloved by student playwrights. The allegory is also heavy in Enchanted Night in which two state functionaries who are staying overnight in a hotel unintentionally put their feeble imaginations together and begin to compete for the girl of their respective dreams. While they squabble over whether they are awake or asleep, or which of them has intruded on the other's dream, the girl vanishes.

Allegory always presents an author with difficulties. If the outward or realistic action behind which it is concealed is convincing, spectators and readers will not bother to look for the allegory or sustained metaphor), much less find it. If the outward action does not carry conviction, the allegory is liable to be even less convincing since it is a projection and suffers from projected distortion — its applicability to life then comes into question. When a play is really funny, nobody but a misanthrope will worry if it has flaws. When it is serious, the flaws in the realism and the allegory — attenuation of a
dramatic idea; labored writing; stichomythia; repetition; obviousness — become irritants. Besides, the contemporary theatre has conditioned us to read allegory right off, without any veneer of realism; our taste — mine at any rate — is for lean entertainment, not for prolonged strangeness of atmosphere.

Striptease (1963) also seems to be spun out for its content, and to illustrate Mrozek’s inclination to let abstraction fill the vacuum created when he forsakes comic devices. The antagonists in this play are a pair of gigantic hands, one of them wearing a red glove. The hands operate on two victims who are called simply Man A and Man B, rather as the farmers in The Party are lettered, not named, as B, N, and J, and the functionaries in Enchanted Night are known as Old Man and Old Boy. Mrozek is not a psychological playwright and it is unfair to pin him down to characterization; yet the less abstract early plays are richer; the characters, even as roles, are more cunningly exploited, as they are in the finest Expressionist plays whose characters are roles rather than people — Kaiser’s From Morn to Midnight, for example. One can regard a search for increasing abstraction as a quest for pureness or simplicity, but the test is in the results, not in the intentions, and the result of Mrozek’s abstractness is a certain dry, didactic tone. Yet even these (for Mrozek) inferior plays create stage images that are memorable and, like any other author, Mrozek is entitled to be judged by his best work. This is so dramatically effective that Out at Sea, which I recently saw in a poorly acted, poorly directed, poorly translated production off-off-Broadway, came through as a glorious farce.

When Mrozek is better known in this country critics will undoubtedly classify him with the “Absurdist.” But as the drama critic Andrzej Wirth explained not long ago in a lecture in New York, the theatre of Mrozek and his contemporaries (among them, Stanislaw Grochowiak and Tadeusz Rosewicz) comes out of a modern Polish tradition of grotesquerie, rather than from a West European one — Lewis Carroll, Jarry, Chaplin and the Marx Brothers, the Surrealists. Dr. Wirth referred specifically to the work of Witold Gombrowicz, born in 1905 and now living in France, and of Stanislas Ignacy Witkiewicz (1885-1939), who signed himself Witkacy. I can claim no familiarity with Polish literature and drama but I would not hesitate to push the tradition of eerie fantasy in Poland back as far as The Saragossa Manuscript by Count Jan Potocki who died in 1815 and whose tales were known by Washington Irving. No plays by Gombrowicz are readily available in English, although some have been translated into French; Yvonne Princesse de Bourgogne was to have been presented during the first season of the short-lived Cultural Centre of Old Montreal. Witkacy, a multi-talented artist (poet, critic, philosopher, playwright, novelist) “wrote over thirty plays (nearly all of them between 1918-1926), of which just over twenty have been preserved.” The two I have read, The Madman and the Nun, or There is Nothing Bad Which Could Not Turn into Something Worse and The New Deliverance, show Witkacy to have been a poetic dramatist of hallucinatory power. Like the French Surrealists he seems to make the most of free-association techniques, but the free association serves only to release or conjure up from nightmares the raw material for his plays; on this material he consciously imposes dramatic form. “An art of this kind,” he wrote, “could be envisioned where every single detail is, in its relation to life, wholly arbitrary but put together with the utmost logic and precision. . . . The essential theatre of Pure Form [Witkacy’s name for his method of composition] is certainly a théâtre d’évasion, redolent of Freudian wish-fulfillment, in which, after all, dreams are an elementary medium.”

If André Breton, René Daumal, Roger Gilbert-Lecomte and other Surrealists are likeable children toying with firecrackers for the delectation of their friends, Witkacy is altogether a more skilled and dangerous figure — a revolutionary in absolute control of his high explosives. It is no wonder that his plays were banned in Poland for many years and revived only after the “thaw” set in in 1955. Like Apollinaire, Witkacy is a Surrealist only in finding the inspiration for his plays by means of “psychic automatism.” His work has a clean, hard finish and a coherence that the Surrealists would have scorned, probably because they could never have matched it.

Mrozek is no Surrealist at all. To
detect Witkacy's influence on him one must look at something else in the latter's "theory of pure form in the drama." The theory is complicated but it involves, among other matters, the eschewing of a false emotional bond between characters and spectators: "The work of art must be wrung, passe-moi l'expression grotesque, from the innermost guts of the personality, but the end effect must be absolutely free of all 'tripes.' There is the formula: and how difficult a one it is to carry out." The formula means in effect that the author must remain dispassionate while permitting his characters to unleash the wildest passions.

Mrozek's characters do not boil with passions, any more than his texts glitter with the frighteningly beautiful apothegms one encounters constantly in Witkacy. He is more tight-lipped, more of a straight storyteller; he cannot command the rhétorique maudite that Witkacy seems able to turn on and off at will. He bears down hard — unnecessarily hard when he is forcing an allegory — on his line of action and so does not dispense Witkacy's prescription for a théâtre d'évasion. But Mrozek has certainly freed himself from "tripes."

His full-length play, Tango, or The Need for Order and Harmony (1964), shares with the shorter plays this detached, almost chill, manner, this "tripeness." The "need for order and harmony" is affirmed by the hero Arthur, a 25-year old rebel. Mrozek turns the pooped-out old conflict between generations on its nose, for Arthur's parents are bohemians who long ago won the battles for free thought, free love, eccentric clothing and general permissiveness. By reaction, therefore, Arthur is a traditionalist. Mrozek never makes it clear what kind of a traditionalist, though, Burkan (principled) or pragmatic (a sort of William F. Buckley, Jr.; God, rather than man, at Yale, with delusions of oral superiority, and possibly anal) or a neo-Victorian clerk, with a rationalist's Polytechnic education like Enny Straker's.

Arthur wants to subvert his parents' comfortably disarrayed home. He will "set up new conventions or bring back the old ones . . . all the proper forms." His first step is to marry his girl friend. He will give her "an honest-to-goodness wedding with all the trimmings." He tries to urge his father into action by getting him to evict a fellow called Edek who hangs about the house and presumably sleeps with Arthur's mother. The father Stomił goes after Edek with a revolver, but somehow gets drawn into an amicable game of cards with him. Arthur then enlists his uncle, and the two of them carry out Arthur's revolution at gunpoint.

The second act of Tango shows the sort of order and harmony Arthur wished to bring about. He calls it "pure form," in a reference to Witkacy's theory. The characters have reverted to the fashions of 50 years before, the post-Edwardian era, say. It may be of significance that Edek the outsider has now become the butler and is sometimes addressed as Edward. Arthur is triumphant; he has discovered that "the one thing that can be made out of nothing is power . . . I am the act, the will, and the way. I am power. I am above, within and beside all things." What is this power that Arthur brags about? It is the "power over life and death," the life and death of his family. Arthur has found out, in short, that the strongest man can do as he likes.

Only, he is fooling himself. Edek is stronger than he is. Edek has been to bed with the girl who is now Arthur's wife. And when a showdown comes, Edek does not dispute with Arthur; he simply kills him and establishes his order and harmony. He tells the people in the family that nobody will get hurt who does not interfere with him. And they are quite happy about this. Edek is a tyrant, but with him they know where they are and who they are. When he orders Arthur's uncle, formerly Arthur's accomplice, to dance a tango with him no questions are asked. The tango is La Cumparsita, and Mrozek insists that "it must be this tango and no other."

On this tableau of the two men dancing, with Edek leading the steps, and Arthur slain, the curtain falls and "as the light goes on in the theatre the tune issues from numerous loudspeakers distributed through the house."

As a play Tango is not so much a comedy, farce or satire as it is a "tango," a succession of weird motions executed by performers who are, so to speak, standing at an angle to the line of dance and
Power seeking Arthur (Robin Gammell) enlists his Grandfather Eugene's (Paul Ballantyne) aid in forcing his parents (Lee Richardson and Gale Sondergaard) to organize their lives in TANGO by Slawomir Mrozek. MINNESOTA THEATRE COMPANY PRODUCTION 1967 — CRAWFORD LIVINGSTON THEATRE, ST. PAUL.
progressing by erratic, exotic steps. Behind them stretches a wake of hints, clues and nudges. A fairly straightforward reading of the action suggests that it is about the tightening of discipline in Poland after seven or eight years of frantic experiment in the arts (1956-63). The avant-garde becomes mannered and complacent (Arthur's parents); the new generation of artists (Arthur) wants to find a solid footing in the "pure forms" of the past. It woos the general public (Arthur's girl friend), and wins the collaboration of the Academy (Arthur's uncle). But once again the word "intellectual" is equated with the word "ineffectual." The new intelligentsia has no firm power base. Russia, the authorities in Poland, or the Party (Edek) or what have you steps in and takes charge, reimposing Edwardian, pre-revolutionary socialist realism.

This interpretation is complicated by what one might describe as a Fortinbras hangup in modern Poland. Jan Kott has been instrumental in making Shakespeare appear to be our (or, more accurately, Beckett's) contemporary. Other critics and playwrights have followed his lead. So have many directors. The Royal Shakespeare Company has rebuilt King Lear and Henry V; in New York Joseph Papp has given a garbled, "shattered-focus" Hamlet; and in Poland itself there have been a number of plays that oppose a modern Hamlet, or spiritual man, to a modern Fortinbras, or man of action. I suppose this way of regarding the play comes initially from Brecht. At any rate, Fortinbras, often omitted from English-language productions for the sake of brevity or a smaller cast, has become a critical figure in modern Polish drama.

Claudius is no longer an important enough antagonist for Hamlet. He is indecisive, needing to pray for divine guidance, becoming terrified by the performance of The Murder of Gonzago, enlisting Laertes' aid in a plot that goes awry, and so on. He is a bungler: with his clumsy device of the poisoned foils he gets himself, Gertrude, and Laertes murdered, as well as Hamlet. Fortinbras, on the other hand is ruthless and efficient. He simply marches in at the end and takes over Denmark. And it may be that Fortinbras' objective in Hamlet — to launch a war against Poland — has made him the Poles' personification of an eternal enemy. Thus, the scene in Tango in which Arthur tries to incite his father to shoot Edek is not, as it might superficially appear, a Hamlet-in-reverse as the Prince incites the Ghost of his father to reclaim Gertrude from a usurper but, conceivably, a scene in which Hamlet tries to egg Claudius into going on the offensive against the outsider, Fortinbras, the literally "strong in arm." At the end Fortinbras-Edek would be compelling official Polish art to dance to his tune, the tango. The tango, by the way, became popular in America, and subsequently in Europe, in 1911-12, that is, in the post-Edwardian era. It may resemble the habanera and seem to be Cuban or Spanish, but it probably derives from Africa. Whatever its origin, it is distinctly alien to Polish or any other European culture.

From the tango to Tango. Mrzok's play is even further removed from the generalized allegory of his earlier comedies. It is the parable or didactic allegory, the example or lesson, in which there is a stronger infusion of morality than in say The Police or Out at Sea. There is also less humor. Not that Mrzok has forsaken comedy. He has some very funny lines in the play and its premises are sardonic. But behind the political parable lies a second allegory which has to do with a large dilemma of the modern theatre, the one Witkacy put his finger on: what kind of dramatic form, if any, is appropriate and satisfactory in the 20th Century's artistic fluidity, not to say chaos? In Ionesco's Victims of Duty a poet named Nicolas d'Eu (a rough anagram of Eugene Ionesco) rather laboriously defends the need for new dramatic conceptions. And Tadeusz Rosewicz's The Interrupted Act (1964) is subtitled "a non-theatrical comedy in one act" and deals with the same difficulty of writing for the theatre today, although as Boleslaw Taborski remarks, "this ironically 'anti-theatrical' piece has proved quite effective on the stage."
Arthur's father may be the Ghost (of his former self) plus a whiff of Claudius, but the situations and characters developed by Mrozek do not encourage one to press the analogy too far. Tango is more likely to be a play about itself. It is outwardly a domestic comedy. The opening scene and closing scene of the first act consist of card games, much like those card games that introduce the boulevard plays of Scribe, Labiche, Sardou, Feydeau, Courteline, and other authors of well-made scripts. And by taking us back, during its second act, to the period before World War I, before Surrealism and Expressionism had got under way, Tango depicts the theatre turning back its own clock. Tragedy is not possible today, Stomil tells Arthur; every attempt at it turns into farce. But nor is it possible to write a boulevard comedy today, not possible, that is, for Mrozek. So he works his variations on the old formulae, as Strindberg did in Crime and Crime. Arthur (the younger generation of artists?) is overwhelmed by Edek (edict? Edwardianism?). The theatre goes back to the simple power struggles of socialist realism based on their 19th-century formulae and ties an unhappy ending, a characteristically modern device, to them. The old, alien dance, the tango, which used to be a fashion, has become a regulation. Why La Cumparsita? I am not at all sure, except that La Cumparsita was perhaps the most popular of the tangos in Europe, the most directly recognizable as a tango. The family in the play accept it, as they bow to Edek’s show of brute power, and they do so much more willingly than they accepted Arthur’s display of power-based-on-logic.

If this is an explanation — I am not satisfied that it is the only one; “exploration” is a better word here than “explanation” — the theme and ending of Tango jibe with the themes and endings of The Police, Out at Sea, Peter Ohey, and Charlie. In all of these short plays the victim accepts the language, the form of dialectic. imposed by the victor. In Charlie, admittedly, the oculist is not so much the victim; by turning informer he saves his skin for the moment, but Mrozek implies that he will eventually be a target, a “Charlie,” too. The language accepted by the family in Tango is symbolic, a dance. The symbol is an especially apt one, for in a stylized dance like the tango the weaker “female” partner has to follow accurately every step of the way, whereas in modern dances like the frug and watusi the partners are free to do just about any steps they like, independently of each other and even independently of the governing rhythms.

With Home on the Border Mrozek returns to the comedy and grotesqueries of his early short plays. The comic moments are, if anything, broader and more imaginatively exploited than before. The head of the divided household, simply named “I”, and his in-laws find that they have to reach across the frontier at dinnertime to get another helping of french fries, while a customs official checks on the number of these french fries they consume, each one requiring a fresh visa or permission. The members of the family also have to pass a border barrier (with guards) when they want to go to the bathroom or the bedroom or to pick up a fork that has fallen under the table. In this script Mrozek has once again made himself securely at home on the border between satire and allegory. However, he tells us that Home on the Border is not, strictly speaking, a play but a screenplay for television or film. (It was adapted from his short story of the same name). The last shot, in fact, shows “I” scuttling away like one of those vanishing figures in silent movies who reach the horizon in about a second and a half. Unlike Mrozek’s earlier heroes, “I” escapes by a prodigious feat of sprinting — but he escapes into a movie. One can only hope that Mrozek, now that he has so impressively regained his balance, will stay in the theatre.

FOOTNOTES
2. Dates mark the publication of the plays in the Polish theatre magazine Dialog.
4. For some years Martin Esslin’s word “abseurd,” borrowed from Camus, had some utility as a sort of wastebasket adjective for holding new plays, many of them written after World War II. Today the word is bandied about by critics who wish to
dismiss the contemporary theatre by not coming to grips with its variety. It is literally absurd to suggest that there is anything in common, other than approximate coincidence of dates, between say the refined classicism of Beckett and the slovenly romanticism of Genet. Most of Ionesco's early dramas, however, as well as those of Simpson, Tardieu, and some other French writers, are governed by deliberate absurdity.

5. According to Boleslaw Taborski's valuable Polish Plays in English Translations: A Bibliography, published by the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, Inc. (New York, 1968, $2.50). Mr. Taborski synopsizes eight plays by Witkiewicz that have appeared in English and provides the addresses of the translators.


8. These quotations from Witkacy are borrowed from Konstanty Puzyna's "The Prism of the Absurd" in Polish Perspectives, June 1963. Among Mr. Puzyna's own critical comments on Witkacy, the following are especially interesting: "The dialogue in his dramas is pitched in invariably the same key, sounding like the table-talk of a set of bohemian aesthetes. ... There are a number of stock types which reappear in the plays: the titanic leader, the tyrant, the artist or savant, the perverted society whore, the moppet with the ambiguously innocent expression."

9. Some examples from The New Deliverance: "You shine like a splendid black diamond mounted in a chunk of rotten pork." "How pleasant it is to crush people when one is young." And a line that seems peculiarly apposite to our policy-makers in Washington today: "A pragmatist is an ordinary beast except that he theorizes his beastliness and tries to make others believe that it is the only philosophy."

10. At this writing I have not seen a production of Tango. It has been given in English by the Royal Shakespeare Company (May 1966).

and at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis (December 1967), but the New York producer who holds the option is trying to arrange for Erwin Axer, who directed the productions in Warsaw and West Germany, to come and stage the play in the U. S. It will be published later in 1968 by Grove Press. I am grateful to Grove for lending me an advance draft of Ralph Manheim's translation.

11. See, for example, section 68 of A Short Organum for the Theatre, (in Playwrights on Playwriting), translated by John Willett, and especially Eric Bentley's footnote to it which includes a letter Brecht wrote Bentley on his view of Hamlet.

12. Daniel C. Gerould deals with this matter at some length in "The Non-Euclidean Drama: Modern Theatre in Poland" (First Stage, Winter 1965).

13. In Stanislaw Grochowiak's King IV (1963) Fortinbras becomes the vacillator; he cannot make up his mind to invade a neighboring country in which there has been an abortive uprising.