

# Israeli Theater in Turmoil While Traditional Battles Modern

**By ELIAV SIMON**  
**United Press International**  
 Jerusalem—In the Israeli theater today, there is turmoil beneath the grease-paint as the new challenges of the old—the "traditional" battles the modern.

In few countries is the public more theater conscious than in this young Jewish nation and, for that very reason, anything that affects the theater becomes something of a national debate.

Leading the traditional forces is Dr. Chaim Gamzu, Israel's leading drama critic. Fighting him is Gershon Plot-

kin, director of the country's most popular theatrical troupe, the "Chamber theater."

The battle came into the open when Gamzu, an admirer of conservatism in the theater, blasted the Chamber theater's latest production, "The Inn of Ghosts" by Poet Nathan Alterman. Plotkin struck back with a reply in the Davar, a rival morning newspaper to Gamzu's paper, Haaretz.

Gamzu, said Plotkin, was "a cultural commissar" seeking to corrupt the public taste instead of educating it. Not

with this d---d mirror!"

At the root of the quarrel is a theme as old as art itself: the artist versus the critic, the experimental against the known. In Israel the present debate goes back to the 1920's before this country was an independent state.

Some 40 years ago a group of Russian actors, some of them trained in the Moscow Art theater, came to the then Palestine and established the Habimah theater. These people, although Zionists and Communists, were influenced by the radical, idealistic atmosphere of the times. Their theater was organized on a cooperative basis in which each actor owned an equal share in the management. All administrative, financial and artistic matters were decided by vote and each actor received the same salary regardless of talent or parts. And, importantly, the acting and production were traditional and stylized.

Russian Accent

At the Habimah the actors declaimed their lines in Russian-accented Hebrew. Overstatement, exaggeration of

gesture and rapturous eye-rolling were essential parts of the technique. It became a standard of what some came to call "Jewish theater."

The Habimah established a reputation of being second to none in staging such productions as "The Dybbuk," reflecting the life and culture of East European Jewry and now a classical part of its repertoire. But it discouraged young Israeli playwrights and actors trying to break into the ranks of this close-knit, Russian-born clique.

Then nearly 20 years ago, in 1947, a group of young actors and actresses revolted against this theatrical traditionalism and founded the Chamber theater on a small and experimental basis.

During Israel's war of independence in 1948 the Chamber theater group produced topical plays by young Israeli writers. A typical one was "He Walked Through the Fields" by Moshe Shamir. It told the story of a young Jewish soldier and it enjoyed great popular success.

As it gained stature and confidence, the Chamber theater branched out to put on Western, Anglo-Saxon plays. Among them have been "Born Yesterday," "The Little Foxes," "Irma La Douce," "The Miracle Maker," and "Look Homeward, Angel." The established theaters, Habimah and another called Ohel, soon were forced to relax their "traditional" rules as they played to increasingly empty houses.

Rebels Best Stars

Today, the "Avante Gard" rebels of 1947 are the established and best known stars. They include Yocef Yadin, brother of a former Israeli chief of staff, Hannah Meron, Orna Porath and Butya Lancet. But now they all are in their 40s and facing the competition of a new crop of younger spirits.

One of the new elements in the Israeli theater is a domestic variation of what in New York is called the "Off-Broadway Theater." Groups of young actors travel the country in small vans and put

on one-night stands in towns and villages. Because of their mode of transport they are known here as "taxi theaters."

The "taxi theaters" are frankly commercial. They give work to many who would otherwise have no theatrical outlet. But they are giving new life, too, to the Jewish theater and from their ranks may come some of the stars of tomorrow.

There is crisis in Israeli's theatrical world. But there is youth, too.



**NEWSPAPER JOINS DEBATE**—The Israeli afternoon newspaper Maariv joins the current theater debate with cartoon depicting aging gazing into a mirror labeled "Criticism". As mirror mercilessly reflects her wrinkles, she says: "There is something wrong with this d---d mirror". (UPI)

## Dr. Kreisman Will Serve As Consultant

Ashland — Dr. Arthur Kreisman, director of general studies and chairman of the Southern Oregon college humanities division, has been selected to serve as a consultant on English usage for the National Convention of the Conference on College Composition and Communication scheduled March 21-23 in Los Angeles.

In line with the conference theme, "The Content of English," there will be a special three-session workshop on English Usage in College Composition for which Dr. Kreisman will serve as co-consultant with Dr. Virginia McDavid of the Chicago Teachers college and Dr. John Gill of the University of Wisconsin.

The workshop has been limited to 30 teachers from throughout the U.S.

**Ashland Student Is Elks Contest Winner**

Jane Hennick, Ashland High school, and Llyod West, South Eugene High school, were the district Elks scholarship contest winners Sunday in Roseburg.

Each will receive a \$250 scholarship with an opportunity to compete in the state finals March 30 in Beaverton.

Among the students participating were Becky Irwin, Rogue River; Mary Ann Carnegie, St. Mary's, Medford; Craig Pennington, Ashland; Charles Versteeg, Illinois Valley, Cave Junction; and Howard Haugen, Medford.

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 Kenneth Dean Cox, violation of basic rule, \$15.  
 Stanley Lorenz Carstensen, violation of basic rule, \$25.  
 Mike Everett Dietrich, violation of basic rule, \$25.  
 Dan Miller, disobeyed traffic signal, \$10.  
 Rex Jerrold Igo, disregarded flashing red light at railroad crossing, \$10.  
 William Martin Atkins, operator's license not in possession, \$5.  
 Constance Brooks, disobeyed traffic signal, \$10.  
 William George Gilman, excessive noise, \$10.  
 Helen Doris Steed, driving while vision obstructed, \$10.  
 John Jay Hubbard, disobeyed traffic signal, \$10.  
 Harry K. Danielson, no operator's license in possession, \$5.  
 Joseph Patrick Dugon, excessive noise, \$10.

**Hearing Slated on Capital Punishment**

Salem—UPI—A public hearing on bills dealing with capital punishment and abolition of the death penalty will be held at 1 p.m. March 22.

The hearings will be conducted by the Senate Judiciary committee in room 6 of the Capitol building.

Sen. Thomas Mahoney (D-Portland) committee chairman, said three bills and two senate joint resolutions will be taken up at the hearing.

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