

THE
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EDITORIAL OFFICES

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April 3rd, 1979

Dear Professor Baker:

Richard Eder, Edwin Wilson, and I, serving as what are now termed "nominating jurors," have voted unanimously to recommend for the Pulitzer Prize in Drama the play called "Buried Child," by Sam Shepard.

Over the past several years, Mr. Shepard has produced a remarkable body of work. He is widely held to be one of the most talented of his comparatively youthful generation, as well as unquestionably the most industrious. As a playwright, he has devoted himself to American themes—perhaps more self-consciously than any of his colleagues, he has taken for his subject the nature of contemporary American life. He is preoccupied with the question of our relationship to the past; he explores with a lyrical exuberance the moral and spiritual values to which as Americans we continue to subscribe.

These matters strike many of us as profoundly mysterious and worrying. They are at the root of "Buried Child" and are presented there in an exceptionally entertaining and accessible fashion.

In recommending Mr. Shepard for the Pulitzer Prize, we of the jury have felt entitled to consider that, beyond the high quality of the play itself, Mr. Shepard's substantial body of work and its inspiring determination to come to grips with American life are worthy of honoring.

The jury felt strongly that it would be a form of self-stultification to lay out, like yard goods on a counter, a number of plays for the Board to choose among. For one thing, there is almost never, in any given year, so wide a range of possibilities; for another thing, the jury is a body of supposed experts, who have seen the plays in question, and the Board is not intended to be a body of experts on theatre; moreover, in most cases, the Board will not have seen more than a tiny

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fraction of the plays produced in the course of a given year. If the jury were to submit a list of several plays (which in any event it wouldn't be able to do, since the jury would never achieve unanimity on two or three plays, much less four or five), the Board would be faced with making a choice almost as blind as if the list had been drawn up by press-agents.

Personally, I feel that this whole matter of the relationship to the jury deserves a thorough going-over in the course of the coming year. The very term "nominating juror" is a violation of common sense. Perhaps a committee of the Board can be chosen to talk the matter over with a committee of critics chosen from among working critics from coast to coast.

In past years, I have stressed the need to make the choosing of a Pulitzer Prize in Drama a national matter and not a New York one, and I understand that in future some means of providing money for travel expenses for the jury will be established. This is a matter of the greatest importance.

It was asked of this jury whether there might be an advantage in setting up an earlier date for the beginning and end of the period within which possible Pulitzer Prize-winning plays are considered. It would understandably be of advantage to the Board, but whether it would be of advantage to playwrights and to the theatre at large is a question that needs further examination. One ought to make a study of what is, to me, merely an impression: that in recent years, more and more of a theatre season has developed in the spring months rather than in winter, which used to be the height of the season. But this impression should be confirmed (or denied) by a statistical study. It would be foolish to change the date arbitrarily, without more information than anyone at the present moment possesses.

The expenses of our deliberations come to twelve dollars.

Yours sincerely,

Brendan Gill
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