

Who's afraid of Edward Albee?

by ROLAND REED
Edward Albee talks too much. Only eight years ago he seemed a masterful word economist. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* opened in October 1962 and impressed us all with its highly selective realism.

There was power and conciseness in every line. There was neither hue nor cry (except from those who are more offended by obscene words than superfluous words) when Albee's contracts required producers of this play to omit not an iota from the printed script.

So the words in the play have not changed. But we have. The artistic economy of Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming* Jimmi Hendrix' "The Star Spangled Banner and Charles Schulz's "Peanuts" have changed us.

When confronted by material we perceive as important and relevant and worth our imaginative contribution as audience members, we have come to expect the author to respect our perceptiveness and sensibility. Conversely we expect Neil Simon and Erich Segal to treat us like boobs. We reinforce their contempt daily at box office and best seller book bins. I think Albee's overwriting results from underestimating his audience.

That it didn't seem overwritten eight years ago is perhaps a reflection of changing needs of audiences. The greatest pleasure in the theater comes when we are given all the elements we need (with no surplus) to project ourselves into the full experience of the play.

Albee's surplus is primarily

entertainment

in the verbal analysis of the games we observe, in the excessive clarification of the nature of the son's existence, and in the scenes of overstated comic relief.

Virginia Woolf is one of the most powerful and beautiful plays of the American theater. It is, in fact, so brilliant as to justify critical slashes for any imperfections.

The Lincoln Community Playhouse production is so good at its best that its flaws, too, seem more heinous than the same flaws in the mediocre production of a mediocre play.

Consistently crisp, deft acting would help to compensate for the apparent overwriting. Understandably, the writing tends to weigh upon the performances. While the acting is not uniformly proficient, the experienced performers, Patricia Dickeson as Martha, and Robert Stuewig as George, capture the power and complexity of their tormented characters.

Stuewig is particularly adept at conveying the subtle nuance of Albee's language. Dickeson gives a mature, exciting interpretation of a character with the stature of a modern Medea.

Richard Terrell's Nick has not sufficient energy to be thoroughly convincing as the vigorous health cultist stud everyone keeps saying he is. Judge Schneider as Hoey

appropriately understates her role.

These difficult supporting roles are performed with some sensitivity, but the actors too often break the momentum built by Dickeson and Stuewig.

Dean Tschetter's nearly dynamic set got painted black. Almost. The ceiling almost meets the stage right wall. Several rows of seats were sacrificed to make room for a great apron stage extended out into the auditorium. More than half of it is utilized by the actors to create a more intimate contact with the audience.

Altogether I found it to be an exciting, moving production. Albee is so good he is seldom performed in Lincoln.

"Gather ye rosebuds while ye may."

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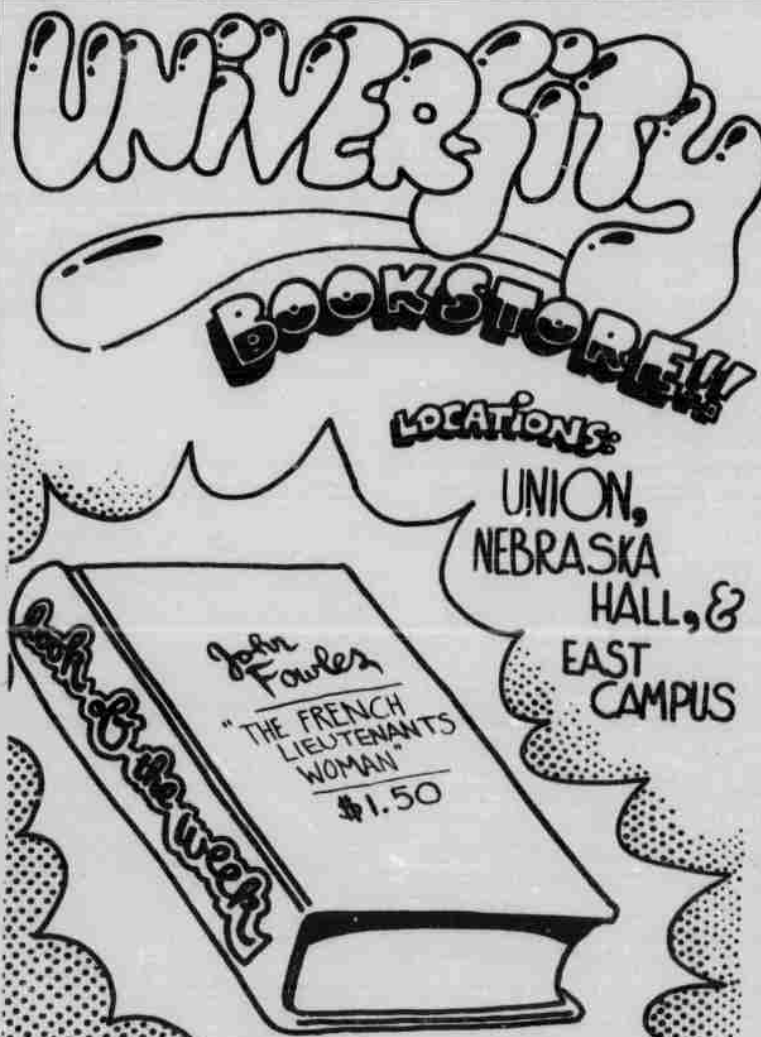
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