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Classics in rotation: A history of the Jean Cocteau Repertory Company

Karten, Harvey S., Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1991

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A

CLASSICS IN ROTATION

A HISTORY OF THE JEAN COCTEAU REPERTORY COMPANY

by

Harvey S. Karten

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1991

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

4/29/91
Date

Chair of Examining Committee
Prof. Edwin Wilson

4-29-91
Date

Executive Officer
Prof. Marvin Carlson

Prof. Harry Carlson

Prof. Daniel Gerould

Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

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Abstract

CLASSICS IN ROTATION

A HISTORY OF THE JEAN COCTEAU REPERTORY COMPANY

by

Harvey S. Karten

Adviser: Professor Edwin Wilson

This history traces the evolution of the Jean Cocteau Repertory Company--which was founded in New York City by Eve Adamson--from its beginnings in a ramshackle storefront of a tumbledown neighborhood to its twentieth year of focus on the classics. The Cocteau Repertory, a small, off-off Broadway company with a record of financial difficulties and mixed critical notices, may owe its survival to its unswerving commitment to its mission: the presentation of classics by a resident company in rotating repertory format.

The study seeks to determine the extent to which the company maintained a focus on its mission in terms of the extent to which each production was considered successful by the company members themselves, by the audiences, and by the critics. The study will accent a political dimension. In any organization, political considerations create subtexts

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if they are not overt components. This political dimension consists largely of the relationship between the artistic side of the company and its commercial side, and of the many decisions that were required relating to real estate, artistic choice, and public communications.

The history, then, traces the evolution of the Cocteau from its origin--a skeletal organization whose existence was tied wholly to the talents of a single person--to its present station in a home with a Landmarks Preservation Commission designation: a group whose mission and quality have given it at once a loyal audience and an uncertainty of tenure.

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PREFACE

The Cocteau Repertory has presented plays on Manhattan's Bowery for nineteen years, opening its first production on 17 June 1971. In 1971, with the winding down of a humiliating war, American youth were getting what appeared to some would be their first haircuts, while experimental theatres whose *raison d'etre* was the greening of America were closing their doors, victims of a new American commercialism. To remain in operation, corporations, both private and non-profit, were compelled to make changes.

In New York City, Broadway theatres, which had not staged a single play about the Vietnam War throughout the 1960s and 1970s, had won the patronage of their audiences and had amassed increasingly robust box-office figures. The conservative trend made its imprint on off-Broadway theaters as well: organizations like the Circle Repertory Company and the Manhattan Theatre Club, conceived originally as refuges from the rampant commercialism of Broadway theatre, were swept into the rising tide of commerce and began competing with Broadway for lavishness of production and employment of celebrated actors.

The experimentalism fostered by Julian Beck and Judith

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Malina of the Living Theatre, Joseph Chaiken of the Open Theatre, Joe Cino of Cafe Cino, and directors Richard Foreman and Jerzi Grotowski, were relegated to the fringe if they survived at all. Through the ebbs and flows of fortune and failure, the Cocteau company, founded in 1971 and dedicated to the classics, retained its pledge to give a small but intensely loyal audience the sorts of plays which, for the most part, were not produced elsewhere.

I had first learned of the presence of the Cocteau in 1974, shortly after Eve Adamson, its founder, moved her embryonic enterprise one-half block from a storefront stage to a Landmarks Preservation structure on the Bowery and East Second Street. An advertisement in the *Village Voice* told of a theatre that had been resisting--by necessity and by ideology--the two major trends of the seventies. On the one hand, the Broadway theatres and a few of their off-Broadway cousins were eager to sign celebrities and to outdo each other in the display of design and dazzle; on the other hand, some small experimental stages remained devoted to the mounting of a repertoire of plays whose forms were decidedly non-traditional. And while a few theaters in town did keep Shakespeare alive, the Elizabethan fare they offered was the safest--*Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Lear, Macbeth,* and *Twelfth Night*.

I became interested in the Cocteau after seeing a performance of Max Frisch's *The Firebugs*. I was entranced

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with the intensely dramatic texture of a play I had not heard of or had ever seen advertised before in New York. I could imagine high-school youngsters attending a school production with skepticism only to be entranced by the precise, Swiss momentum, ultimately yielding to the temptation to call out to Biedermann, "Gottlieb, you idiot--don't give him the matches!"

I noted by their rosters of plays that the company produced other neglected classics like *Ghosts, Cain* and *Sweeney Agonistes*--and subscribed.

Now, years later, I am not surprised that the company is still here, not exactly flourishing, but doggedly persisting with its annual parade of five or six classics, both popular and neglected. Because of its goals and its longevity, the theatre is a worthy subject for documenting its history. Whatever one's views of the quality of their work, what places the Cocteau into the category of meritorious subjects for dissertations is its consistent focus on a mission that mas made the company unique in New York and perhaps the United States: the performance of classics in rotation by a resident ensemble.

I explained to the theatre that I wanted to write its history. Robert Hupp, the artistic director of the theater, agreed. As the guiding arm of the ensemble, he opened voluminous files in his small office of the building's administrative wing, giving me access to all documents,

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including reviews, budgets, trustees' minutes, showbills, photographs, and the like, and in June of 1990, authorized me to attend meetings of the trustees. (The president of the board acknowledged that I was the first non-member ever to attend a meeting.)

While many theatres have little sense of history, the Cocteau staffs throughout the last two decades should be hailed for their archival labors and feeling for tradition. To say that this study would be impossible without Bob's agreement may be trite but is hardly meretricious. He treated me as a professional historian and as a member of the Cocteau family.

Eve Adamson, artistic director for almost eighteen years of the company's twenty-year tenure, provided abundant commentary: her talk was of a caliber that offered insights into the political scope of the study. Eve, who will be visiting the theatre yearly to guest-direct plays of her choosing, has been the spire of the theatre's structure. Several actors helped me immensely, sharing vivid details of the visits by Tennessee Williams, Toby Richardson, Edvard Radzinsky and Wlodmierz Herman to direct works by themselves and others, both distinguished and inconsequential. One of these actors, both by inclination and by his long years of service to the company, was exceptional. Craig Smith, who holds a mundane job during the day to support his acting habit, is to my mind, as wonderful a person as he is a fine

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performer. I spent many pleasant hours both in the theatre and in Phebe's Restaurant across the street listening to this weaver of fascinating tales. Harris Berlinsky, now with the company for twelve years, also supplied me with similar information from his unique viewpoint. Harris, like Craig, works full-time outside the theatre to support his addiction to acting--he has the midnight shift as desk-man in a police precinct. I was fortunate to be able to interview people from the management staff and the trustees. David Fishelson, the managing director, filled me in on the financial health and illness alike of the company, while several trustees and sponsors--Tom Fuld, Loi Leabo, Jim Nichols, and Chaunce Skilling--set aside considerable time to keep me posted on the theatre from their points of view.

Edwin Wilson--critic for the *Wall Street Journal*, interviewer, editor, and professor--advised me while I was writing both my master's thesis at Hunter College and doctoral dissertation at CUNY. He taught me a bit about writing and, as a favorite critic, has inspired my own writing of reviews. Daniel Gerould, a veritable storehouse of knowledge about theatre--specialist in the melodramatic and adapter of the Eastern European--has done more than his part to keep me focused on the stage. Harry Carlson, perhaps this country's foremost authority on Strindberg and an expert on the Romantic writers, has given me new perspectives on the Swedish playwright, and new vistas on

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the poet-dramatists, Byron and Shelley. Professor Marvin Carlson, the executive director of the doctoral program in theatre at the CUNY Graduate Center, has been an inspiration, while his congenial and efficient program assistant Jan Heissinger has cheered me up periodically, getting me through the sometimes complex intricacy of the City University Graduate Center.

And thanks, Julie Bleha and Nia Schooler at the Cocteau box office, for holding aside six pairs of front-row seats for me each year. A special note of gratitude to Paisley, a wee Cairn Terrier puppy, whose mischievous, red-brindle face and overly friendly yaps cautioned me daily against treating this assignment with undue reverence.

This study is dedicated to my wife, Tammy.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Milieu

When Eve Adamson founded the Jean Cocteau Repertory Company in New York City in 1971, she launched an enterprise with which she hoped to satisfy the need for productions of time-honored dramas, especially those which had been neglected by other theatres. Her plan was to establish a company with low ticket prices so that all potential theatergoers who wanted to see the Cocteau's productions could be accommodated.

The Cocteau Repertory did not originate in a vacuum, but took its place among an abundance of small theatres with reasonably-priced tickets: a part of the genre designated off-off-Broadway. While the number of such theatres in New York City is now over one hundred, the Cocteau is unique in its status as the only English-language company in New York that performs in true repertory, and is indeed one of the only such theatres in the United States.

While this dissertation is the only extensive study of the Cocteau, several books and scholarly tracts have considered the general nature of off-off-Broadway companies. Notwithstanding previous treatments of that subject, a

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panoramic look at the off-off-Broadway phenomenon is in order, if only to place the Cocteau in its appropriate milieu.

The movement to diversify and extend the New York theatre community beyond its commercial Broadway houses began not during the 1950s, as some may assume because of the rapid rise of alternative theatres at that time. In fact, the genesis of the movement could be traced to the "little theatres" that were founded just before the outbreak of World War I.[1]

The United States became aware of European theatrical experimentation in about 1915. Shortly before the outbreak of World War I in Europe, some Americans began organizing what were called "little theatres," modeled upon the innovative smaller theatres in Europe. Early organizations in America included the Toy Theatre in Boston, the Chicago Little Theatre in Chicago, and the Washington Square Players in New York. Approximately fifty of these groups began to prepare audiences for the kinds of experimentation that would become customary with non-commercials theatres.[2]

Still other small, experimental houses began to take root in New York during the second decade of this century. The Provincetown Players--led by George Cram Cook, an Iowa visionary fond of ancient Greek drama--deserves much of the credit for influencing the off-Broadway movement, which was to flourish decades later. During the summer of 1915 a band

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of amateurs staged their own plays in Provincetown, Massachusetts, but moved the theatre to New York's Greenwich Village to attract a larger audience to its offerings--which consisted principally of American plays, particularly those of Eugene O'Neill.[3] (At the time that O'Neill moved to Greenwich Village, the neighborhood was known as the "Left Bank" of New York in that it harbored an avant-garde group of writers and artists.)[4] The Provincetown Players' staging of O'Neill's expressionistic *The Emperor Jones* was appropriate, considering the Provincetown's aim to engage in theatrical experimentation.[5] The Provincetown Players split into two branches in 1923, one continuing its older practices, and the other, led by O'Neill, Robert Edmond Jones, and Kenneth Macgowan, performing foreign plays as well as noncommercial works by O'Neill and others. In 1929, the theatre stopped operations because of financial pressures.[6]

Another major forerunner of the off-Broadway movement in New York was the Washington Square Players, of which the Theatre Guild was a spinoff. The Guild, like the Provincetown Players, was dedicated to the presentation of good plays that would not interest commercial managers. The respect it received for the types of plays it presented to its subscribers made the Theatre Guild an important prototype of the off-Broadway movement. The Guild did not close its doors like the Players, but financial pressures

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eventually forced the group to produce plays of a commercial variety.[7]

The Washington Square Players was a more professional group than the more amateurish Provincetown Players, but they shared the conviction that theatre should be more than technical virtuosity, rhetorical acting, and melodramatic displays. During the 1920s and 1930s, "little theatres" such as these continued to oppose the more commercial values of Broadway. The audiences they expected, therefore, were different from those patronizing the uptown theatres.[8]

After the close of World War II, a group known as New Stages bought a moving picture house on Bleecker Street in New York's Greenwich Village and removed all but 299 seats from the auditorium to avoid violating fire regulations. During the 1950s, other principal groups that arose to counter the commercial of the uptown stages were the Living Theatre, the Circle in the Square, the Phoenix Theatre, and the New York Shakespeare Theatre. The mission of the rather prosperous Phoenix Theatre was to "release actors, directors, playwrights and designers from the pressures of the hit-or-flop patterns of Broadway."[9]

Off-Broadway theatres include those that arose beginning in the second half of this century as an alternative to Broadway houses. Generally, off-Broadway theatres sold tickets for a considerably smaller sum than did Broadway

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companies and produced works of a less commercial kind than the more costly theatres.[10]

But soaring production costs led off-Broadway houses like the Circle Repertory Company (founded in 1951) to increase ticket prices and choose less experimental, more commercial, programs to increase subscriptions. A second "revolution"--essentially a spin-off from the commercialization of off-Broadway--took root in New York during the 1960s, a movement whose purpose was partly to counter the price increases that were putting off-Broadway theatres beyond the reach of many audience members, but more important, to return theatre to its role of questioning, probing, and coming to grips with the human situation. Theatres considered members of the new off-*off*-Broadway family, then, are those which succeeded the off-Broadway movement as a focus of serious new drama.[11]

Some thirteen years before the founding of the Cocteau, off-off-Broadway theatre made its first appearance in a coffeehouse in New York's Greenwich Village.[12] The first producer--Joseph Cino--opened his coffee house at 31 Cornelia Street in December 1958, encouraging friends to hang paintings on the walls and read their poetry for regular customers crowded around small tables in front of his tall espresso maker. Impromptu readings by writers and actors led to dramatic readings and to mini-productions on zero budgets. Small amounts were collected for the performers when hats were passed around the house. Many

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credit Cino, therefore, with having established the first stagings of off-off-Broadway drama.[13]

Some mark the origin of the off-off-Broadway movement at a later date; Michael Smith of the *Village Voice* dates the true beginning of the movement with the first staging of Alfred Jarry's *King Ubu* on 27 September 1960. That work opened at a theatre called "Take 3" on Bleecker Street in Greenwich Village.[14]

Others hold that the first *authoritative* step toward the formation of the off-off-Broadway genre came in 1960 when Ellen Stewart opened La Mama Experimental Theatre Club in a cellar on East Twelfth Street, in New York's East Village neighborhood. The coffee served at the establishment was a subterfuge to evade certain legal requirements. The emphasis was on the plays. Stewart seldom read scripts, but she picked her writers by hunch and intuition. Each author was his own producer, and what attracted writers was the possibility of seeing their works staged free from any sort of censorship. By the early 1960s, according to some patrons of La Mama, off-Broadway had became overly-cautious and encrustated with commercialism. Producers were not particularly available to new playwrights with fresh ideas. Off-off Broadway allowed writers to go to the outer limits of their material. No theme was beyond permissibility--sexual deviation, hidden sexuality, and other motifs avoided

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by the more commercial establishments might gain first exposure in off-off-Broadway theatres.[15]

The Cambridge Guide to World Theatre defines "off-off-Broadway" as theatres that technically fall under the American Actors' Equity Basic Showcase Code for performance with limited runs, but also those that feature unsalaried union actors in non-contractual theatres. To explain the diversity of off-off Broadway offerings--from the postmodern works of Robert Wilson and Richard Foreman, to the neglected classics of Ibsen, Shaw, Cocteau and a great many others--the *Cambridge Guide* concedes that no common objective characterizes the movement. Still, off-off-Broadway is often associated with greater experimentation than its cousins off-Broadway--questioning the limits of performance and generating new approaches and methods free from the demands of popular taste that inform commercial theatre.[16]

These theatres are generally located at a distance from the Times Square/Broadway area and are frequently non-traditional in their offerings, stagings, and architectural space. Many have survived as long as the Cocteau only by gaining exemptions from manifold union regulations. In fact, what gives these houses their special legal status is primarily their limited size, together with the prices they ask for tickets. While off-Broadway theatres must have fewer than 300 seats and, as a consequence, are allowed more

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wage flexibility by the unions, the off-*off*-Broadway grouping generally have lower ticket prices and fewer than one hundred seats in each theatre.[17] (The Cocteau, with seating room for one hundred forty people, is larger than many other theatres in its division.)

By their very existence, these theatres often went against the Establishment. On Broadway, little changed during the years of the Vietnam War, the rise of feminism, and the growth of the civil rights movement. Broadway producers felt, perhaps, that patrons would prefer to go to theatres offering escape from this political stress: Audiences could attend Broadway productions and suspend their anxieties and fears. Others, though, felt that escapism was illusory; that when one comes out of the theatre, one's personal and political problems remain to be faced. They believed that the world outside, ostensibly unfathomable, could be understood better by establishing links through comedy and serious drama, original musicals, and reinterpretations of old classics.[18]

The major wave of alternative drama which began in the 1960s gave rise to companies such as the Open Theatre, the Living Theatre, the Brooklyn Academy of Music Chelsea Theatre (all now defunct), as well as to the Classic Stage Company, the Westside Repertory Company, and scores of others that have continued operations to the present. These

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small companies have occupied entire buildings, small halls, cellars, storefronts, and even open sidewalks.[19]

By 1970, on the eve of the founding of the Cocteau, the pendulum had swung from radicalism back to tradition and text-based drama. The fading of the experimental fervor of the late 1960s and the contracting economy of 1970-71 had reduced the impetus toward theatre avant-gardism. Further, a move by the Actors' Equity Association to require payment of all performers could have terminated the entire off-off-Broadway movement. The union policy was successfully resisted by the actors themselves, and in 1970 AEA formed a code allowing members to work without pay if no one was getting rich.[20]

Theatres labeled "off-off-Broadway," then, arose at a rapid pace during the 1960s in response to the growing slickness of the off-Broadway network, which thereafter became steadily more commercial in offerings, leaving the experimentation and discovery mostly to off-off-Broadway companies.[21]

On the eve of the founding of the Cocteau Repertory, Eve Adamson, who was to become its artistic director in 1971, was operating within the milieu of the off-off-Broadway scene in New York. Like Ellen Stewart before her, Adamson was to found an organization that would produce many works considered without commercial merit by Broadway producers. And if her first home on Bond Street near the Bowery did not

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serve coffee, the ramshackle storefront could hardly be mistaken for a commercial playhouse.

Like many other founders of "little theatres" since the 1960s, Adamson envisioned a clear design and sense of purpose in which playwrights, actors and directors performed and produced, working not for monetary compensation, but because there was something they felt impelled to communicate. Her group, like the theatre organizations that preceded her in the 1960s, would cater to people looking for an inexpensive way to be entertained; to those who did not require glitter, glamour and tinsel, but rather a sense of community by an audience united behind a theatre staging plays designed for their special interests.[22]

By 1970, though, there were signs that off-off-Broadway was changing, subjected to many of the same pressures from Actors' Equity and other unions that had driven off-Broadway to retreat from its stance of indifference to commercial success. Some theatre writers began to think that there would have to be an off-off-*off*-Broadway movement if the casual and freewheeling experimentation of the 1960s was to survive.[23]

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CHAPTER TWO

The Founding

When asked by a journalist, "What's ahead for off-Broadway?" Eric Bentley, the noted theatre scholar, replied that "the Jean Cocteau Repertory will continue to give us the classics we've been missing."[1] Eric Bentley--author, teacher, adapter, and commentator on the subject of theatre--thus expressed his confidence in the nineteen-year-old company with a unique mission. That mission embraces the presentation of classics of the world repertory, with a *de facto* emphasis on the neglected classics.

The theatre company's wish to perform rarely-staged works by prominent writers flows from the ideology of its founder and artistic director, Eve Adamson.

Ms. Adamson was born October 30 in Los Angeles. While she declines to give the year of her birth (a detail which cannot be found in available material), she is today an attractive woman apparently in her middle years. Her mother was a Powers model and registered nurse, Julia Eastmond Adamson; her father, Harold Adamson, was a song lyricist whose writings include the songs "Time on My Hands" (with Vincent Youmans), "Around the World in Eighty Days," "Everything I Have is Yours" (with Burton Lane) and "It's a

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Most Unusual Day" (with Jimmy McHugh).[2]

After her parents divorced when she was five years old, Adamson, an only child, lived with her mother, moving between Los Angeles and New York. She attended the Westlake School and graduated from Chadwick School in Los Angeles, then studied English Literature at Hiram College in Ohio, at U.C.L.A., and at the University of California at Santa Barbara. Adamson had numerous interests which she developed during her years in school, but the theatre absorbed her the most. She called theatre "a way of pulling things all together."[3]

An actress in her tenth-grade class, she performed the title role in Anouilh's *Antigone;* this experience was instrumental in Adamson's decision to make theatre a career. Subsequent to her appearance in the Anouilh adaptation of the Greek tragedy, she played Shakespearean roles as Katerina, Ophelia, Prospero, and John of Gaunt in the Chadwick (Los Angeles) Shakespeare Festival, studying piano and modern dance at the same time. Shortly thereafter, she studied acting in New York with Nola Chilton, who later became a well-known director in Israel. Considering herself a Method actress, she returned to California, and started working at small theatres in the Los Angeles area, particularly the Circle Theatre. She began there as a stage manager, and ultimately became a director when she realized

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that she wasn't thinking like an actress, but was, rather, thinking in terms of overview. This discovery prompted her to direct some staged readings and to start a children's theatre, in which the children did everything but the writing and the directing.[4]

In addition to her acting and directing, she became involved in adapting some of the great classics to make them palatable to audiences of children, beginning with Euripides's *Iphigenia in Taurus*, which emerged for the children's theatre as *Beyond Our Dreams*. She acknowledged the influence of George Boroff of the Circle Theatre in her writing, and became adept in editing and adapting plays.[5]

To support herself during those days of exploring options in the theatre, she taught English, drama, dance and creative writing at Happy Valley school, an institution founded by Aldous Huxley and Krishnamurti, at Ojai in California. (By spending a considerable amount of time outside the theatre to earn a living, she foreshadowed the almost two decades of directing a permanent company of actors, who were themselves obliged to earn a living through jobs outside the theatre.) Adamson also performed locally with her modern dance troupe, wrote poetry published in periodicals like *The Beloit Poetry Journal* and *Freelance* and became theatre and film reviewer for the *Ojai News*. During this period Adamson married actor Warner Jones, a marriage which was dissolved several years later.[6]

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In her mid-twenties she moved to Manhattan where she wrote film reviews for a neighborhood newspaper, *Downtown*, continued to write poetry, and taught English drama and dance at the Riverside School. She began her New York directing career in 1970 by staging productions at the Mainstream Theatre, an off-off-Broadway house at 20 East 14th Street devoted to the production of new plays. When the lease expired on that theatre, Adamson assumed tenancy, a move which began her founding of a separate theatre. Because she had always been involved with the classics, she had longed to produce some, and was also beginning to be attracted to the notion of repertory, thus establishing what would be her *raison d'être* as an artistic director.[7]

Adamson's talents are perhaps best described by Chaunce Skilling, now a member of the Cocteau's board of trustees and a media vice president at the advertising firm of Saatchi and Saatchi. Skilling reflected on the company's founding as follows:

> I got involved [with the Cocteau] at the beginning. I joined purely out of admiration for Eve's efforts and desires. How we got involved was like this: Eve was starting a theatre in New York while she was teaching English. She worked at a private school at which two of my children were in attendance. Through that school I saw what Eve was capable of doing with choreographic staging. I'm talking fourth or fifth grade. She was an absolute wonder at what she could do. I admired what she did and when she announced that she was leaving to open a theatre, we agreed to help where we could, my wife and I, and support her efforts. It was as simple as that; helping a friend where we could financially more or less--morally giving support. She happened to be a brilliant teacher--we admired that and admired what she could

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> do theatrically through that, so when she started this rep. company at Bond Street, we supported her where we could.[8]

Demonstrating a capacity for business in addition to her proficiency with the artistic aspects of theatre management, Adamson purchased forty-nine seats from a demolished movie theatre for one dollar each, and with the assistance of an apprentice ensemble of eight volunteers, she brought the chairs to her storefront location at 43 Bond Street. Her motive for leasing the 43 Bond Street location was simply that she wanted to do some plays.[9]

Although both the original playhouse and the current theatre are on Bond Street (the latter being on the corner where Bond Street meets the Bowery, changing its name at that point to East Second Street), there is not a great deal that is attractive about the location. One may infer that Adamson chose this area for reasons of economy.

Bond Street, the site of the theatre's first location, has a somewhat distinguished history. The last private dwelling on Bond Street was turned to commercial use just after World War I. Bond Street does, however, have a splendid architectural past, so that a visit to the area today poses a cruel shock. In better times, notably the eighteen-fifties and eighteen-sixties, this was a street of impressive hotels and shops. The old LaFarge House was a luxury hotel of the Civil War era which ultimately was transformed into Broadway Central, a welfare hotel.

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Adamson was aware of the generally decayed state of Bond Street in 1971. The three-block-long street was a lane of warehouses and light manufacturing lofts, whose trucks clog traffic while loading and unloading merchandise. She must have foreseen that this area was one in which derelicts would continue to doze in doorways and drug addicts congregate. But some amenities existed for the typical theatergoer. Just across the street was the Amato Opera House, notable for presentations of opera on a small stage for rates but a small fraction of those charged by the Metropolitan. Over the years, additional oases would spring up to cater to audiences of the Amato and the Cocteau. Phebe's, called by some "the Sardi's of off-off-Broadway," is two blocks north of the Cocteau, while just around the corner is a combination restaurant and café known as 6 Bond Street. Other restaurants are also available to patrons in the immediate neighborhood of the theatre.[10]

Nearby, Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival Theatre performs at the old Astor Library on Lafayette Place, and off-off Broadway theatres were born in old warehouses and row houses throughout the area. About one mile from Bond Street, in the SoHo area, an influx of resident artists would transform blocks of dreary warehouses and loft buildings into galleries for the exhibitions of their works. By 1971, artists had been living in the area's lofts, often illegally.[11]

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The Bowery itself is of considerable historical interest, and should it ever be rehabilitated as a residential neighborhood--a project discussed for the past decade but scarcely begun--prospective buyers would be shown structures of architectural value. It was part of the first major highway to pass north through all of Manhattan into Westchester and then to Boston.[12]

The Bowery began as a road to Peter Stuyvesant's farm, the last surviving evidence of which are Stuyvesant Street and the Church of St. Mark's-in-the-Bouwerie. When the road was extended in 1673, it continued along the line of Broadway north of 15th Street. It was opened so that an overland exchange of mail might be made with Boston. During the American Revolution, the Bowery passed back and forth from rebel to British hands, and was a favorite place for the display of military might by whatever forces were in possession of it. In 1807 the street received its name, which it has kept to the present day.[13]

The first regular stage coaches from the Bowery to Boston began in 1732, a journey of fourteen days with only one stage a month. In the second quarter of the 19th century, the New York Theatre was built on the Bowery just above Chatham Square. The theatre burned, as did several built on the site afterward. The name was changed to the Bowery Theatre and the Old Bowery, then the German Thalia. Subsequently it became a Yiddish theatre. The Bowery

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Theatre played host to the greatest theatrical talent of the period: Charlotte Cushman, Edwin Booth the Elder, and Edwin Forrest were among the notable persons who performed there.[14]

Near the beginnings of the Bowery in Chatham Square is what is left of the oldest Hebrew cemetery in Manhattan, established in 1681. The Bowery ends at a famous seat of learning, Cooper Union.[15]

The old dangers from the Indians are gone, and no highwaymen lurk in dark woods to waylay mail carriers and to snatch purses. But even in 1971, dangers of another kind threatened to undermine attendance at the Cocteau, specifically, the aforementioned crowds of derelicts and drug addicts whose mere presence serves to inhibit potential audiences.

Scholars and historians of theatre might have seen the positive elements that went into the founding of the repertory company in 1971. Those factors included a commitment to prices that most theatergoers could afford, the energy expended by the artistic director to inspire both her staff and her audience, an insistence on producing the types of plays that fall within the purview of the theater's mission, and the quality (however uneven) of the productions that were staged. These factors would prove strong enough to keep the theatre functioning without a break for nineteen years in a neighborhood that appears more desirable for

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manufacturing and sharing needles than for theatre.

Adamson's love for classical theatre informed the company's choice of plays from the rude beginnings of the company. Even in 1971, Adamson foresaw a niche in New York for a theatre specializing in reviving classics and rarely-produced foreign plays.[16] Perhaps Adamson sensed the unfulfilled need of a segment of theatergoers for plays other than the latest wave of 1960s *avant-garde* dramas, which at the time featured everything from nudity on the stage to direct harassment of audience members by actors during their performances. After all, the theatre was founded in 1971, three years after the height of student rebellions in the colleges, aggressive demonstrations at the Chicago Democratic National Convention, the non-linear presentations of groups like The Living Theatre and The Open Theatre, and assorted Happenings, parodies, and improvised exhibitions in streets, in warehouses, in garages and in parks.

Not that the majority of subscription buyers sought the classics. Adamson perceived simply that enough people in the Greater New York area shared her partiality to classics--particularly to those that were rarely produced by any company--to support and sustain an enterprise within her vision. Nor did she expect to attract the greater part of the youthful audiences that filled some off-off-Broadway theatres during the late 1960s to see presentations

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reflecting their own, fashionably radical, political consciousness. Those included works of frenetic experimentation like Lennox Raphael's *Che!* (1969), which featured not only nudity but the consummation of explicit sexual acts on stage, and Kenneth Tynan's *Oh, Calcutta!* (1970), performed totally in the nude. According to Craig Smith, now the senior actor of the Cocteau, the popularity of off-off-Broadway during the late sixties and shortly thereafter was fueled by youthful audiences who accepted low admission prices to see artists of their own age perform in theatres--a vibrant period in which some looked to the arts for an answer to social problems, while the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movement produced a turbulent America.[17]

The trendiness of far-left American political theatre off-off-Broadway was already giving ground by 1970 to dramas more suited to the tastes of people over thirty years of age. There is a special pleasure, too, in offering something that no one else does, according to one theater writer, Marcia Savin of *Other Stages*.[18] Thus, while the Bread and Puppet theatre focused on larger-than-life heads and bodies and performed in the streets, the CSC Repertory produced new stagings of largely familiar classic drama. While the AMAS repertory concentrated on plays about blacks, the Ridiculous Theatre emphasized campy comic dramas. The Cocteau stubbornly and fortuitously persisted in giving the public a fare that no other theatre would chance; namely,

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forgotten classics and closet dramas, although not without a generous allotment of the better-known dramas from the distant past and, provided that there were universal resonances, from the contemporary world as well.[19]

From the beginning there was no formula, but to hold subscribers, Adamson tried to maintain an equilibrium between familiar classics and neglected ones, and to evaluate her selections from a commercial standpoint in order to make sure people patronized the storefront theatre.[20]

Adamson conceded that on the whole, more tickets might be sold if she gave well-known dramas a greater weight in each season's plans. But she preferred to adhere to her own vision by stressing the neglected, hoping that the uniqueness of her mission would attract a particular audience which would remain loyal to the Cocteau, having no other place to turn. Adamson believed that there was enough new work in other theatres to satisfy theatregoers.[21]

Her decision to devote the major part of the company's time to staging the classics was informed as well by her view that new plays could be done better by television or movies than by live theatre. Few theatres were performing the works that Adamson wanted to stage, and the artistic director realized that infrequently-performed works were likely to be flawed: In plain talk, there were good reasons that no other theatre company chose to mount the overlooked

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writings. She knew that an unusual effort would be required of the Cocteau staff to make such plays "work" for an audience, since most did not flow easily like the principal contributions of Chekhov and Molière.[22]

Adamson was not unmindful of the need for a strong subscriber base to enhance the financial health of the theatre. Yet her antipathy to the blatantly commercial prompted her to resist the trend of theatre directors to eschew the designation off-*off*-Broadway. (*New York* magazine, in fact, considers the Cocteau an off-Broadway company, but this designation was neither sought nor welcomed by Adamson.) In her opinion, the way the terms off-Broadway and off-off-Broadway are used depends on the organization's relationship with the union, i.e. Actors' Equity Association. The Cocteau is not bound by the rules of AEA as theatres off-Broadway are. If Adamson's company had been required to pay union wages to its actors, it could not have survived.

Adamson had pondered one crucial question from the beginning: Should classics be modernized so that they do not remain museum pieces? Her thoughts brought her to the tentative conclusion that some tampering with the raw material of scripts would be appropriate. Textually, she might edit a script that she considered prolix. A play such as *The Iceman Cometh*, if it were attempted at all by the Cocteau, would probably be shortened to three hours by

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Adamson. A theatre affording its patrons little in the way of comfort could not realistically expect people with minimal leg room and without proper ventilation to remain contented for much longer. She reserved the right to make directorial changes in venue and century of a given play if such transpositions would further the accessibility of the text.

Set design, according to Adamson, need not be literal, or in accord with the suggestions of the writers. Adamson's casualness about set design in particular was not entirely ideological. While she de-emphasized massive production values--which she considers the province of overproduced Broadway presentations--she may have simply married her philosophy to a budgetary pragmatism. Yet she had insisted in the earliest Cocteau showbills that minimalism in set design is a *positive* feature, one that allows audiences to concentrate on the actors. On Broadway, especially, many theatres try to compete with films and TV on the level of spectacle, but elaborate sets were really not that important to Adamson.

If the primacy of classics was paramount for the Cocteau company from its beginnings, then the concept of repertory is surely the second regard. While few theaters in New York City define themselves by presentations of *any* avowedly classic dramas of the Western world, even fewer perform in true repertory.

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Adamson had decided from the beginning to commit her artistic staff to the concepts of a resident company and a rotating repertory format, in which audiences could see up to three news presentations in a single week.[23]

A repertory company is, by its nature, rotating; as Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary indicates, repertory theatre is "one in which a permanent acting company presents a varied selection of plays."[24] In Webster's Third International Dictionary, repertory theatre is defined as one "housing a company that presents, year after year, a number of different productions during a season either consecutively or alternately."[25] Adamson indicated that if audiences could see a playing schedule in front of them, then the underlying concept of repertory would be immediately understood: that there would be at least three different productions rotated during any two- to three-week period.[26]

For a more specialized connotation of the repertory ideal, one can turn to a authorities like Rowell and Jackson who, in *The Repertory Movement*, state that a repertory company, strictly speaking, ". . . stages plays in rotation over a period of one year, productions offered to the public on a regularly changing basis, each being performed no more than a week at a time but brought back at frequent intervals according to public demand. . . . But more loosely . . . it is a season of plays while conceived as a whole, is yet

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presented in a single linear sequence: each runs for 3 or 4 weeks at a time with no rotation, no return of plays once done, no repetoire as such. There are other meanings and associations: non-commercial, serving a specific community or region, providing a range of plays, new and classic, challenging and popular. . . . The repertory idea is not one static goal but subject to constant expansion and redefinition."[27]

Rowell and Jackson intended their interpretation to apply to the heavily subsidized theatres in England and on the Continent, but by extension, the Cocteau at its founding measured up to these definitions. The company is non-commercial and is a repertory in the sense that it generally offers two plays during a given week or month, after which it introduces a new work, while keeping one or both of the original selections. And by presenting a balanced program of recent works, respected classics, and neglected dramas by major playwrights of the past, the Cocteau satisfies the additional requirement of Rowell, which is to provide a broad mix each season and thus satisfy a variety of tastes. Generally, this would consist of two or three classics and most likely modern classic plays, and then (in the case of Great Britain only), two or three modern comedies and/or thrillers (Priestley, Rattigan and Coward, Ayckbourn's comedies of modern middle-class manners and Anthony Shaffer's *Sleuth,* or less commonly an Agatha Christie).[28]

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The Jean Cocteau Repertory quickly established itself as the company specializing the reviving classics and rarely-produced plays as *one of the few true repertory companies in the nation performing a season of plays in rotation.*[29] Eve Adamson's singular achievement in 1971 was in fashioning a company whose actors were required to commit themselves to the Cocteau for a year at a time, and to accept roles proferred to them by the Cocteau throughout the theatre year. Apparently, the rigor of this demand did not deter potential members of the company. At one time during the opening year at 43 Bond Street, a murder was committed some ten yards from the door. The police cordoned off the area and the dead body remained, but actors walked right through into the tryouts. That may say something about man's callousness, but more likely is an indication of motivation.[30]

With an opening ticket price at the Bouwerie Lane of $2.50, no money was available to pay the actors and little was found to make costumes. Costumes, then, were made because one person donated a substantial amount of fabric to the theatre. Since salaries to people could be kept at zero while rent and phone bills had to be paid, Adamson needed a designer, one whose training was not toward the realistic, or cinematic. People came from NYU Design School with portfolios that Adamson considered suitable for French bookcases, but she told them she was interested in

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imagination. She also recognized that non-realistic sets could be expensive, as well as the realistic kind.[31]

Before staging her first play in June 1971, Adamson had already accomplished what other groups either ignore or declare years after their debuts into New York theatre society: She had transmitted a mission, a commitment, a vision which, like the very plays she produced, has withstood the test of time. From this inauspicious beginning until the present time nineteen years later, Adamson had resisted the cavils of a segment of the board in order to respond to the needs of the audience who, she always believed, shared her vision. She had insisted on giving her now-growing, now-declining groups of subscribers only the classics of Western dramatic literature and, even more important, has emphasized the production of *neglected* classics--those works which have rarely been produced in New York either because of flawed scripts or management cowardice.

Having pursued a successful career of teaching and acting in California, she came to New York with the willful spirit of the entrepreneur as well as the lyric touch of the poet. In an unlikely garden of a city considered philistine by its detractors, she planted the seeds of an organization that resisted both the lure of the mercenary and the often amateurish experimentation of the *avant-garde*. What is more, by entering the New York theatre family at a time that

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the public was being increasingly seduced by the glitter of movies and the convenience of television; by opening in a neighborhood considered by many unsafe and generally undesirable; and by opposing the tide which was drawing producers to the safe and the profitable--she was creating her own heroic role in the drama that is New York. Her triumph, judged by some to be at most a *succès d'estime*, indicates not that New York has been witness to a Periclean rebirth, but it does show at least a response to the cry from throats parched in that vast wasteland of TV for oases of immutability amid the arid monotony of the momentary. Adamson had given New York its only rotating repertory theatre.[32]

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CHAPTER TWO: Notes

1. Jody Benjamin, "What Ahead for Off-Broadway?" *Village Voice*, 29 May 1990, 69.

2. As told to Holly Hill 30 October 1982 for an unpublished document now in the Cocteau archives.

3. Holly Hill interview.

4. Holly Hill interview.

5. James B. Nichols, Member, Cocteau Board of Trustees, interview with the author, New York City, 31 May 1990.

6. Holly Hill interview.

7. Holly Hill interview.

8. Chaunce Skilling, media vice president at Saatchi and Saatchi and a Cocteau trustee, interview with the author, New York City, 14 March 1990.

9. Gerard Raymond, "Toward the Repertory Ideal: The Jean Cocteau Repertory," *Theatre Week*, 21-27 March 1988, 20.

10. Karen Schoemer, "In the Night, Life on Houston Street," *New York Times*, 31 August 1990, C20.

11. Robert Lockwood, "Bond Street Still Evolving," *New York Times*, 13 February 1972, 6.

12. William Patton, "Bowery: Road to Everywhere," *The Villager*, 10 October 1974, 6.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Jean Cocteau Repertory, publicity statements, 1974 (exact date unknown).

17. Craig Smith, interview by the author, New York City, 27 February 1990.

18. Marcia Savin, "A Classic Cocteau," *Other Stages*, 14 March 1987, 37.

19. Gerald Berkowitz, *New Broadways--Theatres Across America 1950-1980* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowan and Littlefield, 1982), 102.

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20. Eve Adamson, interview with the author, New York City, 28 February 1990.

21. Adamson interview, 28 February 1990.

22. Adamson interview 28 February 1990 and Smith interview 27 February 1990.

23. Adamson interview, 28 February 1990.

24. *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, s.v. "repertory theatre."

25. *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, s.v. "repertory theatre."

26. Adamson interview, 28 February 1990.

27. George Rowell and Anthony Jackson, *The Repertory Movement* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1.

28. George Rowell and Anthony Jackson, *The Repertory Movement*, 122.

29. Press release by Eve Adamson, 1985-6. Italics mine.

30. Adamson interview, 28 February 1990.

31. Adamson interview, 28 February 1990.

32. Two other theatres in New York City have sometimes been cited as incorporating a rotating repertory format. The Pearl Theatre is a classical repertory theatre like the Cocteau, but the company does not use a revolving format, according to its artistic director Shepard Sobel (telephone interview with the author, 26 December 1990). The Repertorio Español performs concerts of music and dance as well as works of classical drama in rotation. But that company uses different troupes of performers during the year, according to its business manager, Santiago Benaverrete (telephone interview with the author, 26 December 1990). Thus, the Cocteau is unique, as stated, in being the only troupe that use the same actors performing classical dramas in rotation.

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CHAPTER THREE

Infancy: 1971-1974

As Adamson prepared for the Cocteau's first presentation in June 1971, she pursued her directorial mission in the environment of a growing New York City off-off-Broadway movement. Along with Adamson's company, several other groups were founded in 1971, namely the Cricket Theatre, the Dell'Arte Players Company, the Empty Space, the Ensemble Studio Theatre, the Invisible Theatre, the Old Creamery Theatre, the Playwrights' Center, and Playwrights' Horizons.[1] (Of these, only Playwrights [*sic*] Horizons and the Ensemble Studio Theatre have shared the longevity enjoyed by the Cocteau and are still performing under their original charters.)

This was the year that the Pulitzer prize for drama was awarded to Paul Zindel for *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* and the New York Drama Critics gave their award for best play to *Home,* for best musical to *Follies,* and for best American play to *The House of Blue Leaves.* Radical political theatre was operating as well, and police raided *La Mise en Scene* for its presentation of

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Marat/Sade. John Mitchell, the United States Attorney General, indicted the producers of *Oh! Calcutta* for "transmitting obscene, lewd, lascivious and filthy video tape." This marked the first time an indictment was won for carrying so-called obscene matter on closed-circuit television. A federal court judge enjoined the Little Rock Auditorium from interfering with the presentation of the "tribal-rock" musical, *Hair,* and *Fiddler on the Roof* became the longest-running show on Broadway with 2,845 performances as of June 18.

The midtown theatre district was inundated with panhandlers while the League of New York Theatre's executive director, Irving Cheskin, pressured the police to assign a special detail to rid the Broadway environs of "undesirables." An off-off-Broadway theatre, the Equity Library Theatre, was refused a grant renewal by the New York State Council of the Arts for being "a showcase for performers, not a developer of artistic audiences." The Brooklyn Academy of Music's off-off-Broadway Chelsea Theatre, committed to the "kinds of works that have no outlets," sold out shortly after announcing its subscription season, and restaurant owners got Broadway theatres to raise their curtains at 8 p.m. instead of 7.30.[2]

As a person involved with theatre throughout her adult life, Eve Adamson was concerned about these developments. Yet, as she prepared to launch the first season of plays at

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her theatre on Bond Street, her most immediate apprehensions centered on the Cocteau company and the risks she was taking in committing the theatre primarily to a repertoire of rarely produced plays.

The six works chosen for the first season were:

1971-1972

06/17/71-07/10/71	*Orphée*	Jean Cocteau
06/17/71-07/10/71	*Christopher Columbus*	M. deGhelderode
08/05/71-08/28/71	*He Who Gets Slapped*	Leonid Andreyev
10/28/71-11/21/71	*The Eagle with 2 Heads*	Jean Cocteau
02/03/72-03/04/72	*Salome*	Oscar Wilde
05/19/72-06/18/72	*The Winter's Tale*	W. Shakespeare

Adamson had expected to begin the new theatre with one of her favorite plays, Calderón's *Life is a Dream*, but she postponed that opening for a year in favor of beginning with a work by Cocteau, the writer for whom the theatre was named, namely *Orphée*. In fact since *Orphée* was a relatively brief work, Adamson staged Ghelderode's *Christopher Columbus* to be performed in tandem with *Orphée* during June and July 1971. Adamson cast actor Bradley Wethern in the title role of *Orphée*, and chose this particular Cocteau work because she considered it "existential and poetic--a work of exquisite lyricism."[3] (*Orphée* had been staged in New York only once before: At the Midway Theatre, opening 27 December 1962.)[4]

Unfortunately, the company, in its presentation of the modern-dress version of the Orpheus myth, did not realize the "exquisite lyricism" of the author, according to

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Adamson. During the first season, the company could not form the ensemble spirit necessary to the successful staging of plays as fragile and ethereal as *Orphée*. Judging from reports, in the absence of true ensemble playing, the performers seemed to compete for attention, each shouting at a higher level than the others. At best, the acting was uneven, those with more experience in the profession performing better than those who were beginners. Despite the director's experience in New York City with the Mainstream Theatre on Fourteenth Street before her founding of the Cocteau, Adamson apparently did not direct the play with the light touch it deserved. As for scenery, since a budget barely existed at this time, Adamson could hardly be expected to have an elaborate set design or even the kind of backdrop that could evoke the author's surrealistic ambiance. Adamson recalled the staging as lackluster, attributing the failure to a lack of rehearsal time.[5]

On the theatre's best night, the audience for *Orphée* consisted of only thirty people. The shortcomings of the production, coupled with acclaim for the director's choice of opening work, were noted by the small group of critics that attended the performance of *Orphée*. Joseph Mazo, theatre critic for *Women's Wear Daily*, called the drama "one of the most beautiful plays written during this century," which is probably why he bristled at the performance. He found Adamson's attempt to realize the mood of its author "a

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bit too fragile to survive [what was] inflicted on it by the company." Mazo chided Adamson for having "more courage than sense," for though he approved of the pacing, the tone, and the set design, he found the acting "terrible . . . . [nothing but] shouting matches in which neither participant really tried to hurt the other or even to listen to him. The performers are too interested in the sounds of their own voices to know there is anyone else on stage."[6]

Allan Wallach of *Newday* agreed with Mazo, calling the Cocteau "one of the most ambitious of off-off-Broadway's myriad enterprises, providing the reader with an intelligent interpretation of the allegory." Wallach called the horse in the play "an inspiration from the devil" and explained that Jean Cocteau was known for his use of surrealistic imagery. He called the performances capable, albeit unevenly acted. But he registered his annoyance with the spareness of set design. Ultimately Wallach called the initial production of the company one that "gives promise that the Jean Cocteau Theatre can become in time a valuable addition to the off-off-Broadway scene."[7]

A theatre patron who read the company's press sheet might be surprised by Adamson's use of such negative notices in an advertisement: "*Orphée* by Jean Cocteau received two favorable reviews [one of which was] by Joseph Mazo, 'Shows courage . . . good pacing . . . inspired staging.'"[8]

Since *Orphée* is a relatively short play, Adamson

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included a companion piece to follow each presentation of the Cocteau work. She selected a work by Michel de Ghelderode, *Christopher Columbus*, because she was influenced by the still-throbbing youth rebellion of the late sixties which, among other notions, hailed so-called primitive people as superior to Europeans. (*Christopher Columbus* was staged only once before in New York City, by Columbia University, opening 29 July 1967.)[9] No records are available to indicate the quality of the Cocteau production. One of the two critics who saw the two works, Joseph Mazo of *Women's Wear Daily*, commented only on the presentation of *Orphée*, while Alan Wallach of *Newsday* reflected only upon the literary aspects of the Ghelderode play.

The second presentation of the Cocteau's initial season was of Arthur Adamov's *He Who Gets Slapped*, which opened on August 5. This play was a risky choice for the director of a theatre without a financial endowment, since *He Who Gets Slapped* is a highly stylized work. Adamson, at a time that her theatre was in little danger of "losing a reputation," wished to risk the production of still another non-realist work to continue the symbolist tone of the season, and to cater to those young people in her audiences who would appreciate the tale of a man who leaves his upper-class society to join an idiosyncratic troupe of circus performers. *He Who Gets Slapped* could not be considered a play with a sanguine vision of mankind and is therefore not

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generally considered suitable for the more commercial stages. No reviewers were in the audience for any presentation of *He Who Gets Slapped*.

The third presentation, Cocteau's *The Eagle with Two Heads*, was chosen not so much because of the timeliness of its material or even the quality of the work, but because Adamson wanted once again to honor the playwright for whom the theatre was named. (The play was staged twice previously in New York City: At the Plymouth Theatre opening 19 March 1947; and at the Actors Playhouse opening 13 December 1956.)[10] Opening at the Cocteau on 18 October, this work reflects the author's view of death in symbolic form, in this case under the assumed name of Azrael, i.e. Angel of Death. *Eagle* deals with the plans of a poet, Stanislas, to murder the queen and was inspired by the death of Ludwig II of Bavaria. The queen falls in love with the would-be assassin, Stanislas, and is persuaded by him to end her ten years of mourning for Ludwig and to regain control of the government from the chief of police. *Eagle* is a play that could easily be presented by a director in a camp style, offering a wink for each melodramatic action and a laugh for every cliché. But Adamson played the Cocteau work in a straightforward style, and would discover later that such a choice was a fortunate one. Further, she was blessed with the acting talent of Jere Jacob as the queen; Ms. Jacob was to become one of the members of the repertory company

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singled out for praise.

Because *Eagle* has melodramatic qualities, many directors would not be likely to choose to stage the drama. But since Adamson was committed to taking risks with flawed plays (and also because *Eagle* was written by Cocteau), she mounted the work with its array of capricious monarchs, revolutionary peasants, sinister police captains, and poison capsules. Because of the talent of two actors--Jere Jacob as the queen and Seamus O'Brien as Count Von Foehn--the audience felt moved by the performances rather than contemptuous of the plot contrivances. (O'Brien was not a member of the company, but appeared with the troupe through the courtesy of the Actors Equity Association.)

Dale Thomajan, reviewing the production for *Show Business,* asked how anyone could select a work whose "first act is so bad that it's a wonder that anyone has ever stayed for the last two." Yet he called Adamson a director who is "an expert at breathing life into some rather creaky classics."[11] (Despite the generally negative commentary of the reviewer for *Show Business*, Adamson told her public that the play received a favorable review.)[12]

Adamson, a proponent of the works of Oscar Wilde--who was to stage that writer's *The Importance of Being Earnest* twice--chose *Salomé* as her fourth production, to open on 3 February 1972. She selected *Salomé* partly because, like Cocteau's *Orphée*, it was not composed in the realistic vein,

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but was written under the influence of another of Adamson's favored writers, the French symbolist poet, Stephane Mallarmé. Considering that the company was in no position to mount shows with elaborate production values, the theatre might well have demurred in presenting a symbolist play requiring an atmosphere shaped by the moon, darkness, light, blood, wind, the beating of unseen wings, the sounds of the sea, the never-ending sense of anxiety, the feel of terror and the unknown. But Adamson was adamant. Her aim *was*, in fact, specifically to show the influence that Mallarmé had on Wilde.[13] The play, which retells the story of the killing of John the Baptist, was banned in London by the Lord Chamberlain's office in that it used characters from the scriptures, but it was publicly shown in 1931 in an English version translated by Wilde's lover, Lord Alfred Douglas.[14] In any case, by the second month of the new year, when Adamson staged Wilde's classic, *Salomé*, more reviewers had become aware of the presence of the Cocteau.

The production of *Salomé* was blessed by some acting that, on the evidence of critical notices, was surprisingly strong. Charles Richetelle, in particular, portrayed John the Baptist so convincingly that the audience could feel each of the martyr's denunciations of society as though he were speaking of corruption in the present day. Adamson felt that her direction of *Salomé* was her first real success in the new theatre.[15]

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Journalists continued to find the acting uneven, set design spartan, and the authors' concepts unrealized. In the case of the presentation of the Wilde drama, lengthy reviews were printed in Manhattan's *Our Town* newspaper as well as the *Metropolitan Review*, while capsule notices appeared in periodicals like *Back Stage* and *Show Business*. Because the large New York newspapers were not yet covering the Cocteau, the theatre had to depend on word-of-mouth and the hope that enough people were influenced by the more narrowly-focused show-business magazines.

Dr. Rolland S. Parker of *Back Stage* gave the company a particularly warm review for *Salomé*, calling himself "unprepared for the power of the leading players."[16] Dale Thomajan of *Show Business*, who had reproached the company in his review of *Orphée*, now called the February offering "as smooth and entertaining as one would expect an Eve Adamson presentation to be," adding nonetheless that her work was becoming redundant. He called on Adamson to attempt material other than that which she was accustomed to do, a criticism perhaps unfair in the light of the company's unwritten mission to center on neglected works.[17] Hugh Heckman of *Our Town,* questioned her aim. Heckman noted a gap in acting skill between the regular actors and the non-featured ones--a disparity of talent that would echo throughout the Cocteau's years involving criticism of productions for unevenness.[18]

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Ellen Stodolsky's views, expressed in *Metropolitan Review* --that Wilde's talent was merely derivative and minor-- could serve only to strengthen Adamson's insistence on mounting works of that nature, i.e. those which have been neglected even if such neglect was due to serious flaws. Stodolsky said little to discourage the artistic director, extending praise to her for "a job well done," and complimenting even the minimalist set for its exoticism. She did not elaborate.[19]

Adamson admires the works of Shakespeare, as a look at the theatre's production history indicates. She chose *The Winter's Tale* to conclude the season (opening May 19 and running through June 18) because the five-act comedy served to frame the season: both the Shakespeare comedy and the French work that opened the season possessed mythic roots from Greek tales. *Orphée* is a retelling of the Orpheus legend; *The Winter's Tale* alludes to the Delphic oracle. Both Cocteau and Shakespeare made ample use of fantasy to inform their plots. There were no reviews for the Shakespeare comedy, but Adamson recalls with pleasure the performance of Jere Jacob as Hermione. "She could wither believably when accused of adultery by her husband, Leontes; and she could glow majestically when she witnessed the elopement of her son with the Bohemian prince."[20]

The announcement of the Cocteau presentation of *The Winter's Tale* was not made until April 1972. A precedent

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was set in which the final play of each season was to be a surprise, a "free event" for subscribers but one which was also covered by the media with less frequency than those announced at the beginning of each season. The lateness in announcing the Shakespeare presentation, then, may have caused the critics to be conspicuous by their absence.

During the early years Adamson included other events at the theatre, such as poetry readings, each to be staged for a limited engagement, often only once. She used her regular actors and "jobbed in" outsiders as well. For example, on 31 May 1972, Jere Jacob of the company gave a portrait of Edna St. Vincent Millay, a one-woman show based on Millay's own works and letters. The performance was repeated three times. Jacob was praised by one critic who called her "especially entertaining," and wholly convincing in her portraiture of the poet's moods--witty, caustic, or loving." The actor was called "stunning," with "lovely changes of moods."[21]

Other single-evening performances included readings of "Sweeney Agonistes," "Rebecca," "All Tomorrow," and "No Fit Place for a Child to Play." There is no information available on the reception accorded to these readings.

The theatre's first season comprised only works of a symbolist or surrealist nature save for the final offering, Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, for example, rather than *Salomé*, could have

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been Adamson's choice to attract attention for her embryonic theatre. But Adamson believed that in the long run, a commitment to producing primarily neglected works would give the Cocteau a niche that no other theatre would duplicate and would attract a particular audience.

Allan Wallach of *Newsday*, assigned in January 1972 to write a feature article on the growth of off-off-Broadway theatres during the 1971-72 season, considered the new Cocteau Repertory Theatre on Bond Street to be an experiment that deserved careful watching. He interviewed Eve Adamson, the artistic director of the Cocteau, to ascertain her motive in staging a season of such unusual works, or, at least, those that had received little attention from any other stage company. Adamson explained to the journalist, "Everybody's told me that what I'm doing is insane, really impossible. But one keeps on, somehow." Wallach noted the adage that when everybody warns against doing something impossible, in the end everybody is proven wrong. Adamson admitted to the journalist that she was facing a slow start with a number of unsold seats (this, in a theatre with a capacity of 49), but was optimistic even though audiences had been averaging 20 to 30 persons per performance. "It's building steadily," said Adamson. "I think when we get known for doing this kind of thing and doing it with quality, we'll be better off." Wallach conjectured that Adamson's vision of theatre was dictated in part by her

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background. When she was artistic director of the Mainstream Theatre on 14th Street, she produced Wilde's *The Nihilists* and other neglected works, and there she acquired a feeling for rarely performed plays. Wallach counseled his reading audience: "She will soon find if there is an audience out there for neglected classics."[22]

Wallach's interview might have given some readers of *Newsday* the impression that Adamson was an impractical visionary. Early in the first season, however, she proved to be otherwise. Determined to stage as many as six plays during the first season, Adamson's workaholic temperament would prove instrumental in keeping the theatre alive, even when utility companies threatened to turn off the current. She would get up and 6:30 in the morning, teach school, then run down to the theatre and teach classes--in fencing, for example--then rehearse the company all night and go home at 1:00 or 2.00.[23]

To understand Adamson's inability to attract a capacity audience on any evening for the 49-seat theatre, one must understand that the opening of still another experimental theatre after a wave of such premières did not excite more than a handful of patrons. The reactions from critics and patrons would be repeated frequently by others attending performances from 1971 to the present day. On the one hand, the theatre was praised for risk-taking--for a willingness to mount poetic works whose very lyricism could make them

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inaccessible to contemporary audiences, thereby alienating them (while pleasing those who appreciated a locus for dramas they could not find anywhere else). On the other hand, the new theatre on Bond Street was faulted for its meager production values, inadequate to the needs of creations like those of Jean Cocteau, and even more important, its inability to attract the level of acting talent that could realize the playwrights' concepts.

During the initial season, bookkeeping was haphazard in that there was no board of trustees and no business staff to take responsibility for efficient recordkeeping. Adamson recalled that tickets were $2.50 and $2.00 but had no available figures on net receipts or on rent paid. Adamson had completed a first year with at least one truly talented performer, Jere Jacob, and with a vision as ambitious as anyone in the theatre community. While she could rarely expect to fill a 49-seat theatre, her presentations had resonance beyond the purely commercial results that a balance sheet could show.

As a non-profit corporation, the new theatre needed a board of trustees to oversee finances, approve the budgets, react (at least informally) to the choices of plays, and perhaps most important of all, to contribute money and raise funds from other people, from foundations, and from corporations. Chaunce Skilling and his wife, Karen Skilling, were the first two members of the board of

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trustees and remain to this day the only charter associates on the board. They had met Eve Adamson when their daughter was attending a private school in Manhattan at which she taught and were familiar with the Mainstream Theatre on East Fourteenth Street at which she was artistic director just before her acquisition of a lease on the Cocteau. Chaunce Skilling, an advertising executive, knew Thomas Fuld, also in the media business, and together they visited some attorneys who urged them to fulfill legal requirements to operate a theatre. The two media representatives reviewed *Roberts' Rules of Order* and together with a few friends (whose names they do not recall), they held their first formal meeting in September 1972.

At that point, with the approach of the second season of the Cocteau, the board of trustees was, in Skilling's words, a "raggedy bunch slow to gel into a disciplined group." Perhaps the major accomplishment of the new board of trustees was to sign the charter making the theatre a legal entity, with the name "The Association for the Advancement of Dramatic Arts," or "AADA." (Though some board members to this day want to abandon the use of that corporate name in favor of calling the company "The Jean Cocteau Repertory Theatre," the original nomenclature remains.)[24]

The trustees drafted an organizational analysis--a kind of constitution--to delegate responsibilities and define its

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sense. Given Adamson's intense and meticulous manner, one would not be surprised to find a detailed list of the responsibilities of the board or of its mission. The primary purpose of the board of trustees--now as in 1972--is to provide professional managerial assistance to the management of the acting company. Since trustees of most organizations tend to be business-minded, one does not wonder that the Cocteau group defined itself as one focused on those areas of the organization in which successful performance must be achieved lest the business fail. And to discourage prospective members who may want involvement essentially for the prestige of seeing their names on a printed roster, the trustees decided that members must be enthusiastic, i.e. people who may lack a particular expertise but can make things happen. Fundamental to the board's mission was the assurance of adequate resources to perpetuate the Cocteau company, and to that end committees were instituted to focus on one or more of these needs: fund raising, financial planning, marketing, recruiting of new members for self-renewal, and general management. The fund-raising committee became responsible for securing grant money, both individual and corporate. The financial planning group assumed custody of exploring alternative money-generating projects; marketing was the research function, to provide for public relations and community involvement, and to stress goals like achieving recognition for individual

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actors and individual board members; the recruiting circle was accountable for finding volunteer groups to support projects, while general management was responsible for administering the acting company. The committee roles were fluid, allowing for input in each committee by any board member.

All committees were to be tied together to the common purpose, which was to be linked to the overall goal of continuity of the repertory concept, permanent commitment to the classical plays, and the creation of an environment that would enable the actors to grow professionally in their representations of figures from the classical repertory. Appended to the entire constitution was a pledge that each person in the Cocteau team should bear in mind: "We are SPECIAL/ We are the BEST/ We are MAGIC."[25]

Adamson echoed the concern of artistic directors everywhere in the United States throughout the century. The board always wanted more commercial plays. But she always believed that occupying the classical niche would mean both more money *and* more artistic quality. This differences between the artistic director and the trustees would eventually lead to Adamson's resignation but not until seventeen years later.[26]

Throughout its first season the company presented its plays at 7.30, three times weekly--on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. The same format would follow during the

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company's second year, in which the Cocteau Repertory again supplied its small audience with rarely-performed classics.

During the theatre season of 1972-1973, Robert Brustein, a critic who is a regular columnist with *New Republic* magazine, noted that London theatre was being patronized by people who consider theatre to part of their lives, whereas the typical audience of New Yorkers treat theatre "like something passed from creator to consumer." Postulating that theatre reflects society, Brustein gave praise to London where people are "gentle, civilized, unthreatening, and people- centered, [while New Yorkers are] brutish, anarchic, apathetic, and opportunistic."[27]

> Theatre is essential to life . . . . Just as every major city in England has its own thriving repertory company, so there is interesting theater to be found in every borough and district in London. . . . decentralization urges the theatergoer away from the conventional amusement areas . . . . I make no comment on the quality of these regional theaters, which ranges from awful to marvelous, but rather on the fact that they offer plays of every possible description--commercial and avant-garde, in repertory and *en suite*, author-written and group-improvised, political and esthetic, popular and arcane. . . . English culture continues to allow choices--this is hardly to say that the average level of taste is any higher here than it is anywhere else, but rather that the average is not allowed to predominate.[28]

Seven years later, Brustein insisted: "You have to have certain standards when you make your judgments. If you stop making the judgments, you are in cultural anarchy."[29]

Adamson, hardly a spokesman for cultural anarchy, pledged the Cocteau to a season of plays with classic dimensions.

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For the second season, Eve Adamson chose the following plays for presentation:

1972-1973

08/72-11/71	*Tom Thumb the Great*	Henry Fielding
11/72-01/73	*Coriolanus*	W. Shakespeare
01/73-03/73	*Love's Comedy*	Henrik Ibsen
03/73-05/73	*Medea*	Jean Anouilh
05/73-06/73	*Orphée/*	Jean Cocteau
05/73-06/73	*The Human Voice*	

While the five playwrights whose works were selected are all well-known writers, most plays chosen could be called neglected classics in that none has been considered among the author's principal writings.

Fielding's *Tom Thumb* is that eighteenth-century writer's best-known play, but since Fielding is noted more for his journalism and novels, the artistic director's choice of that play was suited to the Cocteau's unwritten mission of presenting rarely performed classics. The play opened in August 1972 instead of in June, as Adamson had decided to give the company a reasonably long summer recess.

The selection of *Tom Thumb* was influenced by Karen Skilling--a trustee with the Cocteau from the time the board was formed--as Skilling was enthusiastic about supplying the costume design. What Adamson hoped to do was to introduce her small audience to a writer of whom educated people had heard principally for compositions meant not for the theatre but for the novel. *Tom Thumb* presents a decidedly unromantic view of King Arthur, and, considering the well-educated

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background of the spectators (a fact that would ultimately be indicated by a marketing survey of Cocteau subscribers), ticketholders would be treated to a satire which ridicules heroic drama. When the play was actually performed, Adamson considered her attempt to realize Fielding's satiric purpcse a muddle because she had overdone the parody, which was presented to the audience in the style of camp. Having successfully avoided the error during the previous season by presenting *The Eagle with Two Heads* in a straightforward manner, she now resolved never again to make the error of resorting to excessive tomfoolery.[30]

Adamson did not regret the campiness of the presentation as much as she tended to consider her goals overly ambitious. In her mind, the company did not yet possess the requisite talent and experience. Yet, the single critic who attended a performance of *Tom Thumb*, Debbi Wasserman of *The Villager*, considered the text of the play to be too difficult for a company "with no concept of eighteenth century comedic style." She did praise the group for "even attempting to produce Henry Fielding's play, boldly and energetically." The cast, in her view, was "undisciplined, repetitious in staging, and unsophisticated. . . . Few actors can work within the language of the script."[31]

In Wasserman's opinion the actors threw themselves around the stage at the slightest provocation. Nor did the critic approve of the use of camp, which she felt the Cocteau

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resorted to because of an "inability to trust the script."[32] In other words, Wasserman had implied that the presentation of plays like *Tom Thumb* in a campy style--which is illustrated by the director's use of outrageous comedy rather than straight playing--can easily destroy the comedy which a more subtle shading could embellish.

As her second offering of the season, in November of 1972, Adamson chose to produce *Coriolanus,* in part because she is a lover of Shakespeare and in part because that work is staged less frequently than well-known tragedies like *Hamlet* and *Macbeth.* (In recent years, however, the play has enjoyed a revival of popularity. Increasingly, Adamson added better-known classics to her repertoire to give both her audiences and her actors the joy of sharing those plays that have a deserved reputation.) The play requires a large cast and its realization could prove difficult for a company whose budget allowed little more than a grudging asceticism of production values. Even that drawback could be surmounted had the Cocteau the benefit of excellent actors, but Adamson, underscoring the problems with her cast, recalled R. Mack Miller in the title role as a man who seemed nervous and incapable of rising to the demands of the difficult role.[33]

The credits indicate the difficulties facing the cast members, who often had to assume more than one position. Coral Potter appeared as both costume designer and actor,

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Barbara Bell as both press representative and the wife of the title figure, while James S. Payne, one of the more prominent actors of the Cocteau during the seventies, handled the sets and lights. The company, then, had to perform at least two tasks each, a double-duty undertaken out of necessity.[34]

Adamson knew that to produce a play of this epic nature, involving a large cast of characters and requiring a sizable stage, would tax the company's resources heavily. She did not consider the Cocteau presentation a successful one, not only because she felt her production values were inadequate to the demands of the text, but also because she did not have an actor who could properly play a Shakespearean tragic hero. She had cast R. Mack Miller in the title role, realizing after the first performance as stated above that Miller did not possess the dimensions of the Shakespearean figure.[35]

Only one critic reviewed the production. Martin Oltarsh of *Show Business*, praised Adamson for having a clear conception of what Shakespeare demands, but warned that this difficult play is too formidable an undertaking for her actors. R. Mack Miller in the title role "rushed through his lines so fast that many of them become unintelligible," he said.[36]

The third presentation of the 1972-73 season, Ibsen's *Love's Comedy*, was chosen by Adamson because she knew that

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theatres more conventional than hers, if they staged anything at all by Ibsen, would probably select something better-known, like *A Doll House, Hedda Gabler, The Wild Duck,* or even an epic work like *Peer Gynt.* The work she selected is an example of early Ibsen, having been written in 1862. Also, a contemporary audience would not necessarily see much comedy in what is primarily a composition of contemporary social criticism with reflections on marriage. There is no printed information on the reception it received, but Thomas Fuld, a trustee with the Cocteau, recalled the presentation that opened in January 1973 as "disastrous."[37]

For her fourth production of the 1972-73 season, Adamson chose Anouilh's adaptation of the Euripides drama, *Medea,* because she tended to favor plays that show the dark side of life, and because she felt the adaptation made by Anouilh would give the play a greater relevance to her audience than would the Euripides classic. *Medea,* which opened in March 1973, was to some extent a turning point in that it attracted the commitment of Tom Fuld to the theatre's board of trustees. (Fuld would eventually become the leading fund raiser for the organization.)

Fuld recalled the production (which was not attended by critics) with particular fervor, since his daughter's performance as Glauce served as his own introduction to the theatre on Bond Street. Fuld gave his account of the

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production in an interview. He felt that the acting of Carmen Finestra, Coral Potter, and most of all, his daughter, Catherine, prevented the evening from being intolerable.

> My daughter Catherine's performance was in *Medea*; she was 11 or so. This is not a funny play. She got to play one of the children in this. After that she got into the twelve-year-old stage where there were other things more important than theatre. When you are a child actor in repertory, it is one thing to do it for 5 weeks but at the Cocteau you do it for a year because a play goes on forever. She said, "Enough of this; I want my parties, my friends." She had a lot of wonderful experiences, and now is a writer wishing to be a film writer, trying to write for TV and films. That was the genesis, her experience at Cocteau, the first magic. She did theater at Sarah Lawrence College, wrote and directed her own play. We share this interest in writing, me with my ad business [Fuld is a vice president with BBDO in New York]. Carmen Finestra was an actor in the early Cocteau days--we saw him at the Potter memorial [Coral Potter, the only actor who stayed with the Cocteau from its beginnings to 1990, died in January 1990 of lung cancer at the age of 49]. In the early days the company was a bit looser, less organized, like family as opposed to business.[38]

Obviously, Fuld has a bias in describing his opinion of the staging. The acting of his daughter pleased him so much that he attended the Cocteau on several evenings.

The final production of the 1972-73 season was Cocteau's *Orphée* together with that writer's *The Human Voice,* a play staged three times by other New York City theatres: at the Cubiculo in 1972, at the Dume Spanish Theatre in December 1976, and at the *Maison Française* in May 1980.[39] The dual offering began in May 1973, closing one month later and, as became the custom with the Cocteau, the final play of the

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season was announced just a month in advance of its staging. Adamson chose the plays because most of her company was already familiar with at least one of the dramas, having acted *Orphée* during the previous season, and because she wanted once again to honor the playwright for whom she named the theatre. The relatively short play based on Greek mythology was paired with a tragic monologue written eight years later. There were no reviewers present, nor was there a memory of the stagings by those currently associated with the theatre.

During the season, as in the first one, there were readings on Sundays, though Eve Adamson now believes that a better term should be used to categorize the events.

> What happened on Sunday programs could be called astonishments, which would be a series of things, dancing, chamber pieces, poetry, theatre experiment, even at that time hoping to develop an audience that would say "Let's go there and see what's happening"--a variety of doings would attract people. Only rarely did we do a play reading. Magic shows, chamber pieces--that we did not have to do ourselves. Sometimes we did them, sometimes others did them. There were no reviews because they were singletons. The whole business did not last more than two years--we dropped them because there was too much to do and I was just one person trying to do all. We needed rehearsal time.[40]

At the midpoint of the season, in February 1973, the Cocteau came to the attention of Craig Smith, now the senior actor of the troupe, with seventeen years' service to the company. He had just come to New York and was looking for work, and though not conscious of going against the trend of the youth movement in the early 1970s, he tended to be more

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attracted to a conservative approach to theatre. Late in 1972 Smith visited the theatre to find out what kinds of plays Adamson was doing at the time. He discoverered that Anouilh's *Medea* was part of the season's offerings and noted further that the Cocteau was "kind of an unusual theatre in New York because a lot of them tended to original work--experimental, social commentary kind of work, and in the early days we used to say we were very experimental *for doing* classical theatre."[41]

Smith noted that not much money was available to finance detailed production values and cited the way the company simulated the fire that broke out when Medea's wagon was lifted up by a *deus ex machina*. "They had a red light against the canvas, the lighting instrument was in coffee cans, and the lighting person would wave her fingers to produce an effect." Smith considered this *Medea* a strong performance playing to "good audiences."[42] (Smith appears to be honest in his judgments of Cocteau productions and not simply one who engages in the hyperbole of a public relations officer, which he was to become. During his first interview as well as one that followed, the senior actor did not hesitate to criticize his group's performances when he felt they deserved such treatment.)

If Adamson harbored any illusions of instant success for her troupe, they must have been destroyed by the time the 1972-73 season had ended. Critics did not appear willing to

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grant the company special consideration for fledging status and hand-to-mouth finances. Critics praised the commitment of the theatre to the classics but at the same time raised serious questions about the quality of acting and direction.

One can sympathize with Adamson's burden. Not only did she cast her actors, but also led the rehearsals, invited the critics, choreographed the dances, and supervised production values. In April 1972, she added a further responsibility, that of raising money from foundations. Without foundation money the Cocteau could not have lasted as it had for nineteen years, and even now grants are a major part of the annual budget.

A standard letter was sent by Adamson to each organization that had the potential to contribute funds to the theatre. Adamson noted that the theatre's real potential audience had not yet been tapped, and that although audience growth was steady, the theatergoers came primarily because of word-of-mouth and small, irregularly-placed advertisements in the *Village Voice*. Computers that might be practical for small business were in the initial stages of development, and Adamson did not have the use of one, though she did possess a limited mailing list. According to Adamson, critical notices were growing increasingly favorable. Salutary evaluations were published late in the run of each production, occasionally after the closing dates of the stagings.

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The potential donor in which Adamson was most interested was the New York State Council on the Arts, which even today is the largest single contributor to New York non-profit theatre. NYSCA, as the government body is called, was asked for money to defray the cost of advertising, including newspaper advisories and mailings, and also to fund the salaries of a small administrative staff. The *Village Voice* was the only newspaper carrying Cocteau advertising at the time; the director hoped to gain some business from the student sector, which she felt comprised the bulk of the newspaper's readership. She asked NYSCA for a grant to allow the Cocteau to advertise in every issue and to double the size of the advertisements. (While the statewide cultural organization was to be generous in its endowments to the Cocteau in later years, Adamson's plea in 1972 was rejected.) She also wanted to use promotion space in the *New York Times*, which she judged to be the publication most referred to by the general theatre-going public. Adamson noted that a small, one inch by one-half inch advertisement in the *Times* often filled the theatre to near-capacity with audiences that might otherwise not have heard of the theatre.

At the time Adamson had a mailing list of only five hundred people (that number was to increase perhaps twenty-fold during the tenure of the theatre), but she had to refuse the offers of additional names because of the costs

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involved in handling the mail. Her ambition now was to announce six major productions annually and, in addition, a special series of Sunday programs. To promote the planned activity, she sent flyers to schools, colleges, and other organizations that might arrange for theatre parties.

Adamson asked also for the funding of brochures that could be printed, addressed, and mailed, and stated that she wished to hire a single person to coordinate and administer the squads of volunteers serving the company. She was confident that if this were accomplished, the theatre would have a surplus in the treasury by the 1973-74 fiscal year, and the Jean Cocteau Theatre would be close to self-supporting.[43]

During this second season, a balance sheet was drawn to be used with the appropriate foundations. The operating budget for 1972-73 showed the Cocteau's income as $12,301, with box office contributions providing half of that income, the rest being from donations, rentals, and tuition for the training program. Surprisingly there was a profit--$621--as rent was a low $3600 and office expenses only about $2500. This represented a sizable jump in income from the 1971-72 budget in which the company took in $8815 and was left with a deficit of $2,684.[44]

The 1973-1974 season in New York was optimistic for alternative theatre, dismal for mainstream. Robert Brustein

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reported that only eight Broadway productions were held over from the previous season; he attributed the theatre recession to public indifference, the high cost of Broadway tickets, and the presentation of formulaic plays of which people were tiring. A spokesman for Broadway producers noted that as of January 1974, 15 out of 38 Broadway theatres were dark and not expected to book anything during the next few months. Since the 1930s, according to Joseph O'Gara of O'Gara and Company, the number of Broadway houses was down to only half, and of the 58 productions mounted, only 20 survived a full season.[45]

But off-off-Broadway found reason to cheer. According to a report written in April 1974 by Philip Dougherty, advertising specialist for the *New York Times*, attendance at off-off Broadway theatres had perhaps doubled from that of the previous year, largely because of the availability of TDF vouchers that provided subsidies for their holders.[46] (Vouchers are coupons supplied by the Theatre Development Fund, which was founded during the spring of 1969 to provide theatre subsidies to students, the unemployed, workers, and others who might otherwise not be able to afford seeing plays at full price. The holder of a voucher, valued at five dollars, may have paid only three dollars for the coupon, with the balance of two dollars later provided to the theatre by the Theatre Development Fund from its own treasury. TDF also sells tickets at half-price on the day of

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performance; these tickets are principally for seats that would otherwise remain empty, in the opinion of the business staffs of the participating auditoriums.)

A *New York Times* theatre article which appeared in July 1974 revealed that there were 53 off-off-Broadway groups, operating in part as laboratories for directors, actors and playwrights to sharpen their tools. As one of those quoted in the article, Adamson expressed her views on the benefits of alternative, i.e. off-off Broadway theatre. She explained her ideas on the mission of her theatre and also that of off-off Broadway theatre generally, pointing out that their directors could experiment since costs were low. New York, according to Adamson, had been reviving alternate forms of theater during the 1970s. Boasting of her flexibility, she indicated that she would have no problem doing a crazy play of Oscar Wilde--while on Broadway, no one would take such a chance since the latter's costs are too large to risk failure. Adamson admitted she could not make a living at what she was doing: supporting the group entirely out of her own pocket, and teaching English, dance and drama on the side.

Even when the theatre was able to take care of itself, Adamson received no salary, and continued to charge the low rates of $3 per ticket, $2 per student ticket. (Current rates for the 1990-1991 season are $16 per ticket.) Asked how she liked being on the Bowery, Adamson insisted that she

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was not unhappy, stating that she felt once the theatergoers' fears had been overcome, they would return regularly. The operation was still small enough to allow for personal services, and Adamson would even call taxicabs for those who chose to go home by that method. James Payne, an actor and set designer for the Cocteau during the 1970s, added that the company did plays for only one reason: to get on stage and act.[47]

Adamson's praise of the off-off-Broadway scene was echoed by Marshall Mason, then the 34-year-old director of the Circle Repertory Company. He, too, boasted of the freedom to do what he really wanted to do without being concerned about salaries and schedules. There was one caveat. According to a spokesperson for the Off-off-Broadway Alliance (founded in 1972, OOBA is now called The Alliance of Resident Theatres), the New York State Council on the Arts had been dropping the small new groups and throwing its money behind the established groups.[48]

(During that season, the *Times* reported that there was one lucrative way for off-off-Broadway actors to make a living, which was by employment as voice-over characters in television advertisements. While at least one trustee for the Cocteau is a media official with a major advertising agency, few Cocteau actors have been able to make much money in these commercials. James Nichols, a media specialist with his own Nicholodeon Productions, called Craig Smith a

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brilliant actor who should be getting many contracts to do voice-overs. Chauce Skilling, a Cocteau trustee who is a vice president of the advertising firm of Saatchi and Saatchi, did use him to tape some voice-overs and found him to have a fine personality that comes across on the air. Such freelance jobs, according to Nichols, pay very well.[49] According to a 1974 article in the *Times*, the scale was $118 for a one-day session. A well-known celebrity could get as much as $100,000 a year for a campaign, and with on-camera work, $250,000.)[50]

For its 1973-1974 season the Cocteau mounted eight full productions and one series of poetry readings:

1973-1974

09/73-06/74	*Medea*	Jean Anouilh
09/73-06/74	*Waiting for Godot*	Samuel Beckett
09/73-12/73	*The Lesson*	Eugène Ionesco
10/73-06/74	*The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife*	Anatole France
09/73-06/74	*No Fit Place for a Child to Play*	Edna St. Vincent Millay
02/74-06/74	*Ghosts*	Henrik Ibsen
04/74-06/74	*Suddenly Last Summer*	Tennessee Williams
04/74-06/74	*Cain*	Lord Byron
04/74-06/74	*No Exit*	Jean-Paul Sartre

This was the most ambitious program to date, one that would both punctuate the young theatre company's commitment to neglected classics, and at the same time declare the theatre's dedication to genuine, rotating repertory. To act in this many productions during a single season, while simultaneously holding mundane jobs, would be no small

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accomplishment for the actors. To ameliorate the strain, Adamson staged Anouilh's *Medea* once again, beginning in September 1973, since most of the actors were familiar with the play from their previous season's staging. She was thereby giving her company a rest because of its heavy schedule for the year. Further, Adamson was eager to further the career of an actor that had received some favorable notices during the previous year, Jere Jacob. Eve Adamson and Craig Smith both considered her to be a particularly fine actress. While Adamson promised every actor a part in each production of a given season and *perhaps* a chance for a lead role, she did not *guarantee* each performer a lead. What Adamson had in mind was to give the people she felt to be superior performers--people like Jere Jacob, Craig Smith, and Coral Potter--some of the more significant roles, while doing her best to satisfy those of lesser talent or experience.

Craig Smith recalled his experience with the adaptation of the Greek tragedy, the opening play of the 1973-74 season.

> Jere Jacob was wonderful as Medea while John Mitchell, a South African actor, played Jason. My first audition was for a replacement for Jason and I was 22 or 23. I auditioned with Jere Jacob as Medea and she was so strong that on my first audition I lost my voice. She did the scene as an overwhelming presence and my voice caught in my throat and I had to stop. I could not make a sound. I got a glass of water and I grew to like the people around the Cocteau. I volunteered to do more plays.[51]

The presentation of *Medea* the previous years, as was noted

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earlier, became a turning point in that it led to the membership of Thomas Fuld on the board of trustees, now in its second year of functioning in a governing capacity. Fuld was drawn more deeply into the activities of the theatre troupe because of his daughter's involvement. During the 1973-1974 season his five-year-old daughter, Catherine, was performing at the Theatre for a New City some blocks from the Cocteau, when Eve recalled the youth to her theatre on Bond Street. Fuld saw how much his daughter enjoyed her own performance and he got to know the people who worked at the Cocteau. Soon he invited all of his friends and relatives to the theatre, one of whom asked Katie what she did on Bond Street. "I get killed a few times every week," was her reply. Fuld appreciated the care that the theatre took of the children in their casts and liked the way they did the show. He recalled that Catherine had no lines of her own, but that "like any natural-born extrovert, she discovered that when you are a little kid and cute, you could upstage Medea whenever you want. She figured out if she sucked her thumb and made other physical actions, she could stay on the stage longer. (If an adult actor did that, she would be tossed off the stage.)" After that Catherine appeared as Fleance in *Macbeth*, a switch from the times that boys played all the roles.[52]

Medea received no coverage; the press, overwhelmed by the numbers of offerings in off-off-Broadway houses

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generally, sent critics to only a few of the presentations, but the power of particular Cocteau presentations was such that people who were associated with that theatre during the 1973-74 season had vivid memories of the productions as noted above.

Also in September 1973 the company opened its second production, *Waiting for Godot*. Adamson was eager to open the production at a point in the group's history when it was feeling particularly confident of its abilities.[53]

Eve Adamson, Craig Smith, and Thomas Fuld considered both the comic and the tragic concepts appropriately realized by the production.

Adamson admired the way the more naïve audience members appeared to enjoy the play to a greater extent than did the more sophisticated theatergoers, because she felt that the former group "do not waste time analyzing--they just enjoy."[54] She was aware that some directors emphasize the comic and clownish aspects of the play, hoping to engage audience attention through the ample humor in the classic. She knew, too, that others treat Beckett's absurdist play with reverence, hoping to impress audiences with the seriousness of the theatre's mission. Adamson wanted the best from both interpretations, though she leaned toward the former, hoping to surprise subscribers who expected unmitigated seriousness in a work that has become almost sacrosanct.

Coral Potter and James Payne were cast in the roles of

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Didi and Gogo, Potter playing Vladimir to Payne's Estragon, while Carmen Finestra was cast as Pozzo to John Mitchell's Lucky. Smith explained the humor in the production: "Finestra was four feet eleven inches tall and Mitchell was unusually big. Yet Pozzo was the master and possessed the whip." Smith was particularly affected by how Mitchell handled Lucky's long speech--"a tour-de-force with Adamson directing Lucky as though he were a machine that had gone completely out of use. When Lucky started talking he would crank up as he had not used this machinery (vocal chords) for years, as he never talked. Carmen threw himself at the huge Pozzo and everyone was jumping on Lucky, who would walk around the stage with Carmen running around after him. Others would hang on to his arms and legs as the language went lickety-split."[55]

(Finestra's experiences with the Cocteau gave him a love for comedy. He decided he wanted to be a writer, went to Los Angeles to try his hand at comedy writing, and has been with the Bill Cosby show since 1986. He frequently visits the Cocteau when in New York.)[56]

Smith's recollections of *Godot* were among his most vivid. He played the part of Lucky a year after Mitchell did. Mitchell delivered a speech that Smith considered incredibly difficult to learn. The symbolism, he said, made the Cocteau's *Godot* very good, as the actors did not get hung up on meaning. (John Mitchell, who played the role of Lucky

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during that 1973-74 season, was hired by a Broadway company a few year later to perform in a play by Tom Stoppard.)

Craig Smith recalled the behavior of audiences during the running of *Godot*:

> There is this completely deserted street and people would come down to see this play [*Godot*] at 10.30 Saturday night. Coming here was a real adventure. The older people came during the seventies as well as now. There is an older New York theatergoing audience that is very adventurous, not very many, but they will go a long way. They tended to be older people, back then, too. They're retired, they love the city and the theatre, and if they heard of a new play, they would take their TDF vouchers, but mainly on Sunday afternoons.[57]

Since there were empty seats for many performances, the Cocteau would reach out into the community with complimentary tickets. The Phoenix House was one recipient of these free tickets--these were people recovering from drug addiction and were not sophisticated theatergoers. Smith said they responded to *Godot* in a way that was overwhelming. "They understood the play, they knew the despair and the hope and they knew it immediately, it was palpable, they could feel it. They sat back and let it happen and did not let their intellects get in the way of the performance," according to Smith.[58]

Though members of the Cocteau community were enthusiastic, critics of major newspapers did not attend the production. Miriam Faugno, an undergraduate reporting for the *Hunter College Envoy*, unfortunately devoted most of her review space to an interpretation of the work; and

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concerning the actors, she simply that they were entertaining the audience with their presences.[59]

When Adamson staged Ionesco's *The Lesson* as the company's third production, beginning also in September 1973, she was undertaking the difficult job of presenting a rotating format of three plays simultaneously. Ionesco's absurdist play has been interpreted by some as a warning of the dangers of fascism and by others as a pessimistic account of the innate brutality of the individual. In the play, Ionesco pits an energetic young woman studying arithmetic and linguistics against a professor who is probably in his fifties or sixties. After an extended period of dialogue, the professor stabs and kills the pupil, his fortieth victim of the day. No members of the company have vivid recollections of the play--a surprising detail considering the artistic director's affection for the works of the French-Romanian absurdist. There was no press coverage.

With three plays running during the month of September, Adamson launched a fourth production, Anatole France's *The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife*, during the following month. The writer's medieval farce, adapted by France from the works of Rabelais, opened in October 1973, sharing the Cocteau space with three other dramas. The Anatole France work was not reviewed, nor did any member of the company retain recollections of its staging. (Similarly, limited attention was paid to a revival of the monologue by Edna St.

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Vincent Millay, *No Fit Place for a Child to Play*, which was performed in Sunday readings during the month of October 1973 by Jere Jacob.) But the company's inability to attract reviewers would begin to change with the staging of the next production.

While the Cocteau has done few works by American writers, the company would start its artistic relationship with Tennessee Williams during the 1973-1974 season with a presentation of *Suddenly Last Summer*, directed by Adamson, and designed by actor and set designer James S. Payne. This Williams horror tale is rarely performed, perhaps because of the long monologue by Catherine and the play's general lack of strong plot development.

The drama in two acts indicates the writer's feeling about the innate brutality of the universe, a cosmos in which the strong devour the weak both literally (as in the cannibalizing of Sebastian by hungry boys somewhere in Europe) and figuratively (as when Mrs. Venable promises money to an institution if its doctor would "eat" part of the brain of Sebastian's travelling companion, Cathy, or more scientifically phrased, perform a lobotomy on her). In the role of Miss Foxhill, Adamson cast Margo Avery who had been a student of the artistic director in California and was brought in by Adamson as an intern. (Avery came from an acting family; her mother is Margo Stevenson who has acted in several daytime television dramas, while her father is

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Val Avery who has acted the part of the gangster in other television spots.) Smith remembered Avery as one who could carry her own against the acting of Jere Jacob in the role of Mrs. Venable.

For the production of *Suddenly Last Summer*, Adamson once again used a minimalist set, painted starkly in gray and black, using an arrangement of stone benches suggesting Veneable's garden as a cemetery. This concept was used to convey the mood of danger. Payne, in his role as sound coordinator, introduced the chirping of birds in the background to augment the threat. Costume design was important: Catherine and Dr. Cuckrowicz were dressed in white, while those out to destroy Catherine were dressed in black. Smith recalled the acting as adequate, with production values emphasized to convey the mood of danger.[60]

(Some off-stage drama took place during the run of *Suddenly*. Patricia Carey, who was cast in the role of Catherine, had frequent verbal duels off stage with James Payne, another actor. Carey had given herself a costume according to her own concept of the character's outward appearance, dressing in a brightly-colored outfit. Payne teased her, insisting that "only someone playing a customer in a farming community doing spring buying would wear such apparel." When he insisted that Catherine's costume be changed, Carey, a sensitive young women, left the set in tears.[61]

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Craig Smith, who played the role of Dr. Sugar in Williams's tale of primitive forces and avaricious people, did not care much for Carey as a person. Carey, perhaps seeking an outlet for the rage she felt following Payne's insults, taunted Smith with comments like, "Don't look so stupid on the stage." Smith was only 24 years old, and was naïve enough to take the actress seriously. He later regretted the subservient role he adopted toward her, and felt that he should have ignored her.)[62]

Despite the allure that a story of the nature of *Suddenly Last Summer* possessed, only two critics attended the production. Ed Moran of *Show Business* reflected the opinions of both Adamson and Smith in finding the play an event that merited seeing, calling the artistic director one who had created a frightening scene of dissipation, incest, and repressed violence.[63] Another critic, an anonymous reviewer for the *SoHo Weekly News*, called the work a strong production, admiring Adamson's boldness in evoking the central image.[64]

The eighth and penultimate offering of the 1973-74 season was *Cain,* which Lord Byron wrote more as a closet drama than a truly dramatic play. Adamscn had decided to stage *Cain* as she felt it was interesting and not often seen; she did not regret her use of minimalist set. On its small stage, the Cocteau was compelled to do without a mountain, but Adamson believes that if she had a chance to

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direct the work again, she would use a set design that would suggest an alp.[65]

Adamson, in fact, considered *Cain* to be an incredibly good choice for her company, and felt it was well-acted. She admired Jere Jacob's playing of Lucifer, Craig Smith as Abel, and Carmen Finestra as Adam. Audiences were sparse because, Adamson, believes, the play is essentially a discussion between Lucifer and Cain, and there is nothing dramatic in the usual sense.[66]

The presentation by the Cocteau was not a good one, as Craig Smith indicated. Smith feels that this is the kind of play that must be done brilliantly, and he hopes that the Cocteau will stage another production of the Romantic work. Smith believes that a company cannot make this play work simply by an effective job of presenting plot and characterization; Byron's play is noted for its lyric dialogue.[67] No professional critics attended.[68]

The ninth and final production of the Cocteau during the 1973-74 season opened in May 1973. To conclude the year, Adamson chose a play by a writer as well-known for his philosophic tracts as for his dramatic pieces. One could hardly divorce Jean-Paul Sartre's play, *No Exit*, from his existentialist philosophy.

Adamson chose to stage the work, despite the view of some theatregoers that *No Exit* is too static to be considered a dramatic piece, because she felt that Sartre's philosophic

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views were important, and she hoped that the inner tensions created by the actors would be sufficient to extract dramatic feeling.

Adamson was pleased by the Cocteau's rendition of Sartre's play. She acknowledged that at least one trustee advised her against staging *No Exit* because as he explained, he felt that the script allows for little but an inert display of activity on the stage. Adamson became even more determined to realize the drama when challenged by this trustee. In her favor, she had cast Jere Jacob, now a veteran actor with the company, in the role of Inez; and she had given the role of Estelle to Patricia Carey, who, she insisted, had by then matured as a performer after just two years with the Cocteau. Adamson does not believe that the play should be judged by the viewer's feeling for Sartre's philosophy but only by the extent to which his views are fleshed out.[69]

According to Smith--who disagreed with Adamson on the merits of the text--the fine acting of Jere Jacob as Inez compensated for what he considered the sterility of the play itself. Smith also praised the performance of Patricia Carey who successfully conveyed to the audience the misery she felt while in a room without a mirror.[70]

One college reporter who was enthusiastic about the production of Sartre's *No Exit*--Alan Amtzis of *The Hunter College Envoy*--called it well-acted (particularly Jere

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Jacob's performance as Inez).[71] Another reviewer, Charles Kuschinski of the community newspaper, *The Bleecker Times*, said simply that *No Exit* was up to professional standards. The critic called the Cocteau theatre a top-flight organization, a view which in 1974 with the Cocteau in its infancy, must be viewed with a certain skepticism.[72]

Not satisfied with presenting a large array of full-length works, the theatre produced also a Sunday set of "astonishments," which employed magician Jeff Sheridan and Cocteau actor Michael Pfesemeyer. Craig Smith recalled that the magician would do sleight-of-hand with bubbles and smoke while dressed in black, while Michael Pfesemeyer was masked. The piece "Sweeney Agonistes" was simply read, as this was a poem in three parts not meant for stage. In "Sweeney," Michael Pfesemeyer and Carmen Finestra played characters with the latter on the shoulders of the former; Coral Porter and Craig Smith played the pimps for two hookers with two others acting as the clients. They spoke in a rhythm of the heavily metered lines, but Smith thinks that an attempt to do this in the future would be box-office suicide.[73]

Curtain times during that season were Fridays at 8 p.m., and then on Saturday at 7.30 and at 10.30. There was also a Sunday afternoon presentation. Senior citizens, who received complimentary tickets through their organizations, did not allow the location of the theatre to deter them from

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going to the plays. The schedule of performances was adopted thereafter and remained in force for several years. One member of the audience was from the Peggy Santvoord Foundation, which shortly thereafter awarded the theatre a grant of money--a timely grant since the theatre had *no* money at that point.

The favorable reviews received by the Cocteau from some critics were a harbinger of good tidings. Perhaps the major dailies, scanning the off-off-Broadway field for promising new theatres, had noted the favorable statements of those covering *Suddenly Last Summer* and decided to assign their reviewing staffs to the Cocteau. Ultimately, because of growing interest by the media in the Cocteau, Tennessee Williams would attend the theatre after its move down the block to larger quarters; he would encourage hordes of theatre writers to the Bowery, who would, in effect, put the Cocteau more firmly on the map.

During this third and most ambitious season to date, Adamson's theatre was becoming better known in the theatrical community of New York. Her ambition, to stage a large number of works (nine) during a nine-month season, was realized, and some of the productions met with positive, even enthusiastic, reviews. Jere Jacob and James Payne were recognized as actors who stood above the others; these two promising performers would have a disproportionate number of leading roles in what was to come.

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While a forty-nine seat theatre playing to full houses would theoretically receive $22,500 (about the amount that a Broadway theatre at the time received in a single evening), the actual income that year from box office receipts was about half of that. One can see why the Cocteau's first major grant, received in October 1973 from NYSCA (the New York State Council for the Arts) was welcome. Nobody at the Cocteau, not even the artistic director, got paid in those early days. The actual payment of some personnel would start during the following season after the move down the block to the Bouwerie Lane Theatre.

Adamson was aware that more money for advertising would have improved attendance at the theatre, but considered at least one major weekly newspaper derelict in its responsibility to the theatre community. In a sharply worded note to the *Village Voice,* which Adamson says is supposed to be a people's press, she compared the paper's advertising policy to the workings of AT&T in that, in her opinion, the *Voice* kept raising its rates despite inefficient service and inflexible rules. She called the receptionists rude as well. Since the big theatres can afford to advertise in the *New York Times,* Adamson considered a so-called people's paper to have an obligation to give more space to the off-off Broadway circuit.

On this subject she stated:

> Advertising revenue from off-off-Broadway is considerable . . . our display ad has two to five

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> typographical errors, sometimes causing us embarrassment at the door . . . and listings [which are even more important than the paid advertising] often do not appear, costing the theatre $175 in business per week.[74]

Adamson cited also the failure of the *Village Voice* to list announcements that had been mailed in ample time and its inability in many cases to list items hand-delivered before the deadline. "These facts are as true as my grandmother's grave," was how she described her annoyance and anger. She compared the receptionist's hostile tone to that of Adamson's third-grade teacher, Sister Marie, whenever the nun caught her talking during mass.[75]

Despite financial problems and troubles with advertising media, Adamson completed her first three years--the period of time before her move to the larger and better-situated Bouwerie Lane Theatre--with much to feel good about. Financially, she was operating on a shoestring, but was blessed with understanding actors who did not demand payment and with only a small outlay for minimalist set and lighting design; she was a survivor. Artistically she was receiving praise, however mixed, and while actors in the company could not be counted on to continue with the theatre from year to year as their contracts became due for renewal, at least the performers were committed for the ten months of each season. Of course the quality of the acting was uneven (as it has remained to the present day), but in those early years, there were several veteran talents to anchor the cast. By

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the close of the season in 1974 Adamson had persons who earned rather consistently favorable notices--James Payne, Jere Jacobs, Coral Potter and Craig Smith, among others--and a board of trustees, created at the opening of the second season in September 1972, pledged to raise money from their contacts in the New York City business community. The inevitable disagreements between the forces of art (Adamson and her actors) and commerce (the trustees and the creditors) would come, but they were never to threaten the very existence of the enterprise.

Helping to assure the Cocteau's finances was not simply the support of talented and enthusiastic actors with a small administrative staff, but the very climate of the theatre community itself. Off-off Broadway had gained a general respectability with the theatre community that it had not had during what seemed the nihilistic days of the student rebellions. Contributions by private foundations and governmental authorities were increasing, the Theatre Development Fund was expanding its role of subsidizing individual theatre admissions, and costs remained low especially in areas unable to charge exorbitant rents. The public were becoming increasing aware that some off-off-Broadway productions were moving to more commercial stages--Terrence McNally's *Bad Habits*, Lanford Wilson's *The Hot 1 Baltimore*, and Mark Medoff's *When You Coming Home, Red Ryder*, to mention some, and a wide spectrum of audience

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tastes was able to be satisfied off-off-Broadway events. The Cocteau was performing a service not only to a community of persons who enjoyed the bargain rates and neglected plays, but also to the young actors, who could use the theatre as a laboratory for study. Adamson believed that an actor could achieve true growth only through contact with a live audience, and not in the sterile, controlled atmosphere of a drama school. The company had not prospered, but even bare survival was a *desideratum* in the tenuous climate of off-off-Broadway theatre. The first critical period had passed.

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CHAPTER THREE: Notes

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57. Smith interview 27 February 1990.

58. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

59. Miriam Faugno, "Existentialism Lives," *Hunter College Envoy*, 15 March 1974, 4.

60. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

61. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

62. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

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63. Ed Moran, "Tense But Impressive," *Show Business,* 27 June 1974, 8.

64. "*Suddenly Last Summer,*" *Soho Weekly News*, 27 June 1974, 10.

65. Eve Adamson, interview with the author, New York City, 14 March 1990.

66. Adamson interview, 28 February 1990.

67. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

68. According to available records, the first New York company that produced *Cain* was the Meat and Potatoes Company, whose artistic director was Neal Weaver. The group is now defunct.

69. Adamson interview, 28 February 1990.

70. Adamson interview, 27 February 1990.

71. Alan Amtzis, "Existentialism Lives," *Hunter College Envoy*, 15 May 1974, 4.

72. Charles Kuschinski, "Theater," *The Bleecker Times*, May 1974, 7.

73. Craig Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

74. Letter from Eve Adamson to the editor of the *Village Voice*, 2 November 1973.

75. Ibid.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Adolescence: 1974-1978

Some time during the early months of 1974, Eve Adamson became convinced that she needed a new theatre space. Her storefront location could cater to an audience of no more than 49 people, and she had faith that as the company continued growing, her audience would increase. Just one-half block from her location at 43 Bond Street was a theatre called the Bouwerie Lane, which had bookings from producers of plays like *Dames At Sea* (starring Bernadette Peters), and from producers of commercials who wanted the basement space as an area providing rest and relaxation for performers like Billy Joel. Adamson consulted Chaunce Skilling about the feasibility of taking a lease on the Bouwerie Lane. Skilling had not only been a trustee since the Cocteau was formed, but he was also a media executive whose expertise could be helpful. (Skilling now works as a vice president with the advertising firm of Saatchi and Saatchi.)[1]

Skilling became the first member of the Cocteau family to take steps toward meeting Adamson's need to acquire a new theatre. He recalled the advice given to him by the owner of Phebe's Restaurant on the Bowery and East Fourth Street.

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Skilling described the informal meeting as follows:

> There was a gentleman who ran a restaurant near the theatre called Phebe's. He had little or no board experience but he had a thriving business and we had the opportunity to move from our storefront into the Bowerie Lane Theatre. It was a monumental leap, our rent would suddenly quadruple (as I discovered shortly thereafter) to make this move, but it was a move to a house three times the size. I do believe that his being a merchant, a businessman, and not a professional and an art lover, was a good thing. His urging had us make the move as he got up and said, "I know if I increased my place to three times the present size, I have a chance to get three times the business." It was interesting. He was someone not encumbered with artistic ideas, strictly a businessman with a simple formula.[2]

> Adamson was attracted to the location because, like the owner of Phebe's who foresaw a tripling of business, she was enthusiastic about expanding space and audience size. We knew that once we went into that theatre, we would have to recover the place. It was in shambles. But if we could get a lease on a formal structure like the Bouwerie Lane, we would have the incentive to renovate. We could rally the troops and go in and help. There was a lot of hand labor to be done, a lot of bringing friends and relatives to paint the place. Like someone moving to a new apartment. If you are on a limited budget, that is what you do. We just knew it would pay off, make us more attractive as far as location.

> Looking back now, I'd have to say that being on the Bowery had always been an onus. But when you look at our subscriber list, there are enough people in New York to do almost anything and enough to give us a pretty good audience base.[3]

One day in March 1974, Adamson went to the theatre, met Honey Waldman (who is still the landlord of the property). introduced herself to Waldman and began to chat. Waldman revealed that she had an appointment to meet a theatrical company that wanted to rent the building to do a commercial. Adamson then suggested that if Waldman were willing to grant

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a lease to the Cocteau, the landlord would gain the advantage of a permanent tenant for the property instead of a series of single-production companies.

As a result of negotiations, Adamson received a five-year lease on the theatre, the terms changing at the expiration of the five years to a year-by-year renewable option. Waldman charged a sum that Adamson considered almost impossible to pay, but conceded that Waldman would thereby be getting less from the Cocteau than she might be able to receive from someone else. Adamson considered Waldman supportive, a person who would not sell out to a higher bidder if she could afford renewing the leases with the Cocteau. (To the present day, Honey Waldman attends the plays of the Cocteau and is on the advisory committee of the theatre.)[4]

The Cocteau company moved one-half block from 43 Bond Street into its new home at 330 Bowery on 1 July 1974. Skilling, his fellow trustees, and several actors and design people took charge of renovations. Adamson described the experience as follows:

> During that month [June 1974] we moved to the Bouwerie Lane, and we tripled our expenses. Everyone was working hard and was strung out. Most of the company walked out at one time, fighting over putting in so much non-acting work. They felt they deserved better stage roles in return. We had a lot of ill feeling that year. I resolved not to ask for so much from actors because it was crippling to have all of them walk out. If you put in work you hate and cannot get acting roles you like, you would be right to walk out. We spent hour after hour moving into the Bouwerie Lane, cleaning, fixing, extending the stage-

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-months in the summer.[5]

Craig Smith agreed that 1974-75 was a disastrous year filled with problems, many emanating from the stresses of moving. He remembered the backbreaking physical work that the actors were willing to undertake despite their grumbling. He recalled the revolt, signs of which can still be seen in the new theatre.

> We took the first six rows of seats out and put in an extension that still exists and is used to make the stage turn that first year--a unit set on a revolving stage. Many levels were used for 2 or 3 different plays. We used that for *Midsummer* and for *Romeo*, and got rid of it--it was boring to keep looking at it. There was a lot of work to get the plant ready for production. We cleaned out the sub-basement, fixed the plaster on the walls, and built a raked stage. The actors were putting most of their time and effort into the construction. Half of the company felt abused and left before the end of the season.[6]

These details are not available in Mindy Levine's guide to off-off-Broadway theatre, called *New York's Guide to Other Theatres*. Instead, Levine cited the standard historical aspects of the property--in this case the Bouwerie Lane theatre--which she considered to be part of the neighborhood of NoHo-East Village. The handbook called the Bouwerie Lane an elegantly designed landmarks building constructed in 1874 as a bank, which was converted into a theatre during the early 1960s. As the author indicated, this building is graced with old oak doors, glass chandeliers, and gilded box office window grates (the original bank teller's windows). The building continues to

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evoke an old-world sophistication. Levine was familiar with the large downstairs lounge which to this day offers refreshments and has a walled display of the building's original masonry. In her artistic profile, Levine certified that the "audience may view innovative productions of enduring classics and rarely-performed works that are seen more often on the pages of anthologies than on the stage, all performed by a resident acting company in a rotating repertory format." She emphasized the theatre's goal of providing the opportunity to see familiar actors playing dramatically different roles in a variety of classics.[7]

While Levine's guidebook utilized a popular format suitable for tourists and New Yorkers with a casual interest in theatre, the Landmarks Preservation Commission yielded a more detailed description of the Bouwerie Lane Theatre (originally the Bond Street Savings Bank). According to that description, the building was completed in 1874 under the architectural designs of Henry Engelbert and is on the Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 530, Lot 41. The Landmarks Preservation Commission actually granted the buiding its designation eight years before its lease by Adamson, though Waldman's representative opposed the proposed designation. Two witnesses (identities not disclosed) spoke in favor of the designation.

The Commission held that the theatre is especially interesting because the architect designed it in the

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elaborate style of the French Second Empire so that it now contains a wealth of ornamental detail giving a plastic, sculptured effect, making this building an unusually fine example of an important type of construction.

Apparently the architect considered the problem of making two separate elevations--a frontage on Bond Street with one narrow end facing the Bowery--pleasing and harmonious. He unified both elevations by using the same design elements in each while making the extent of their use equal to the width of the elevation. Further, he gave the building a sense of culmination at the top, with the main cornice handsomely detailed and imposing in scale.

From 1874 it was known as the Bond Street Bank and later became the German Exchange Bank. At a much later time it became a loft building with varied use. After a period in which the building was used as a warehouse, it remained empty for several years, and was then purchased by Honey Waldman who, in 1963, converted it to the Bouwerie Lane Theatre. After considering the architecture, history, and other features, the commission considered the special character, together with the particular historical and aesthetic interest and value, and declared it all to be part of the heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City. Landmark status was granted.[8]

During the 1960s, the theatre was rented to a number of producers. Its most acclaimed use during that time was by

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a company performing *Dames at Sea* with Bernadette Peters in the leading role. In the late 1960s, the theatre remained empty for a time. In 1968, Craig Smith had come to Manhattan from a town in Northern Minnesota and saw a gay play at the theatre. The show was called *And Puppy Dog Tales*. Smith remembered that he and his roommate were the only straight people in the audience. Honey Waldman had spoken with Smith about the sellout business of the show, which had not been opened for reviews. When the producer finally did invite the critics, the notices were bad, and the play closed in two days.

Smith recalled being terrified of the neighborhood, as he had never seen anything like the degradation of the Bowery area during his days of youth and innocence in Minnesota. He found that there were more "winos" then and some panhandlers, but warned that now there is a harder element in residence. At the same time, along with gentrification patterns in other parts of the city, there are well-to-do artists moving into lofts in the area.[9]

The building was put to different uses during the 1970s. Commercials were occasionally shot there, even after the Cocteau moved into the building. For subleasing the hall to an advertising agency that was producing a commercial for Bold detergent, the theatre received $1,000 per day. A print photograph for Hanes hosiery was taken in the dressing room on one day. Fifty people appeared to take a single

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photo for Hanes. Billy Joel's video "Uptown Girl" was shot at the gas station across the street from the theatre, and the actors--Billy Joel and Christy Brinkley and others--used the Bouwerie Lane for relaxation and meals.[10]

The Bouwerie Lane was hardly a director's dream. What the Landmarks Preservation Commission considered irrelevant to its study was a problem soon noted by Adamson, a dilemma she attacked by turning a physical limitation into a positive benefit. Frequently actors went into the aisles, not to attack the audience as was common for productions of the Living Theatre and other radical organizations of the sixties, but simply to get on and off a stage which had no wings--just walls on the sides. A realistic set must have wings, must allow people to pretend there is space on the sides. But at the Bouwerie Lane, a redesign was impossible without diminishing the size of the stage.[11]

During its first season in the new theatre at 330 Bowery, the Cocteau staged eight dramas amid a background of activity on Broadway, off-Broadway, and off-off-Broadway. During the 1960s, off-off-Broadway companies mounted shoestring productions of plays by writers that were not well-known; many plays were resolutely avant-garde, violating the tenets of traditional theatre, and often shocked visitors from affluent neighborhoods. These companies seemed resigned to a marginal existence in various

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New York neighborhoods, many in the area of East Village. Even in 1974, there were as many as 150 groups that fit into the category of off-off-Broadway theatres, the oldest being Ellen Stewart's La Mama E.T.C. (Experimental Theatre Club), which opened its doors in 1960, mounting a new play every week.[12]

While generally avant-garde in their stagings, these theatres did not present homogeneous fare. To the contrary, they conferred on the adventurous a diversity that included classical repertory companies, feminist theatres, gay theatres, and others, including companies under the leadership of such experimental directors as André Gregory, Richard Schechner, and Robert Wilson. By 1974 playwrights like Lanford Wilson, Sam Shepard and Israel Horovitz gained exposure to such an extent, that they are now considered first-rate writers. Plays that are often regarded as modern classics include *Bad Habits*, by Terrence McNally; *America Hurrah*, by Jean-Claude von Itallie; and *The Connection*, by Jack Gelber.[13]

While the Cocteau company would not conclusively reject the chance to perform the plays cited above or present any of the works already mounted by the aforementioned theatres, an examination of the production history of the Cocteau should indicate that plays bearing the highest possibility of presentation are 1) neglected classics written prior to 1914, 2) celebrated classics written prior to 1914, and 3)

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modern classics, written after 1914, which are not trendy; that is, which have some universal resonance transcending the times in which they were written.

In June 1974 the Cocteau issued a release announcing auditions for its 1974-75 season. Adamson was looking for actors with a strong classical background and a firm commitment to the repertory concept. She advised actors to have a reliable source of income, since only a token wage could be earned from Cocteau work. [14]

This was the season's roster of plays, to be performed at the new location of 330 Bowery in the Bouwerie Lane Theatre:

1974-1975

09/74-02/75	*A Midsummer's Night's Dream*	W. Shakespeare
09/74-06/75	*Waiting for Godot*	Samuel Beckett
09/74-06/75	*Ghosts*	Henrik Ibsen
10/74-06/75	*The Doctor in Spite of Himself*	Molière
12/74-06/75	*Romeo and Juliet*	W. Shakespeare
01/75-03/75	*The Firebugs*	Max Frisch
03/75-06/75	*Winterset*	Maxwell Anderson
05/75-06/75	*In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*	T. Williams

To open the season in September 1974, Adamson chose the Shakespearean fantasy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, because of her partiality to the playwright's works, but particularly because the defiance of parental authority is a motif of the plot, thus affording the play a special relevance during the waning years of the youth movement in America. She chose to cast Craig Smith in the role of Puck, the principal

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mischief-maker of a fairy band, since Adamson considered Smith particularly able to fill the comic role.

Adamson wanted high-school students to see a comedy, particularly one that offered the image of the transformation of one character, Bottom, into a donkey-headed favorite of Titania. Adamson hoped to clear a misconception which she believed youngsters had: that everything written by Shakespeare was difficult to understand and particularly solemn.

Thomas Fuld, a trustee of the Cocteau, recalled the season, with particular emphasis on the artistic success of the *Midsummer* presentation. He gave his overview of the production:

> I loved *Midsummer*. That was my favorite. That was where they used platforms but of different sizes and shapes so they fit together making the set an interweaving of platforms. Eve, I thought, had a physical show; she wanted to be very physical and the characters were agile. She had a young acting company; that was wonderful. Nobody walked anywhere. Everyone danced, tumbled, a very physical production. Jim Payne from *Godot* was in that; I think he was one of the helpers to the queen in the forest. He would be jumping around on these blocks or platforms in the dark, something not easy to do. Behind, there was a drop on the stage which I imagine was used. One night Jim bounded up onto the stage and just kept going, did not stop, did a tumble off the back of the platform. You could watch the horror of the actors, one said "My God, is he going to be all right?" But they kept on. Suddenly you would see this hand pulling himself back as if this were part of the show.[15]

The critics generally agreed with Fuld's view that the Cocteau had realized the author's aims. They took cognizance of the audience reactions, and determined that

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the theatergoers had much to enjoy from the fine choreography and communication of humor, both light and clownish. Based on the statements of Thomas Fuld and the critics who attended, the Cocteau's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was perhaps the theatre company's most successful one so far.

Howard Thompson of the *New York Times* called *A Midsummer Night's Dream* a performance that "crackled with succinct movement, one that brought out the dynamics and poetry." The critic predicted that 1974-75 would be a particularly good year for the Cocteau.[16]

Another critic, Doris Diether of the community newspaper *The Villager,* cited Adamson's direction, holding that the artistic director emphasized changes in pace and meaning within the longer speeches. She admired the dance-like quality of the entire performance, and felt that all the characters were carefully delineated. While a critic does not usually report audience response, Doris Diether observed that laughter was frequent and prolonged.[17]

Adamson chose the second play for production under the advice of Craig Smith, who thought that *Waiting for Godot* would be an ideal choice for schools and for senior citizens' groups alike. The company staged that drama as its second presentation, opening in rotation with *Midsummer* in September 1974. The play was carried over from the previous season, because it was so successful with

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audiences. Craig Smith was cast as Lucky. He found the show very funny and simple, as it should be. Smith, like Adamson, considers *Godot* to be unusual, a great classic, and certainly no museum piece.[18]

Craig Smith was not the only admirer. Thomas Fuld had a strong memory of the production of *Godot*, particularly of what he called its magic. Fuld elaborated:

> It was that show that got me interested in the Cocteau. Just having a few people on stage and barely any scenery, and magic took place. I got hooked into it and loved the performance. Jim Payne, Coral Potter, I remember them strongly. Every once in a while they would forget a line. One night they did, someone forgot a line, an audience member said the line, and the second character picked up from the audience line as if nothing happened. It was beautiful. That is the magic of theatre. The audience member knew the show as well as they did. They picked it up as though a character said it. That says a lot about the audience and its relation to the theatre.[19]

Except for the introduction of Craig Smith in a leading role, the staging of *Godot* was similar to that of the 1973-74 season. Again, people that attended live theatre rarely laughed more than those who appeared to be sophisticated members of the audience, according to Adamson.

Critics were divided. Doris Diether of *The Villager* found the first-act performance of Michael Pfesenmeier as Lucky a dramatization that made the entire show worth attending, although she found that the rest of the cast in this exacting Beckett play were unable to match his acting skills. She blamed Adamson for permitting Coral S. Potter, in the role of Didi, to rush frantically around the stage.[20]

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Edward Moran of *Show Business* considered the Cocteau performance in *Godot* to be a good one, but faulted the group for being "over its head with players who know more about technique than they do about life." As he watched, he concluded that no one in the cast seemed to have a consistent idea of what the author was trying to say, and thereby went through the motions of the play with an absence of tension. Like Diether, Moran praised Michael Pfesenmeier, without whom, in the critic's view, the production would have been a total loss.[21]

The next play in the Cocteau's season, opening, like the other two, in September 1974, was Ibsen's *Ghosts*. The Cocteau was courageous to stage a play often considered to be dated: Although venereal disease is still very much with us, what shocked Ibsen's contemporaries was not so much the open discussion of such illness, but Mrs. Alving's *cri de coeur* that loyalty to a demented husband to gratify the conventions of society is unwise.

Adamson is partial to Ibsen but was wary of doing still another *Doll House* or *Hedda Gabler*. Since many theatres seem reluctant to stage *Ghosts*, she chose to produce the play. The AIDS epidemic had not begun at the time of the production: Adamson wanted to use the suffering of Oswald not so much as a literal warning against unsafe sex, but as a demonstration of Ibsen's disapproval of Mrs. Alving's conformity. Ibsen, in effect, was answering those critics

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who condemned Nora's walking out of her husband's home in the author's better-known play, *A Doll House*.

Adamson commented on one aspect of the staging, saying:

> We used a red couch--a critic went on and on about the symbolism of the red couch--but we used it, actually, because the WPA theatre across the street lent it to us. A reason for choosing a play is that what the writer is saying is relevant today for us in the kind of world in which we live--as opposed to doing, say, a museum piece in *Comédie Francais* style. For example, I would not have done *The Cid* (performed during the company's 1978-1979 season) the way it was done in neo-classical style by the guest director. The guest went all the way with painted backdrop, chandelier, all the action in front of the proscenium. I did not think that was right.[22]

Adamson apparently staged the play in a serious, purposeful way, and she later questioned this choice. She realized shortly after the first presentation that Ibsen provided the needed melodrama in his script. The principal failing of the Cocteau staging of *Ghosts* arose from a lack of funds. The minimalism of set design, a consequence of the theatre's financial weakness, meant that Adamson had to use an unusual arrangement of furnishings on the small Cocteau stage, thus partially blocking the vision of many spectators. From the evidence in the reviews, the Cocteau production of *Ghosts* was pleasing to some, objectionable to others. Reviewers were divided in their opinions of set, acting, and direction.

Doris Diether of *The Villager* was unenthusiastic, not about the company's allegedly bad timing in presenting a dated work, but about the quality of direction and acting.

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She disapproved of the set design as well. Diether found that audience vision was obstructed from every seat. In addition, she complained, the five people seated under the balcony watched a whole scene presented over their heads. Even so, she considered the set design to be the best aspect of the show. Craig Smith was praised by Diether despite her objections of the production as a whole.[23]

Reviewing is a subjective craft. Those who doubt this, might be convinced by contrasting Edward Moran's view with Diether's. Moran, of *Show Business* magazine, exclaimed that one knew that this *Ghosts* would be a first-rate production from the moment one entered the theatre and confronted the craftsmanship of Jerry Rojo's set, which was sparse and featured stairs that were slightly out of proportion. According to Moran, Eve Adamson was able to capture the essence of Ibsen.[24]

Linda Lawrence, a critic for the *Chelsea-Clinton News*, admired the play itself, which she considered to have no fat; but she assailed Coral Potter in words that would be repeated to him throughout his acting career with the Cocteau, i.e. that he had a tendency to act too broadly. In playing the role of Manders, said Lawrence, he engaged in much bobbing around and in overly significant facial expressions.[25]

For the fourth production, Adamson staged a work by Molière beginning in October 1974. Adamson, who is not a

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devotee of the French comic writer, does not enjoy directing Molière's plays. She had determined to employ a guest director to stage any further presentations of Molière's works. Though aware of the writer's popularity, she just did not consider his plays to be the kinds of works toward which she leaned. She felt, though, that the company would be committing an error if it ignored him. Adamson had no particular preference for *Doctor*, but selected that farce arbitrarily because she felt compelled to stage at least one work of the French comic writer.[26]

The production suffered from her indifference. While a director sympathetic to Molière could do much with this satire of the medical profession, the Cocteau staging paid little attention to detail. Adamson had not yet gained an appreciation for the importance of production values in launching a successful presentation, and paid little attention to lapses in makeup and costumes. According to the judgments of critics, she apparently neglected to correct the enunciation patterns of at least one performer. The actor playing the role of Sgnarelle wore a bald-wig with a poor fit; still another, Jim Klawin in the role of Leandre, spoke indistinctly and was difficult to hear.

The anonymous critic from the *SoHo Weekly News* said that *The Doctor in Spite of Himself* was "poorly and disastrously handled." The critic noticed that the makeup of the actor was out of sorts, noting that "one actor's bald-headed wig

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fit so poorly that his scalp seemed strip mined." Another was said to wear a tuft of beard as patently unreal and unbelievable as all his mannerisms. Jim Klawin as Leandre, to cite only one example, was criticized for playing the role as though he had a mouth full of marbles. The writer called the production "botched, phony, illogical, drab, and grim."[27]

Linda Lawrence of the *Chelsea-Clinton News* found Eve Adamson not as successful with the 17th century French farce about the-doctor-as-quack as she was with the production of *Ghosts*. She perceived a general absence of comic talent in the company. Adamson was indicted for alleged mistakes in characterizations. Lucinde, whose feigned muteness the doctor is called to treat, "is made to jerk around like a deranged marionette," according to Lawrence.[28]

Michael Bertin of *Show Business* similarly found the production forced and lacking in finesse,[29] while Doris Diether of *The Villager* held it to be "not a great evening of theatre."[30]

Several reviewers deemed the company unable to deal with comedy. (Despite many changes in the cast during the nineteen-year history, a survey of journalistic critics might well give the impression that the presentation of comedy was Cocteau's weakest point.)

Following a series of negative notices for the staging of the farcical Molière work, the Cocteau rebounded with its

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rendition of *Romeo and Juliet* as its fifth presentation beginning in December 1974. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had been chosen by Adamson to begin the season, since in her words the Shakespearean comedy would "give the actors a flawless masterpiece to revive spirits that might be expected to dim after acting in a succession of imperfect classics." The result of this action was mixed because of the unevenness of the acting. Craig Smith and James Payne, two of the more experienced and talented performers with the group, gave commendable portrayals of the youthful exuberance of Romeo and Tybalt respectively; the latter gained a reputation for staging exciting sword fights that sometimes forced audience members in the first two rows to crouch to avoid being hit.

During the production of Shakespeare's tragedy, Clive Barnes, a critic for the *New York Times*, made a trip to the Bowery theatre. Barnes praised the company for giving New York a stage exclusively for the works of classical theatre. He warned that many off-off-Broadway houses lack the required skill to match their dedication, but called the Cocteau a company that was improving with years. Barnes underscored a flaw in the company which, like its minimalist set design and inadequate handling of comic works, would remain a permanent source of alarm--its uneven acting. He praised the prudent pruning of particular passages by Adamson, but rejected what he considered the silliness of

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the stylized fight scene and the lack of originality in the staging.[31]

Craig Smith was criticized for his characterization of Romeo, particularly for rushing through his lines, thereby losing much of the effectiveness of Shakespeare's language. Linda Fowler, who broadcast her review on the radio station of Seton Hall University, had found a similar weakness in Lesley Appleby's portrayal of Juliet. This criticism may have been a response to Adamson's custom of shortening plays that she considered prolix.[32]

Actors that continued to receive favorable notices in addition to Smith were James Payne, acclaimed especially for his ability to choreograph sword fights, and Eric M. Goldscheider, who was considered particularly adept at bringing minor characters to life. The sword fights, according to critic Doris Diether of *The Villager*, were so realistic that people in the front row had to duck continually.[33]

In a scathing review, though, one writer dismissed the entire production. Linda Lawrence of *The Villager* called the Cocteau's *Romeo* one in which emotional content was completely missing--"a play with love but no passion, and one in which none of the irony and tragedy seems to come through."[34]

Adamson chose to stage Max Frisch's *The Firebugs* as the sixth work of the season beginning in January 1975, because

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she was challenged by the chance to design an unusual set, one which required the exhibition of two levels of staging. The living room and the attic had to be exhibited simultaneously, both watched over by a Greek-style chorus of firemen. She felt that the actors were now polished enough to handle a modern tragi-comedy; that is, one in which elements of both tragedy and comedy were mixed throughout the drama. She cast Jim Klawin in the role of wrestler-arsonist because of her feeling that Klawin, a broad-shouldered young man, could best effect Frisch's concept of the man--and Kathleen Forbes in the role of his wife because, she felt, Forbes would give a realistic portrayal of Babette.

The Firebugs is a play considered by some to symbolize the failure of the Western powers to stop the advances of Hitler some years before the outbreak the World War II. Actually, however, Frisch was encouraged to write the work after the 1948 coup in Czechoslovakia, which he felt could have been prevented by the West. In the work, whose original title is *Herr Biedermann und der Brandschtifter,* the title character is disturbed by reports that an arsonist-at-large has been setting fires to attics. Because of his gullibility and guilt-ridden conscience, Biedermann cooperates with the fire raisers, and helps them to burn down his own house.

A full realization of the play proved impossible for the

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Cocteau because of its inability to create the set design required, and because of the mediocre caliber of some of its performers. The evidence from the critics is that some actors ran through their lines, while others played their roles with too much reverence.

Adamson later realized that her directing was too emphatic and direct, with the result that the sardonic mood of the play was not realized. As Doris Diether of *The Villager* explained, the suave firebug would always speak with a raised eyebrow or sudden smirk. Similarly, Diether felt that Ms. Forbes was doing fine as Babette until she began to show constant agitation throughout the latter part of the play. Yet Diether pointed out that the company was welcome regardless of its occasional lack of perceptivity because without it, there may not be many chances to see *The Firebugs* and, by extension, other neglected classics.[35]

Clive Barnes, who made his second visit to the theatre for the production of Frisch's play, agreed with Diether that the acting was not polished, but asserted that the performers played their roles with vigor; at the same time he assailed the actors for performing with a *lack* of affectation.[36] Allan Wallach of *Newsday* criticized the play itself for heavy-handedness, pointing out like most of the other critics that "the Cocteau is once again providing a rare opportunity simply by performing works of neglected classics like Frisch's."[37]

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The choice by Adamson of Maxwell Anderson's *Winterset* as her seventh production in March 1975 was criticized by senior actor Craig Smith as a play which, despite its beauty, would prove too big for the Cocteau.

Anderson set his play in the slums of New York overlooking the Manhattan Bridge. *Winterset* is based on the murder trial of Sacco and Vanzetti, who were executed for a murder which, in the opinion of some, they did not commit. The tragedy centers on Mio, the son of a radical named Romagna, who was executed for murder. Mio wants to clear his father's name by tracking down Garth, the one witness who could exonerate his father. In counterpart to the tale of revenge, Anderson pits the love story of Mio and Miriamne, who are ultimately killed.

Craig Smith professed his love for the poetic language of *Winterset*, which he called "florid, gorgeous and beautiful" and for the plot, which he considers both melodramatic and replete with the themes of "passion, love, and death." He elaborated as follows:

> Many try not to draw attention to its poetry, making it sound like normal speech. But it is not. It is artificial, though iambic. Coral Potter played Shadow. I had never seen Coral before, and he came from the lifeboat as if he had just crawled out of the river and had blood all over himself. I saw him with heavy makeup for the first time and he looked awful. I thought the reality of the moment was incredible. Yet they say that it is hard to shock anyone nowadays.[38]

Although eight newspaper critics had attended the earlier production of *Ghosts*, not a single reviewer was

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present for *Winterset*. Only Craig Smith recalled the production at all and did not think that the Cocteau had the actors with sufficient talent to realize the tragic motifs.

On the other hand, works by Tennessee Williams are performed constantly. The Cocteau chose to present a particularly challenging work of that author, *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*, constructed with incomplete sentences as though each of these phrases were complete--with a drop of inflection at the conclusion of each phrase. (In New York City, the play was staged twice before: at the Eastside Playhouse opening on 11 May 1969; and at the Old Reliable Theatre Tavern, opening in October 1972.)[39] *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel* was the Cocteau's final production of the 1974-75 season, the "free event" for subscribers in May and June of 1975, announced but a few weeks before the staging.

Craig Smith credited Adamson with a good production, and recalled that in Adamson's concept, all the action took place on one set--a barroom with three round tables, each possessing a little gauze with little flowers and a lamp. Smith felt that the play possessed a Zen-like quality, something that is somehow not earthbound, one in which the audience had difficulty knowing what to feel. Smith considered the character Miriam to be one who is desperate about her own sensuality, stuck in a barroom with a maniac husband who is naked upstairs. Listening to their dialogue made Smith consider these people weird; audiences wanted the

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characters to talk realistically. Williams had told Smith that this was the playwright's personal period, and this was the way he heard other people talking to him.[40]

In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel is considered to be "late Williams," a term which nowadays implies mediocrity, insofar as some consider the author to have become so dissipated with alcohol and drugs that his talent for exquisitely lyrical playwriting had died. Yet the play can be forceful if properly staged in a manner that would evoke the isolation and estrangement of a painter and his promiscuous wife. The wife, determined to be free of her husband, tries to persuade a friend to take him back to New York; her husband dies before the plan can be carried out, and the wife finds herself lost. The dialogue consists of many fragmentary sentences which Adamson interpreted literally--by emphasizing that each fragment ends with a period rather than with overlapping dialogue.

A *Newsday* review was discouraging. Allan Wallach felt the play to be a clumsy parody of Williams, written at a time of personal crisis, clotted with self-pity and distorting Williams's gift for lyricism. He considered the pauses pretentious, doing nothing but making the play incoherent. But Wallach had even worse news for the actors and director, calling the cast unable to keep the play from being merely embarrassing, and adding that Coral Potter (as Mark) carried each role to its farcical limits, "just

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lurching and quivering in the case of *In the Bar.*"[41]

During the 1974-75 season, Adamson invited schools to matinee performances at which only subscribing classes would be admitted. Since *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has always been a favorite play of teachers of high-school English as well as of college instructors of theatre, she thought it appropriate to use that work as the program debut.

The Cocteau is among the theatre companies that still exploit a natural market for school programs, and with its presentation of *Midsummer*, began an annual series of school matinees in which the company would perform at 1 P.M., often on selected Wednesdays. During the 1974-75 season, the only play with such afternoon presentations was *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which was staged four times for school matiness. (The company would later expand the program, affording students a variety of plays each year and an increase in number of matinees to twelve per annum.) The aims of the program--still a strong money-maker for the Cocteau--are to bring to life the plays that are studied in texts and to imbue students with a love for theatre. Some believe strongly in the value of carefully defined field trips and take their students to live theatre, particularly if prices are reasonable and the plays have been studied in class. Traditionally, students read Shakespeare in their English classes, if they read any plays at all.

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Craig Smith gave his views on the validity of the program, disagreeing with the artistic director's choices of Shakespearean plays like *Midsummer*. He clarified his position as follows:

> You do not see that type of theater audience when they become adults. But that does not mean the program should be scrapped. After all the kids are living now and what they learn now is at least as important as what they will commit themselves to later in life, isn't it? I agree with you [the author of this dissertation] that plays like Dürrenmatt's *the Visit* would be better choices, easier to understand, than a lot of Shakespearean stuff, but *The Visit* is just too big for the Cocteau--too many characters.
>
> What was more exciting for these young people was the program of fencing lessons we used to have on Saturday mornings, ten o'clock, for two hours. That program is totally lost now, but they loved the stuff, it's tremendously realistic. But it is dangerous. I would worry that a sword would break off and go into the audience, and if you do not duck you could really get hurt. We used to have great sword play. Jim Payne was choreographer and the guy that taught the fight scenes. Now we have Jacobean tragedy without much sword play.
>
> I love *'Tis Pity [She's a Whore]*, but the language is too difficult for the kids. During the matinee series we have not reached many kids, only some. For those few whom we've reached, the whole thing becomes worth while. By reaching them, I mean really getting them to have an interest in the theater so they would later become theatre-goers. The lack of a tradition of going to the theater! There is no tradition in this country. In the city we have many first-generation immigrants who have the tradition of going to the theater, but it is going away.[42]

Notwithstanding the negative aspects of this appraisal, Adamson has offered the high-school matinee program annually, and has considered the series worthy whether or not participants became lifelong theatergoers.

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Because the Bouwerie Lane Theatre is three times the size of the original theatre at 43 Bond Street, Adamson had to make artistic changes lest half the seats remain empty for each performance. Instead of producing only neglected classics, she continued to stage some that would appeal to a wider audience, an example being the mounting of two plays of Shakespeare. As the director of a repertory company, she insisted on a fair distribution of good roles among the members of the company, while not necessarily guaranteeing each member one leading role per annum. Adamson considered herself a producer by default, staging the plays that no one seemed to want to direct. Describing her choices, she justified the selections during the 1974-75 season of *A Midsummer Night's Dream, Ghosts, The Firebugs,* and *Winterset* as follows:

> I liked *Midsummer* because it has savage aspects--more important than the pretty glitter. The fairies were very primitive, and the play was filled with their strange, intoxicating magic. Many people think of it as though it were an essay, but it also has features of a typical English comedy--it can provoke laughter, and I tried to make it theatrical by liberating the emotions in the play. *Ghosts* is not too well written; I can cut one third of the lines, while *Winterset* exemplifies the company's attempts to produce obscure classics, in this case by a writer who had become unfashionable. I consider *Winterset, Firebugs* and *Marat/Sade* to be modern classics, with certain elements of traditional theatre.[43]

During the 1974-75 season, the Cocteau was visited by many critics. Perhaps the influx of reviewers was precipitated by the move of the company to its new, larger quarters. But what is surprising--and remains startling--

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is the paucity of reviews from the *Village Voice*, which is located in a neighborhood contiguous to that of the Cocteau, and whose championing of non-commercial theatre should have led that journal to be the prime source of critical commentary for the Cocteau. According to Smith, the *Voice* very rarely gave a good review to a Cocteau performance, but college newspapers, community journals, and show-business magazines filled the gap.[44]

Members of the Cocteau company began receiving payments for the first time during the 1974-75 season. Ten actors were each paid $100 per month, while the artistic director was paid $7,200 (half to be supplied by the box office, the other half by funding). The administrator and the technical director were also compensated. In her funding application to NYSCA, Adamsom wrote that she considered her audience to be principally students, artists, and professionals, and some members of groups that do not ordinarily attend, like hospital audiences, needy children, ex-addicts, foreign students, and senior citizens. During that season NYSCA granted the theatre $12,000 to help its income to reach its ultimate figure of $51,000. (The NYSCA grant was received in October 1974.) Some outside professionals were hired, such as graphics designer, photographer and fiscal administrator, while equipment was purchased, including a portable light board, an adding machine and a projector. Rent during the first year, as charged by Honey Waldman, the

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landlord, was $7,600, utilities $3,400, telephone $1,000.

The prices for individual tickets was $2.50 to $3.50, up from $1.00 and $2.00 during the 1971-1972 season. A six-admission pass could be purchased for $12.50. Audience attendance for that year was approximately 10,000 with receipts totalling approximately $21,000. The company had virtually doubled its income from the preceding year, the growing proceeds attributed by Adamson to the increased size of the theatre.

Adamson knew she faced a steady battle to find audiences for her types of dramas. She believes that people pay lip service to classics but few actually go out to see them. A further barrier to professional productions is that well-trained classical actors are not easy to find, especially nowadays, since experimental theatres had made actors self-indulgent, according to the director.[45]

During the 1975-1976 season, the theatre group staged nine works, an ambitious agenda for any acting troupe. They were:

1975-1976

09/75-06/76	*Twelfth Night*	W. Shakespeare
09/75-04/76	*Brecht on Brecht*	Bertolt Brecht
10/75-05/76	*Desire Under the Elms*	Eugene O'Neill
11/75-06/76	*The Importance of Being Earnest*	Oscar Wilde
01/76-06/76	*Endgame*	Samuel Beckett
02/76-06/76	*The Count of Monte Cristo*	Douglas McKeown
04/76-06/76	*Vera, or the Nihilists*	Oscar Wilde

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05/76-06/76	*Winterset*	Maxwell Anderson
05/76-06/76	*The Lesson*	Eugène Ionesco

Adamson chose *Twelfth Night* to open the season in September 1975 because of its widespread appeal and for the opportunity which the staging would give to actors to perform one of Shakespeare's highly regarded comedies.

Adamson emphasized the dark side of the play, following a convention of the 1970s of staging Shakespearean comedies as though they were autumnal. At the same time, however, she did not ignore some farcical elements in the play and encouraged Coral Potter to overact in the role of Sir Toby Belch. Craig Smith did not agree with her interpretation, believing that a light comedy like *Twelfth Night* did not call for a sinister mood. From the evidence of the critics, Adamson had not costumed her performers appropriately, a major failing considering the need of characters like Viola to give a credible performance disguised as a boy. The credibility of the audience was further taxed by the farcical interpretation which Adamson gave to the script.

A Shakespearean work that is popular rather than neglected appears to draw critics as well as audience members, for *Twelfth Night* received three reviews of substantial size--including one from the *Village Voice*, conspicuous by its absence during the theatre's first four seasons. One critic, Richard Gottlieb of the *SoHo Weekly News*, took exception to the costume design, particularly to

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Viola's outfit, which, he believed, should have complemented the ruse of her playing the role of a boy. Instead, the costumes were found wanting, in that they did nothing to hide the fact that Viola was a woman. The reviewer also criticized Coral Potter for playing on a cartoonish level even when such acting did not fit the scene.[46]

Charles Whitlin of the *Village Voice* was not impressed, either. He found the staging too farcical and thereby improbable, while lacking the bawdiness or whimsy common to British director Peter Brook's concepts. The reviewer pointed out that Viola's costume did not emphasize the needed androgyny, yet he praised Eve Adamson for "avoiding the pitfalls of being more sexually *au courant*."[47]

Adamson is not overly fond of directing the plays of Bertolt Brecht or, for that matter, most other plays built primarily on political themes. Believing that her audience should not be deprived of modern classics, however, she chose to stage a collection of Brecht's short dramas called *Brecht on Brecht*, which had been staged only once before in New York, at the Theatre de Lys in March 1962.[48] *Brecht on Brecht* was performed by the Cocteau from September 1975 through April of the following year. Adamson cast Joan Grant in "The Ballad of the Jewish Whore," and made some editorial changes in the comic segment from *Schweik in World War II*. Thomas Fuld recalled the dullness of the lighting design, which used only a single setting, and the neutral

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costumes of the performers. He was not pleased with the production and felt that Adamson had not put her heart into the Brecht anthology.[49] Fuld was disappointed about some changes Adamson made in the script. Because the Cocteau performers were unable sing well, Adamson directed Joan Grant to speak her role in "The Ballad of the Jewish Whore." She also made some cuts in the play, *Schweik in World War II* excising much of the comic element.

This production drew only a single reviewer, Richard Gottlieb of *SoHo Weekly News*, who called the direction bland, and accused the director of dispensing with the needed music despite the fact that Brecht's songs do not call for great voices.[50]

For the next offering of the season, Adamson chose a play by Eugene O'Neill. Though she had chiefly offered non-American plays, she felt that American writers deserved to have some of their plays produced. Since the company was not large enough for a staging of Eugene O'Neill's *Marco Millions* or yet skilled enough to attempt to stage one of O'Neill's later masterworks, she chose to produce *Desire Under the Elms*. O'Neill's early tragedy was presented from October 1975 through May 1976.

Craig Smith considered this presentation to be the single worst show ever mounted by the Cocteau--"just awful"--and he expressed his relief that the theatre had a difficult time getting critics to attend. If a play was not working, the

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company did not push for critics, and none came. According to Smith, despite Eve Adamson's stylizing of some scenes in the play, the company failed to perform the play at even a minimal level of quality.[51]

After the production of *Desire Under the Elms*, Adamson interrupted the flow of neglected classics to give her actors a change of pace. Thus, Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* was performed during the season beginning in November 1975 and continuing through June in repertory.

In the opinion of critics who attended the production, the company performed inadequately.

Yet the Cocteau performers had by this time become known for their ability to enunciate lines clearly, so that according to Thomas Fuld, they had no problem being heard, and each delicate dollop of wit was vividly communicated to the audience. Fuld, though, faulted the acting, which he called uneven, but he praised Joan Grant for "playing her part with grace and style." (Ms. Grant had moved from her leading role in *Brecht on Brecht* to the role of Cecily Cardew in the Wilde work.)[52]

Despite the importance and popularity of the work, only two reviewers visited the theatre. Emory Lewis of New Jersey's *The Record* found that while the revival did not measure up to the all-star British production on Broadway in the 1940s, "the Cocteau Company must be complimented for tackling the comedy of manners. Eve Adamson's direction pays

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the proper attention to the value of every line."[53]

The fifth production, Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, which opened in January 1976, was chosen in part because the director wanted to give a rest to one half of her company, and Adamson needed only four actors for this production. Only one member of the company had recollections of the presentation, and even then recalled only the performance of one actor. Craig Smith recalled George Brunner's performance as Hamm as "wonderful, but one which slipped away from him." Smith considers Beckett's characters difficult to perform and felt that "Brunner had Hamm nailed just so, yet somehow he got 'mushy' at the end."

(Smith remembered Brunner as a teacher at Somers Junior High School in Brooklyn during his tenure at the Cocteau, and believes he is there to this day, but thinks that holding a job that has the pressures of teaching while doing several performance weekly at the Cocteau is contraindicated. Yet Brunner did remain with the theatre from 1975 to 1979, playing some major roles such as that of Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night*. Given Brunner's inability to be a full-time teacher and a Cocteau actor as well, Smith recommends to any Cocteau actor who needs an income outside the theater to be a waiter, a taxi driver, or a word processor--something to do and then forget about when he leaves at the end of the day.)[54]

No critics attended the production of the Beckett work.

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For its sixth production, the Cocteau staged *The Count of Monte Cristo*, with an initial performance in February 1976. The Cocteau used a particularly free adaptation of the Dumas *père* novel; in fact the adaptation by one of its own actors, Douglas McKeown, was a musical version. Thomas Fuld conceded that everything was going wrong that night--music cues were missed, and actors' lines were forgotten. Fuld enjoyed the skills of Craig Smith, who appeared to the trustee to have saved the show. Craig Smith played the role of the young hero, and believed that the last duel would be the best duel ever staged anywhere. According to Fuld, Smith drew his sword quickly, and unfortunately opened his hand, making the sword fly across the stage. "In a real fight he would be dead. Someone across the stage had to give the sword to Craig. He decided never again to try to be the world's best swordsman," Fuld concluded.[55]

Harris Berlinsky, who has been an actor with the Cocteau since 1977, explained why he, too, considered the Cocteau rendition of *The Count* to be a disastrous production.

> This was a musical version. We had a representation of a ship on which an escape was launched. There was a pulley arrangement which actually broke and the ship fell. Everyone wondered how the escape was accomplished. When the budget is not large everything has to be done by the people involved. Although Eve is a minimalist, Doug McKeown was guest director and this was his idea. He was formerly a company member before I joined. It's amazing. The people with whom we worked were inventive and Eve would say "you can't go over $100." These people we worked with would try an ingenious method of making something work. If they did not think about it, they would have to spend $500. It was pure genius. One thing I learned; never

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> think anything is impossible. I would say that greatest lesson I learned with the Cocteau was that nothing is impossible.[56]

Fuld added to Berlinsky's thoughts that he, too, knew the Cocteau actors could not sing; that the play had wonderful music, and a good script, but that it needed a company of light opera performers to do a good job.[57] (While this classic in the staged version is no longer produced frequently, the student of theatre may recall that Eugene O'Neill's father, James, played the role of Edmond Dante over 5000 times.)

Allan Wallach, who had reviewed Cocteau presentations several times for *Newsday*, found that with the production of *The Count* by the Cocteau, "the story buckled more than it swashed, and oscillated between a straight adventure story and a spoofing treatment." According to him, neither approach worked very well. Wallach found that Craig Smith and Coral Potter did work hard to breathe some life into the roles of the young Dantes, but ultimately conceded that the company did not possess the flair that might have carried off the kidding.[58]

On the other hand, Holly Hill of *Westchester-Rockland Papers* enjoyed the melodrama and tomfoolery and, in fact, favored the way the Cocteau performers played it--"tastefully straight rather than tongue-in-cheek."[59] Mel Gussow of the *New York Times* made his first trip to the Cocteau for the production of *The Count*, which he found a

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modest one, even to the point of being threadbare. He observed that platforms and boxes were standing in for harbor, prison, salon and open field. He called the costumes unflattering and the lighting rudimentary. Gussow joined the chorus of critics who underscored the uneven acting by calling a few members of the cast amateurish. Yet he found some vigor in the performances, which ultimately made the play an enlivening experience for him. Gussow regarded the version of another melodrama at the nearby CSC, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, as a much more polished production than the Cocteau's.[60]

While theatergoers are generally familiar with the plot of Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, few are conversant with his first play, *Vera, or the Nihilists*, which Adamson chose for the seventh production, to begin in April 1976. Apparently the flaw in Wilde's first play--the reason it had been neglected before the Cocteau bravely staged it--is that it was written by an immature Wilde with only the traces of what would be his later, mature wit. Adamson felt that this distinction gave the play merit, a sort of theater-lover's first view of a genuine, comic genius while his humor was still sophomoric.[61]

Vera was written in 1883, and accordingly is clumsy in its melodramatic depiction of a group of Russian revolutionary terrorists whom some considered to be idealists. Vera, a beauteous maiden, has fallen in love with

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another conspirator, Alexis, who turns out to be the czarevitch. Alexis is annoyed with his father's tyrannical regime and has secretly joined the nihilists. After his father is assassinated, the nihilists decide that Russia does not need the czarevitch either. Vera is assigned the nasty job of killing the czar's son.

According to Smith, Coral Potter played the role of Prince Paul with such exaggeration that he, Smith, enjoyed the vivid playing while at the same time disliking the overacting.

The (anonymous) writer from a journal called *Downtown Poets* apparently had read the play, calling it "contrived and melodramatic despite flashes of insight into the wit which would later develop." The critic called Coral Potter's interpretation of Prince Paul "bad beyond belief," which to the scholar was a shame insofar as Potter had Wilde's best lines. Citing the author's own line in the play, the critic advised the potential audience of Wilde's belief that "indifference is the revenge that the world takes on mediocrity."[62]

One work that Adamson loves is Anderson's *Winterset*, which she selected (for the second time) for presentation in May 1976--the theatre company's eighth that season. Despite her affection for the work, she made some radical cuts prior to its staging by the Cocteau, especially in the political aspects of the story--in order to focus on the human story.

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She recognized that it was no longer fashionable to like Anderson, but she has remained fond of his verse.[63] Craig Smith shares Adamson's love for the output of the American dramatist of the thirties, holding that *Winterset* is a play of great language, difficult to learn, and equally difficult to re-learn. Smith also knows the effort involved in learning the lines, and of the phenomenon of loss in recall that follows a three-months' gap between stagings of the Anderson play.[64] It took time to find an actress, Joan Grant, who would take a starring role in the Anderson work--which had been announced for the previous season but which, because of personnel difficulties, was not attempted until the 1975-1976 season. The play was not reviewed.

A staging in May 1976 of Ionesco's parable of fascism, *The Lesson*, completed a rather poor year for the Cocteau. The play centers on a lesson given by a professor to a young woman with an unrelieved toothache and, played appropriately, makes for a fine combination of farce and tragedy. Many feel that a director must avoid the temptation to direct the work in a camp style and that, in fact, all such farcical pieces should be presented in a straightforward style. Adamson, in Smith's opinion, departed from her rule of candid and forthright interpretation, and emphasized the broadly comic aspects too strongly. Critics generally agreed with Smith that Ionesco's play was done in an overwrought manner.[65]

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Sy Syna of radio station WNYC criticized Coral Potter's acting as overdone and Constance Stellas's as inept. While Potter was the senior actor with the organization, he had been the target of barbs from several reviewers and from some of his co-actors, for overemphasizing the melodramatic aspects of the plays in which he performed. Since Constance Stellas was performing in her first season as an actress, one can understand her less than ideal performance. Syna believed that an absurd piece of theatre must have believable characters with situations played as though they were perfectly real and reasonable, which Adamson's cast of three allegedly did not do. Syna found that James Payne, a charter member of the acting troupe who also designed the production, affected a falsetto voice but then, for no reason, lapsed back to his natural voice. Constance Stellas, playing the part of the pupil, was found wanting in talent, as in the critic's opinion she could not muster a single real moment during the entire play. Coral Potter's rendition of the role of professor was labeled as phony.[66]

Don Nelsen of the *New York Daily News* called the Ionesco production a B+ performance by the Cocteau. Unlike Syna, he found Coral Potter's interpretation of the professor quite natural.[67]

Dean Valery of the *SoHo Weekly News* took exception to both views, beckoning potential audiences to see as Coral Potter's acting as the high point of the presentation.[68]

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Coral Potter was under severe critical attack for years for what critics perceived as over-acting. He had generally been cast in bold and swashbuckling roles *because* of that trait, making Adamson reluctant to train him to modulate his performance. But whether playing the dashing hero of *The Count of Monte Cristo* or the tyrannical professor of *The Lesson*, he displayed a need to test the boundaries of ensemble playing and to be the center of attention whenever he appeared on stage.

Attendance during the 1975-76 season was 13,480, yielding box office revenue of $32,220. The company was encouraged by these figures, which represented an increase of about 34% over the previous year's attendance and a gain of approximately $11,000 over receipts acquired during the previous year. Two hundred thirty performances were given.

The first meeting of the board of trustees that season was held on 25 August 1975 and was attended by several actors, including Jere Jacob, Beverly Katz, James Payne, Coral Potter, and Craig Smith. Reports demonstrated that the company's marketing efforts were growing. A brochure was designed, to be sent to a mailing list of 100,000 people, a list constructed from various sources, such as exchanges with other theatres, book clubs, Channel 13, and list brokers. School groups would be invited to selected matinees as they had been the year before, and 4,000

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teachers would be notified of productions under consideration. The program received the name *Outreach*, and the trustees were to seek special funding so that tickets might be discounted. The theatre discovered that its most important mailing list was from the Theatre Development Fund. A public relations firm, Baird Associates, was hired to try to attract the attendance of women's groups, alumni organizations, singles clubs, and religious organizations in particular. The theatre designed its first sophisticated piece about the history, goals, and objectives of the company, which it was to use to attract individual and corporate contributions. A poster design was donated by a subscriber.[69]

The company continued to stage an average of seven or eight plays per season, enduring up to twenty hours a week of rehearsals and, in addition, attending workshops on acting, speech, dancing, and dueling. In addition to the rehearsals, company members were each spending ten or more hours in performance each week. All actors pursued outside employment to enable them to remain solvent. In addition, the making of costumes, the cleaning of the theatre, the taking of the tickets, and miscellaneous, mundane chores were performed by the company members, as the Cocteau could not afford to hire outside help. However, during the 1975-76 season, for the second consecutive year, company members received token payments for their efforts.[70]

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Despite hardships, the company had been able to attract 200 people yearly to its auditions, each understanding the required commitment of at least one year's work for the Cocteau if accepted. Adamson explained that this pledge was necessary if the company was to continue performing as a repertory, each actor taking roles in approximately five shows annually. Craig Smith believes that the theatre attracts actors who want to learn their craft and grow, and that since every actor performs a multiplicity of tasks, each member can learn the entire operation of the theatre.[71]

Occasionally a subscriber would ease the strain on the actors. Thomas Fuld recalled one such incident:

> Once during this 1975-1976 season we had two ladies, one named Lea, I forget the other, both subscribers from Queens who decided the actors needed to be fed better. They brought food in on Saturday nights to give to the actors. Lea would say to me, "You look too skinny." One woman said the stuff we were serving was terrible. The actors said better food was too expensive. The women said they would bake. So every Saturday night they baked brownies and cakes and cookies and during that time, the people who came to the Cocteau had the best baked goods of any theatre in town. This round of Saturday night parties lasted for a couple of years.[72]

Media interviews with Cocteau actors comprise an important segment of the theatre's public relations strategy. George Brunner was questioned for a feature article in *Flatbush Life* during the season. Brunner was described as a Brooklyn school teacher, at Junior High School 252 in East Flatbush, who graduated from City College at a time when graduates were being quickly drafted for the

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Vietnam War. Wanting to do something other than fight, Brunner joined VISTA. When his tour of duty with the domestic peace corps ended, he took some classes in acting at Brooklyn College. When asked to lose 35 pounds in order to play a role in an Indian Sanskrit drama, *The Little Clay Cart*, he exercised, dieted and lost every pound before opening night. When he joined the Cocteau company, he continued to teach in junior high school and used almost every hour of time off to act and to do the miscellaneous details at the theatre--cleaning up, putting sets together, and selling refreshments to spectators. He also participated in the rigorous training conducted by the theatre group. For example, he would arrive at eleven on Saturday mornings to take fencing lessons for two hours, and after an hour break, would return to clean the outside premises. Then he would rehearse for one of the plays in the repertory, after which, on Saturdays, he would perform in two shows, at 7:30 p.m. and at 10:30 p.m. Those not acting would sell tickets. In an interview with *Flatbush Life*, Brunner commented on Adamson's directing, as follows:

> I like the director of the Cocteau Players, Eve Adamson. Eve lets us develop characters. She steers us, but she doesn't tell us what to do. She encourages me to be subtle, which I appreciate. It's a fine experience, but I wish I were paid more for it. My salary is $10 for forty hours' work. Last month I got $40 for 160 hours of work. During intermissions I grade papers at the theatre.[73]

Brunner reported that he had no time to go around to agents to find a paying job in theater, and was prevented

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from doing so, anyway, since hunting for jobs in theatres is discouraged by the Cocteau, whose goal is to have actors grow together as an ensemble. However, in telling his interviewer that the Cocteau does not expect individuals to use the group as a stepping stone to a professional career, he may have exaggerated, since the company expects a commitment of only one year at a time, and recognizes the need--even the merit--of some turnover of actors, who leave for better-paying jobs in June of every year. Brunner was not timorous about stating that his ambition was to eat and sleep every once in a while. His other ambition was to play Claudius in *Hamlet* and the title character in Macbeth.

Requesting assistance from foundations, Adamson wrote a grant proposal announcing the intention of the company to grow during the 1975-1976 season, to keep the rotating repertory format and the resident company concept, and to try to raise the artistic quality of the productions. She noted that the student matinee series, begun as a pilot project during the 1974-75 season, had met with marked success, and would be expanded to twelve matinees annually. She promised the foundations to institute a fully researched and organized audience development program, and to reorganize the board of trustees so that it could assume more fundraising responsibilities.[74]

Adamson praised the landlord of her building for granting a generous rent concession during the first year of the

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lease on the Bouwerie Lane Theatre, but noted that beginning in September 1975, the rent would increase from $750 per month to $1,250. She added--perhaps to pay tribute to the owner of the property--that the theatre would probably generate rent of $500 per week if it were leased to a commercial concern. An examination of her statement on personnel indicated the burden on those who committed themselves to the ensemble.

> Members . . . spend a minimum of forty-five hours weekly rehearsing, performing, and participating in workshops. In addition they are collectively responsible for maintaining the physical plant, inside and out, and assisting with backstage and front-of-house activities. Their payment this season has been $40 or $50 per month, depending on seniority. (Some had been on this schedule since the company's inception in 1971.)[75]

Adamson asked for money to expand the Cocteau's promotion and audience development program--to include a subscription renewal drive, a subscription campaign, and the purchase of office equipment. The theatre's income from box office, concession, individual and corporate contributions during the 1975-76 season was $85,000, the most sizable donation being from the New York State Council on the Arts, which granted $28,000. The chief expense was $16,000, the funds paid to *all* the actors collectively. Adamson continued to get a salary of $3,900 as did Coral S. Potter in his role as administrator. James S. Payne received $2,600 as technical director, while Craig Smith received $1,300 for his services as company manager. On the payroll were four full-time

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people and eight part-time employees.[76]

While the Cocteau's expenses were increasing, the company was fortunate in having a reasonable monthly bill for rent, through the largesse of its landlord, Honey Waldman. At the same time box office receipts were increasing--a benefit enjoyed partly because the off-off-Broadway actors defeated a move by the actors' union, AEA, to require substantial wages for even the most spartan house. Also, NYSCA, on which the company depended for its largest benefits, awarded the theatre a rather substantial sum for the year.

Artistically, the Cocteau received a mixed reception from critics, and some journalists had no compunctions about demanding from the actors the same standards they required from the more professional troupes on Broadway. While Adamson introduced her public to neglected classics, she had not found a single work that could electrify the greater New York theatre community.

From time to time, amid an array of tepid and hostile reviews, one might encounter a statement from a critic to the effect that he was amazed at the fine quality and imaginative productions of theatres in the off-off-Broadway circuit. The (anonymous) reporter from the *Hunter College Envoy* essentially made this analogy: Off-off-Broadway houses are to Broadway theatres as revival cinema houses are to the movies. The favorite theatre of the journalist was the Cocteau, in whose productions he found a degree of

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professionalism difficult to exceed. He noted that tickets for students were inexpensive ($3.00 per ticket), and that the theatre often provided compelling drama.[77] Unfortunately for Eve Adamson and company, not all critics shared this view.

When the Vietnam War ended, many off-off-Broadway theatres with radical agendas closed. Television and movies were cutting into the business of live theatre, and only a handful remained in the Cocteau neighborhood: Still in operation were the Public Theatre, the Astor Place theatre, the New York Theatre Ensemble, the Truck and Warehouse Theatre, the Wonderhorse Theatre, La Mama, the National Arts Theatres I and II, and the Colonnades Theatre Lab. The area had fallen under a recent rezoning law, receiving the name NoHo (North of Houston Street and between Bowery and Broadway). The neighborhood had begun developing into an artists' community--although the immediate blocks surrounding the Cocteau remained a dismal zone of bars and hotels catering to derelicts and addicts. Six restaurants in the neighborhood catered to Cocteau audiences during the 1976-1977 season. These were Phebe's Place (which Craig Smith called the Sardi's of the downtown theatre community), The Tin Palace, Hisae's Place, McSorley's Old Ale House, The Colonnades, and Lady Astor's. An added attraction was the presence of jazz clubs on Bond Street. They were the Studio Rivbee, the Live Loft Jazz, and The Tin Palace. Further,

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the Amato Opera House was in operation across the street from the Cocteau, and four art galleries were in the immediate area. CBGB's provided its customers with the entertainment of rock groups. Craig Smith, in sending this information to several newspapers, aimed to counteract the unappealing connotation of the Bowery by suggesting entertainments that audiences could enjoy.[78]

To raise additional money--a perennial need given the hand-to-mouth nature of the company--the Cocteau held subscription parties regularly. The trustees' minutes of 20 October 1976 noted that one such party added 46 subscriptions and $345 in contributions, but the trustees felt that not nearly enough was raised. To help develop a greater audience, other techniques were used. Eighty thousand subscription brochures were mailed in October 1976, while Baird Associates (whose president was a regular subscriber) designed an mailer for church organizations, women's clubs, singles clubs and other groups. The theatre tested a "two-fer" program, designed by Baird Associates, distributing 10,000 coupons to book shops, college campuses, and sightseeing agencies. Coupon advertisements were put in some community newspapers. At the same time, foundations were asked to support various programs. The Billy Rose Foundation was asked to subsidize the school program, and groups like National Distillers and Chemical Foundation were asked to contribute. Trustees met with neighborhood

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businesses like Phebe's Restaurant, owned by Lester Nichols, to plan a campaign to coax more people to the area.[79]

Toward the close of the 1974-75 season, some theatres decided to combine forces to attract greater audiences. The Off-Off-Broadway Alliance (known as OOBA and founded in 1972), standardized some fiscal and audience-building procedures such as shared mailing lists, and publicized their membership in brochures distributed by the Theatre Development Fund.[80]

One dramatic example of such promotional activity took place in April 1975, when Broadway became a showcase for off-off-Broadway companies. Between noon and 1 P.M.. on 21 April, fifty entertainers representing forty off-off-Broadway playhouses gave samples of their wares at Duffy Square, between West 46th Street and West 47th Street, under the sponsorship of OOBA. Hundreds of people watched the events, in which four actors from the Cocteau--James S. Payne, Eric Goldscheider, Coral Potter, and Craig Smith--demonstrated dagger-and-sword fights behind the statue of George M. Cohan. They were roundly applauded, but one observer remarked that this was a typical, New York occurrence--just another knife fight.[81]

As the theatre entered its sixth season in August 1976, Craig Smith was concerned that with the growth in audience base achieved by the Cocteau, the selection of plays might become more conservative. Smith remarked:

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> Look at *Orphèe* by Cocteau and *Christopher Columbus* by Ghelderode and *Salomè* by Wilde and other things--look at *The Tragedy of Tragedies: The Life of Tom Thumb the Great* by Fielding. These are unusual choices of plays that are neglected today. Ghelderode is simply not done in this country. When you are new and young and have a small theatre you can take those chances. You have nothing to lose. As you age, the choices become more conservative.[82]

Adamson's choices for the 1976-77 season belied Smith's fears. Of the nine plays on the schedule, the majority were rarely performed. Some, like Pinter's *The Caretaker*, were well known, and one play in particular--Shelley's *The Cenci*--was to be produced by the Cocteau after having been performed in the United States only twice before.

Adamson launched the sixth season in an inspired mood. She had just returned from a vacation in Great Britain, where she met Terry Hands of the Royal Shakespeare Company and watched an enactment by the RSC of *Henry V*--which she hailed as the best piece of theatre she had ever seen. She spoke with Hands and saw some of the work at the National Theatre also. The experience enlarged her. She saw dramas done with the authority, adventure and tradition that her own theatre lacked. She had gained a larger artistic vision.[83]

For the season beginning in August 1976, Adamson scheduled presentations of these plays:

1976-1977

08/76-10/76	*The Lesson*	Eugène Ionesco
09/76-06/77	*Macbeth*	William Shakespeare
09/76-02/77	*Rhinoceros*	Eugène Ionesco
10/76-12/76	*Androcles & the Lion*	G.B. Shaw

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11/76-03/77	*The Caretaker*	Harold Pinter
01/77-06/77	*The Cenci*	Percy B. Shelley
03/77-06/77	*She Stoops to Conquer*	Oliver Goldsmith
04/77-06/77	*Salome*	Oscar Wilde
05/77-06/77	*The Brass Butterfly*	William Golding

Adamson began the season with a carry-over of a work done during the previous period: Ionesco's *The Lesson*. Sustaining one work from the previous season each year was to become a tradition with the company, not so much to cater to audience demand, but to help ease the enormous burden of staging seven, eight, or nine works per year. Craig Smith recalled Coral Potter in the role of the professor--a wonderful bit of casting, in his opinion. At the end of *The Lesson*, the director added a *coup d'thêâtre*: The maid entered wearing a swastika armband. Smith considered both the play and the Cocteau presentation superb.[84] No critics attended.

Macbeth was chosen by Adamson to be staged next, from September 1976 through June 1977, because of its reputation in attracting groups from high schools and colleges. (Many classes of high-school English are assigned works of Shakespeare, by teachers who appear to ignore works of other playwrights. Somehow the visceral dramas of Ionesco, Frisch, Williams and Miller, even Pinter and Euripides, are considered by most English departments to be beyond the pale for youth: Perhaps the faculty members are unaware of the existence of these playwrights or of the potential excitement their plays could generate for high-school

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students.) The Cocteau was committed both to catering to teachers attracted by productions of Shakespeare's plays and to broadening the horizons of educators by delivering presentations of works by others which might appeal to young audiences.

For the *Macbeth* production, a black actress was cast in the role of Lady Macbeth, a fortuitous decision, not only because her performance was considered by some in the company to be memorable, but also because a large percentage of the audience were African-American students, who were surprised by the non-traditional casting.

Harris Berlinsky recalled the staging, particularly the casting of Olivia Harper as the leading actress:

> She was very good--Olivia Harper was her name. Black and Puerto Rican kids liked what they saw--we rarely had trouble anyway with the city youngsters. We had more trouble with the ones from Jersey and the suburbs. I think that the New York kids appreciated what they saw.[85]

Berlinsky noted that the company never had a male black actor except on a "jobbed-in" basis. For the production of the play *Of Mice and Men* in 1987, Berlinsky recalled, a black actor was hired from the outside. Berlinsky explained that to employ a black actor for a single production, the company placed an ad a trade paper like *Back Stage,* advising what the company was seeking. He remembered attending one audition and judging that some black actors were good, some not.[86] Craig Smith recalled the casting of Tom Keever as Macbeth, with Olivia Harper as Lady Macbeth, a production

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in which Adamson eliminated the witches. Smith called Adamson's excision an inventive one, in that she did not simply exorcise the witches, but directed Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to communicate telepathically. Macbeth was portrayed as a hopeless alcoholic "swigging" from a bottle in a brown paper bag. Smith recalled that under the spotlight, Lady Macbeth looked as though she were *creating* the witches. (Keever was a designer and an actor who stayed with the company for two years, then did some work as technical director, returned to set design, and left. He returned from time to time; in fact, Keaver designed the set for the production of *The Prince of Homburg* in 1990.)[87]

The production of *Macbeth* received only sparse attendance by reviewers. Doris Cheng of *Inside Beat* magazine called this *Macbeth* "a corker of a play, having taken on a new significance through the direction of Eve Adamson." Cheng appreciated Adamson's attempts to comment on contemporary society, seeing Macbeth in terms of addiction: to power, to substances, and to people.[88]

Adamson did not invent the technique of making classics appear contemporary. Many directors try to update centuries-old dramas, believing that plays are written for their own time. One could cast witches as homeless women or do what Adamson did: She portrayed Macbeth as a lover of Thunderbird wine. Opponents of such directorial interventions insist that directors are thereby showing

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contempt for the writers, while advocates cheer the new relevance with which this tampering imbues a production. With high-school audiences, who are often not mature enough to appreciate a work in a remote historical setting, the latter course is considered acceptable by many teachers.

If *Macbeth* received too little press, Robert A. Smith, a subscriber tried to compensate. In a letter dated 11 October 1976, Mr. Smith stated:

> I was pleasantly surprised. I have been to a number of other repertory theaters and the quality of the acting left much to be desired. This was not the case with your company. I thought your production to be innovative and the acting of a high quality.
>
> I would like to make one suggestion. I felt that there was a weakness in the final scene. There is a tendency when there is fighting on stage for it to look artificial--almost like people playing at dueling. . . . Perhaps some means might be devised to make the final fight scene even more unreal. This would elevate the scene to operate on a symbollic [sic] level. Maybe use of the strobe light could achieve this effect. And when Macduff goes center stage holding Macbeth's head, which is so obviously artificial, the desired audience reaction is not achieved. Again, maybe going to the surreal rather than the real might improve this.
>
> Please do not think that all I have is criticism. I thought the parts of Lady Macbeth, Macbeth, and Macduff to be extremely powerful. I will definitely return in the future.[89]

Despite the high level of education of most Cocteau subscribers, correspondence such as this is rare. The writer had suggested improvements as a member of the theater community to improve stagecraft. Theatre companies often recommend that the critic's role be like that of the subscriber who is sincerely interested in helping--not as an

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adversary whose reputation seems elevated by his biting sarcasm.

Eugène Ionesco's broadsides against conformity were given a presentation in repertory from September 1976 through February 1977. Adamson chose to stage *Rhinoceros* because she wanted adequate representation of "modern classics" in the Cocteau production history, and had a fondness for some of the works of the absurdist playwrights. *Rhinoceros*, the company's third production of the 1976-77 season, is a work that some would present only on a large stage, as it involves hordes of people suddenly appearing as rhinoceroses bellowing and trampling through the streets of a small French town. The people are caught in the transformation until only one brave person defies the hysteria. The play had rambunctious action which, together with its large panorama, made it an unacceptable choice for the Cocteau, according to Smith, who had vague memories of the production. Smith was content with the acting, but felt that the epic qualities of the play could not be explored in a theatre whose stage required performers to tramp up and down the aisles frequently, breaking the proscenium arch. There were no reviews of the Ionesco production.

Androcles and the Lion is a play by Shaw that has been considered by some to be not one of the author's great ones. It has been taken as a lightweight, a fable--witty but too heavy on message. The Cocteau presented *Androcles* as its

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fourth production in October 1976, because Adamson appreciated the wit of the Irish writer and felt that *Androcles* had been insufficiently staged by New York theatres. This time, Coral Potter was recalled by both Adamson and Smith for a fine performance in the role of Caesar, neither overplaying nor pensive, but Smith was disappointed with the actors who "did not pull their weight," and was satsfied only with the performances of Potter and Olivia Harper (who played the role of Lavinia). According to Smith, Coral Potter gave his best performance to date in *Androcles and the Lion*.

One reviewer--Dean Valentine of *Our Town*--called Coral Potter the best comic actor he had seen in months.[90] In another review, Alexis Greene of the *Gramercy Herald* evoked the perennial criticism of the Cocteau performers by calling the company one that was replete with young actors of varying abilities. He faulted Eve Adamson for what he judged to be sluggish direction.[91]

Meanwhile Adamson was preparing to mount a production of another work by Pinter, one of Adamson's favorite writers. She chose *The Caretaker* to be the company's fifth production of the 1976-77 season beginning in November 1976 principally for the comedy that Pinter superimposed on a menacing, dark look at human motives.

Craig Smith played the role of Davies, while Coral Potter and James Payne interpreted the roles of Mick and Aston,

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respectively. The triumvirate of Potter, Payne, and Smith anchored many productions, and through their performances, they taught the younger members of the staff a good deal about acting.

According to Smith, Adamson played Pinter more for the humor than the symbolism, a wise choice since many directors treat writers like Pinter with a form of reverence that ossifies their productions. With the advantage of hindsight, Adamson concurred, stating that *The Caretaker* is about love and people more than about symbols. The artistic director did not recollect the details of the Cocteau production.[92] The *New York Times* carried a feature during the time in which *Caretaker* was staged, one which encouraged its readers to visit the theater.

> Theatergoers should not be put off by an image of derelicts and panhandlers in this section of Manhattan. One of its attractions is the Jean Cocteau Repertory Company . . . . Repertory companies are a rarity in this country . . . The Cocteau's current production of *The Caretaker* is an example of the company's devotion to unusual, serious theater.[93]

Emory Lewis in his review for *The* [New Jersey] *Record* praised Adamson for not ignoring the element of humor, and noted that past audiences have spent so much time looking for symbols that they failed to see delightful and abundant humor in Pinter's play. He agreed with Adamson that Pinter's work in not about intellectual abstractions but about real people. Emory Lewis called the Cocteau, "one of the best stage companies in Manhattan."[94]

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Lewis may have sensed that the Cocteau did have an unusually able company during that season--one reason that Adamson may have chosen the year 1977 to mount a staging of Shelley's *The Cenci*.

From the time Adamson moved the company one-half block to the Bouwerie Lane Theatre during the summer of 1974, there were no major turning points in the company's history. Reviews were mixed, and, like the guests in *Grand Hotel,* actors came, actors left. Adamson's staging of Shelley's *The Cenci* beginning in January 1977 was a turning point, for this sixth production of the season was apparently the third American staging. Despite its alluring scenes of incest, hatred, and violence, productions of Shelley's play were almost unknown in this country, having been staged once in a New York City theatre (by the Lenox Hill Players at the Lenox Little Theatre opening 21 May 1926) and once in a Pasadena, California playhouse--and was rarely produced even in Europe.[95] While a production of the work is no more difficult to undertake than much of the standard fare of theatre repertories, Adamson was looked on by the media and by mainstream theatergoers as having achieved a directoral coup. People bought tickets in record numbers, and the Cocteau was sold out for the duration of the engagement. Craig Smith recalled that this was a special time for the morale of the company. This staging of *The Cenci* was a

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breakthrough--there was a large story of the production in the Friday weekend *Times*. This had never happened before. Smith recalled that tickets were picked up so fast that the house sold out after the second performance. Smith found Shelley's language to be stunning and was aware of the need for a good woman to play the part of Beatrice Cenci.[96]

Adamson recalled at the time that she was still focusing on what would sell. She had to pay the rent at the Bouwerie Lane and to compensate the actors. She was confident that the play would be stageworthy, that it would work. She enjoyed posting the large *New York Times* feature article in addition to the review. She realized then that there was just no way to predict what would happen, so her philosophy remained to do what she believed in and let people come or not come.[97]

Part of the Adamson's problem in staging *The Cenci* is the alleged unstageworthiness of the play. Opinions varied from from those people who consider it nothing more than a dull, domestic quarrel, to those who believe that only a large-scale production would do it justice. Adamson could not overcome the first objection, and as for the second, her minimalist staging caused some audience members to wonder whether the work was anything more than a soap opera in a castle.[98]

Smith (who played the role of the priest Orsino) viewed the production as a commercial success, but was less

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confident about the artistic merits of the production. The presentation succeeded commercially, according to the actor, insofar as uptown, upper-middle-class crowds were drawn to the Bowery by features carried in the *New York Times*. Adamson directed the work with a kind of religiosity, a straightforwardness that treated Shelley with too much reverence, in Smith's view. While going to another extreme, i.e. giving a camp presentation, would be totally disastrous, the artistic director--in Smith's opinion--felt uncomfortable about making changes that would adapt the play to present-day pertinence and to the limitations of her stage. This production was a simple one, given the director's philosophy of minimalist production values, with credible acting by Craig Smith as Orsino and Donna Rowe as Beatrice. But Coral Potter overacted the evil role of Count Cenci, according to the judgment of some critics.

A critic for United Press International explained that the play is rarely seen and for good reason. He called the text a third-rate opera plot with no decent poetry. Yet he designated it an interesting sidelight to theatrical history, and for that reason he urged that his readers be thankful to the off-off-Broadway Jean Cocteau Repertory Company for giving them a chance to see it.[99]

Another reviewer agreed only in part. Thomas Lask of the *New York Times*, gave his views as follows:

> It is remarkably stageworthy, much more than we thought. Its dramatic structure is excellent. Shelley

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> did have a sense of advancing the action. It's a sensational story, but the story is wrapped up two-thirds of the way through, and then Shelley examines the issues in the plays, issues of domestic tyranny and, by extension, issues of papal and political tyranny.
>
> There are melodramatic elements in the play. The sense of excess is difficult for contemporary actors to believe in. The play transcends melodrama in the way in which it deals with the tyrannical authority of the father.[100]

In addition to the two *New York Times* features, that newspaper, whose drama criticism has usually been considered the most important barometer of box office success, assigned Richard Eder to review the production. Eder dealt with the question of why Shelley's work is so rarely performed by citing the Cocteau's own program notes. Victorian prudery made the play unpresentable both in its own time and in our own. While praising the performance of Donna Rowe as Beatrice Cenci, the staging of Eve Adamson, and the lighting of James Payne, the *Times* declared the production worthy, yet insufficient to bring out all the true strengths of the play. Eder would have preferred a staging by British director Peter Brook to bring out the absolute evil of Count Cenci, played with bare acceptability by Coral Potter (who seemed to him acceptable). Eder considered Potter as one who was able to spit out his undiluted venom without falling into exaggeration.[101]

Glenn Loney of *The Villager* shared Eder's feelings about the performances, particularly that of Donna Rowe as Beatrice, adding praise for Craig Smith's job as Orsino; he

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shared Eve Adamson's philosophy of minimalism by calling this *Cenci* one "touched with the virtue of simplicity."[102]

The reviewer for *Mandate* differed with Loney and found common ground with Eder. He called the Cocteau's presentation inadequate for a play that needed big-budget extravaganza, something beyond the Cocteau Rep's resources "whose limitations do not allow for opulence of production." Like Eder and Loney, though, he had little but praise for Donna Rowe as Beatrice, but found that the rest of the cast (excluding Craig Smith who, he felt, performed the part of Orsino well) were too young to portray these Renaissance scoundrels convincingly. Coral Potter came under heavy attack for his enduring flaw, overacting, for being one who, in that critic's opinion, "mistakes posturing for dramatic acting." For *Mandate* magazine, every gesture of Potter looked learned and unnatural, every intonation appeared melodramatically acted.[103]

David Bakish, reviewer for the Cable TV "Peter Abel Show," went to the Cocteau to see a rarely performed work of some historical significance, assessing it as one that is so rarely performed that he might never see it again in his lifetime. Apparently that critic required comic dessert with his tragic entrée, as he sat in the Cocteau preoccupied with his watch. Like the other critics, he commended the Cocteau for its bravery in staging the play, though he found fault, as so many other critics did, with the impoverished-

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looking set.[104]

Sharing the television reviewer's indifference to Shelley's drama, Richard Gottlieb of the *SoHo Weekly News* called the Shelley's tale of revenge not worth the effort to produce. Gottlieb looked at the company's performance as a whole, calling it a considerable improvement over that of previous years, but still flat-footed and unimaginative. She faulted Eve Adamson for not reshaping the play, but rather giving the script what he called straight-faced piety.[105]

Ed Moran of the *New York Theatre Review* differed with Gottlieb, finding in the show some welcome humor, particularly when Count Cenci dismisses the entire business as a dull domestic quarrel. Unlike Gottlieb, he found Coral Potter statuesque and frightening and always impressive. He called the Cocteau a fine ensemble.[106]

For the sixth production, which was launched in March 1977, Adamson staged *She Stoops to Conquer*, a comedy by Oliver Goldsmith. It was remembered by Craig Smith as a play that seemed too slight, somehow not connecting with the audience, but he did praise the final tableau which showed the events of the night completely corrected.[107] No critics attended.

Having been successful with a presentation of Wilde's *Salomè* during her first season, though somewhat less so with that writer's *Vera*, Adamson repeated the former work and

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staged it as her eighth production from April to June 1977, though she and Craig Smith recall nothing from the run of the show; nor did any critics attend.

As if a balance to the season were needed after the presentations of *The Cenci*, Adamson's final thrust was a production of Golding's *The Brass Butterly* in May 1977, which Craig Smith called a sweet and gentle story about another Caesar as he runs into the passage of time, preparing to give up his reign and become an inventor of the steamship and pressure cooker. (The play was staged once before in New York City, by the Chelsea Theatre Center at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, opening 30 January 1970.)[108]

(*The Brass Butterly* was, according to Craig Smith, an enjoyable production, and he recalled a situation that occurred because of the impetuousness of an actor, Charles Stanley, who played a major role in Golding's work. One day he left the building fifteen minutes before he was to go on stage--he came in at 7 for a 7:30 show and quit on the spot: He felt he had some justifiable cause. Smith interpreted such histrionics as part of the game of dealing with people's emotions in the theatre world, where feelings are often on edge. Smith chased Stanley around the theater threatening to make sure he would never work off-off Broadway again, but his entreaties were to no avail. Smith then donned the costume of a Roman soldier, surprised by the almost perfect fit. He carried the book with him onto the

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stage and later took part in the second show, *Salomé*, as a non-speaking guard, a spearholder. He was not confident that he could do the required acting at such short notice, but his adrenalin was flowing and somehow he missed no lines.

Smith believes that some people have a talent for script reading, especially the younger actors--something to do with brain cells, according to Smith, who added, "Young people can memorize things fast." Smith agreed he could do more in that area when he was 25, but now he finds the task more difficult. The actor believes that in the early years of the theatre, people were mismanaged sometimes, but that no one had a rule book on how to run a rotating repertory company on a few dollars a year.)[109]

Emory Lewis, who by this time had been reviewing at the Bouwerie Lane with some regularity, found *The Brass Butterfly* to be a thinking man's comedy about history, a good production but not great, with direction by Eve Adamsom that was crisp and laudable, the cast capable. In fact Lewis considered the Cocteau one of the most provocative and distinguished acting troupes in New York, and named Douglas McKeown (who played the role of the emperor) "one of New York's most exciting performers."[110]

Joan Stern advised further editing (a skill for which Eve Adamson was praised by trustee James Nichols), but like Lewis, Stern praised the acting of Douglas McKeown who

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"seems to be one who can transform himself in every utterance."[111]

During the season, some disagreements arose between the artistic director and the board of trustees. At the time Adamson was ready to stage Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, Thomas Fuld was reaching the end of his patience. He represented a faction that wanted the artistic director to mount more commercial plays in that such an accent would probably increase the audience base and supply the added money that the company would need to survive. By the time the season ended, though, the trustee was ashamed of his views, and reconciled to the Cocteau vision of emphasizing neglected classics. Fuld remembered this:

> I saw *Rhinoceros*. I watched Coral Potter resisting what was happening; I remember him clearly in that, and in the Russian plays he was strong. But by the time *The Cenci* was to be staged, I said to Eve, "What the hell are you doing here? The board never heard of it!" But she wanted to do the shows she believed in. Well, it got the best reviews of the season, all that publicity considering all the violence in it. That was a wonderful season. *Macbeth, The Lesson, Rhinoceros*. I did not like *Androcles*, that was the weakest, probably put on to bring audiences in, it was a known play. That was always the argument on the board, to put on known plays.
>
> I'm in advertising. Should you put on a play known by the audience like Shakespeare's, or like Shaw's more popular writings? Androcles was put on to bring in the people but it was the weakest, as I said. I'm guilty like the others on the Board. I said let's put on popular plays, but the one that brought 'em in was the most unknown of all.[112]

Fuld alluded to his error in opposing a staging of

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Shelley's *The Cenci*, which turned out to be the play that finally "put the company on the map." Strangely enough, *Androcles and the Lion*, staged to bring in the crowds, was poorly received, while *The Cenci* brought in people living on Manhattan's affluent Upper East Side neighborhoods--who wanted to see a work staged in this country only once before.

During the 1976-77 season, James Payne, who had been a founder along with Adamson, left the theatre. According to James Nichols, trustee, and to Craig Smith as well, Payne and Adamson had shared an apartment during the former's years as designer and actor at the Cocteau. (When Smith began his career with the company, he had joined a nucleus made up of Adamson, Payne, Coral Potter, and Carmen Finestra.) After Adamson and Payne drew apart, both remained for the season, a difficult time for the Cocteau family. Payne left at the end of the season and moved to Nebraska.[113]

During that particularly dramatic season of 1976-77, one in which the company boldly presented *The Cenci*, Eve Adamson was paid no more than she was during the last three seasons--$3,900, while Coral Potter's $3,900 was deferred for budgetary reasons. As general manager Craig Smith received $3,800. James Payne, the technical director (as well as actor), was paid $2,600. Three full-time employees were on the payroll; ten were part-time employees. Over

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thirteen thousand tickets were sold, to yield an earned income of $32,000, about the same sum as had been received during the previous season.[114]

The trustees, meeting in July of 1977, discussed the need to redecorate the outside of the theatre, a project which would require the consent of Honey Waldman, the landlord. The trustees were informed that two guest directors would be used for the forthcoming season, Chris Martin of the CSC and Martin Reymert, who would direct Ibsen's *Love's Comedy*.

Adamson, expecting attrition among actors forced to look elsewhere for more money, is not now aware of the current activities of most former Cocteau members. She conjectured that some work in professional theatre, some left theatre altogether, another one or two became nuns. She is convinced that she learned how to build a company and establish proper relationships by 1978. But she was dismayed at losing more actors than she has kept. During the 1977-78 season, though, she began to keep more than she lost. She admits that in the beginning, she did not always know how to manage people effectively. Her expertise was her familiarity with plays. (That aspect of her personality--the artistic side which she cherished over the commercial necessities--eventually led, in part, to her resignation in 1989.)[115]

Adamson visited England during the summer of 1977, and thereafter went to other parts of Europe. She was surprised

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to find out the way theatres were run in the rest of the world. She observed that the resident companies and rotating repertories were more plentiful in Europe, as the citizens there had a greater commitment to the system. She learned that every European country respects artists more than the U.S. (Now there is a playwright, Vaclav Havel of Czechoslovakia, who is president of his country.)[116]

During the 1977-1978 season the Cocteau presented eight works amid a background of theatre activity in New York City. Despite coolness from critics and higher prices than ever, Broadway audiences were at levels matched only once before in history. Actors' Equity again tried to ratify a new pay scale for off-off-Broadway performers, imposing financial conditions which off-off-Broadway producers warned would kill the small theatres.[117]

By the end of the 1977-1978 season, despite the near-poverty of many off-off-Broadway theatres, Broadway houses had taken in more money than ever before, with a total audience that exceeded that of any other. The high cash intake was attributed to the ever-increasing prices for tickets. Yet none of the new musicals was unanimously acclaimed by critics, and not one of the straight plays was a major success at the box office. Also, none of the musicals that opened achieved the success enjoyed by *A Chorus Line* and *Annie*. Proceeds from ticket sales to

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Broadway productions were $114 million, $21 million more than the intake during the 1976-77 season. Total paid attendance reached 9.6 million.[118]

Nor was off-off-Broadway suffering from a shortage of audiences. Glenne Currie, UPI Arts Editor, reported in the *Youngstown Vindicator* that these small theatres--many housed in uncomfortable garages and lofts, some excruciatingly bad in every respect including the presence of cockroaches, some unable to advertise except by handbill--should be a never-never-land for most visitors to New York. He recommended just a handful of these enterprises, including the Light Opera of Manhattan and the Cocteau. The latter, now in its seventh season, had what he considered to be caliber of acting that was not high but improving. The company was recommended for people who wanted to see unfamiliar plays in repertory. According to Currie, the best actors in the repertory company were Harris Berlinsky, Michele Farr, and Craig Smith[119]

Hoping for her theatre to exploit the general prosperity of New York stages, Adamson mounted eight plays during the company's seventh season. They were:

1977-1978

08/77-10/77	*The Caretaker*	Harold Pinter
11/77-06/78	*The Cocktail Party*	T.S. Eliot
10/77-01/78	*A New Way to Pay Old Debts*	Philip Massinger
12/77-02/78	*Love's Comedy*	Henrik Ibsen
01/78-06/78	*Hamlet*	W. Shakespeare
02/78-06/78	*No Exit*	Jean-Paul Sartre

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03/78-06/78	*Volpone*	Ben Jonson
04/78-06/78	*'Tis Pity She's a Whore*	John Ford

In August 1977 Adamson once again staged Pinter's *The Caretaker* as the company's first production, a holdover from the previous season. She wanted to give the actors an opportunity to become more accustomed to the play, and believed that selected twentieth century works deserved exposure as modern classics. Craig Smith recalled his experience with the work during its second run as a production breakthrough for him--the first time he played a character role. Smith, then one of the older actors of the company (though he was only thirty), believed that the company would do well to have some older performers as they have "more soulful character." According to Smith, "older people have an inner dialogue as they have had greater life experiences, had been around the block, had lived." (Later, Smith balanced his view by advocating a 25 percent turnover yearly to bring new, young people into the ensemble and provide new energy.)[120] Adamson noted that in *The Caretaker,* Craig Smith played his first major character role.[121]

Thomas Fuld recalled his experience with the production of *The Caretaker:*

> I was house manager on Saturday nights that season. You would hear wonderful things from the audience. Many people were confused; they did not understand this play. People who understood it best were the older people. They had a clear understanding of the play. One night some college kids were walking up the aisle going on with "I don't know what that meant. What was that about?" They were going back and forth

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> with their discussion. A man clearly in his seventies said, "It is simple: Don't bite the hand that feeds you." He walked back out and they said, "Oh, that was what it was about!"
>
> I love the audience involvement. We succeeded most when we had audiences say they did not know what it was about--maybe about this, then again maybe about that. Or when they disagreed on what they liked. One would say it's awful, the others that it was great. It was interesting to see.[122]

More reviews were published for the second staging of Pinter than for the previous season's presentation. Stan Rutman of *Our Town* devoted half of a 700-word review to a summary of the play, calling the Cocteau's performance impressive. He was entranced by the way the many pauses, rapid interjections, and precise repetition required by Pinter were almost never flubbed. He appreciated the true ensemble acting, the collective timing of Craig Smith, Coral Potter, and James Payne, and felt that Eve Adamson's direction was on the same high level. All the subtlety and rich menace of Pinter's work was captured for that critic in the production. Coral Potter was faulted, though; this time his enactment of the role of Mick appeared unvaryingly stiff and overweening. Rutman enjoyed Craig Smith's portrayal of an old man, but could not forget that the actor was a young man.[123]

Adamson staged Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* beginning in November 1977 as the Cocteau's second production of the 1977-78 season. While the director was fascinated by the subtleties of the drama, Smith did not agree with the

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choice, considering *The Cocktail Party* to be unsuited for the stage. Smith noted that the company staged the play again two seasons later and that the house sold out its seats both times. Smith played Alex, the old fellow in the play, while Coral Potter was in the role of the psychiatrist. Steve Randolph took the role of the husband.[124]

Like Smith, Thomas Fuld did not approve of the choice of *The Cocktail Party*, and he communicated his disfavor to Adamson. While Fuld liked some plays better than others that season, he found the Eliot production too long. He thought she should have staged it over two nights, particularly since the television audience had become used to the miniseries idea of coming back the next night. But Fuld welcomed Adamson's decision to present the play in a thoroughly straightforward manner, treating the characters like real human beings. The trustee, who is devoted to the theatre and knowledgable about it, believed that Adamson could have portrayed characters like Julia Shuttlethwaite in a cartoonish manner, but chose wisely to have Michele Farr enact the character squarely. He enjoyed the performances of Steve Randolph as Edward Chamberlayne and Amy K. Posner as Lavinia Chamberlayne.[125] Fuld did not address himself to the belief that theatres should take a contrarian stance, performing for their audiences those works which television companies avoided.

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Judy Thrall, purportedly reviewing the Eliot production for *The Villager*, instead "reviewed" the two cats belonging to the Cocteau theatre which she considered to be symbols of T. S. Eliot's "Gus: The Theatre Cat."

> Living at the Cocteau are Rosencrantz and Guildentern. Rosencrantz, who is black with white marking, was appropriately enough born at the Theatre for the New City and taken in by Adamson because someone in the company saw a mouse. Rosencrantz, a big tough male alter, has since kept the rodents in the Bouwerie Lane Theatre down to zero population growth.
> In 1976 Guildenstern was rescued in front of the theatre from a moat caused by foul weather. They are fed by whoever arrives at the theatre first . . . and are given free reign of the premises but locked in the basement during performances. One time during a show, however, Rosencrantz got out somehow and was finally grabbed by Craig, just under the stage.[126]

The play is often considered to be a period piece, and for that reason, Adamson chose not to allot to it the number of performances that a fine verse comedy might deserve.

With its third production (from October 1977 through January 1978), *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, Adamson proved once again the authenticity of her mission of bringing back neglected classics. Most patrons of classical theatre had heard of the previous work by T. S. Eliot, but few were familiar with the Phillip Massinger drama. The author, who modeled his comedy after Thomas Middleton's *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, displayed an ability to create powerful central characters, i.e. Sir Giles Overreach and Luke Frugal--men of huge appetites. According to Brander Matthews, it was the only drama by an Elizabethan or Jacobean playwright--

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excepting only Shakespeare's--which held the stage until the final quarter of the 19th century. In Matthews's recollection, actors loved it. David Garrick did not perform in it, but he revived it at the Drury Lane theater in the middle of the 18th century. Kemble, Kean, Junius Brutus Booth, Edwin Booth and a host of lesser-known actors played in it. E. L. Davenport appeared in it 500 times. Christopher Martin, who directed the production, told Adamson that the play is one of the few classical plays with a melodramatic framework, written in iambic pentameter but with a prose-like directness.

One does not expect trustees of a company like the Cocteau to be as conversant as the artistic staff with the chosen plays, but Craig Smith recalled that a trustee asked him what the first effort of the new season would be. "*A New Way to Pay Old Debts*," was the actor's response, to which the trustee assured him, "We can talk about money later."[127]

This case of life's following art shows more than a simple misunderstanding between actor and businessman. If the trustee did not immediately grasp the answer, perhaps the reason is that Massinger's work was simply not performed in New York for a century. But up to that time it had been one of the more enduring of Elizabethan plays. Smith felt that the Cocteau production looked good, had bold prosecution and was cripsly done; yet, he conceded that the

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reviews were not favorable.[128] If one considered the evidence of critics in forming an overview of this production, one would be bemused by the division between those writers who considered Coral Potter's acting overdone and those who felt his performance was too subtle.

C. Lee Jenner of *The Villager* rejected the company's interpretation under the direction of CSC's Chris Martin as sterile, stylish and brisk. Expertly doffed caps and twirled capes were called inadequate substitutions for motivated behavior. She labeled the play a sleeper and scored the overdirection, asking for a return of Eve Adamson to the podium.[129]

Neglected as this work may be for Americans, Allan Wallach reminded his readers of *Newsday* that *A New Way* was the play most often revived in its period other than those of Shakespeare, but conceded that it had not been seen in New York since the 1870s when E.L. Davenport and Edwin Booth played in it. Wallach would have preferred a more stylish production and congratulated the Cocteau for bringing it to a New York stage. Wallach pointed out that running on Broadway at the same as *New Way* was an adaptation of Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, entitled *Sly Fox*, and that audience delight in that work suggested that today's theatergoers find the same things funny as did the Jonsonian audiences. Wallach believed that the Cocteau players brought out the malevolence which Massinger mirrored in his work, but he had

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mixed feelings about the swift pacing of guest director Christopher Martin which, in his opinion, "led to a bland playing of roles." Like other critics, he praised Michele Farr while he censured Coral Potter for overdoing his role.[130]

Emory Lewis, writing for New Jersey's *Record*, reviewed the Massinger work and called the Cocteau one of the best repertory troupes in the nation. He praised the company for recruiting what in his view was a "first-rate band of actors who can work together with finesse and who have achieved an ensemble feeling." He had special commendations for the four senior actors of the band; Craig Smith, Coral Potter, Harris Berlinsky, and James S. Payne.[131] Brian Gygi of *The Columbia* (University) *Daily Spectator,* noted that the costumes were from the Revolutionary War period, giving the play a different set of associations from those of the Elizabethan theatre. He called the Cocteau's production underdone, the reverse of what it is usually accused of, and thought that even Coral Potter performed the role of Sir Giles Overreach with too much subtlety.[132]

Julius Novick of the *Village Voice* did not agree with the other critics that Massinger deserved a revival. For Novick, the play was a compound of tiresome comedy and crude melodrama that survived on the strength of its villain, Sir Giles Overreach. He rejected as well the Cocteau's interpretation, in which Coral Potter played Overreach with

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inflections and gestures that Novick thought derived equally from Gilbert and Sullivan operettas and horror-movie parodies. Potter, according to the reviewer from the *Voice*, played the role as though Overreach were not a true villain but were only an animated scarecrow, with a total absence of real ferocity or real intensity. Other performers, according to Novick, substituted attitudes for performances, while the remainder had absolutely nothing to offer. But Novick was pleased that the play was able to stand up better to unskilled acting than some worthier plays might.[133] (Novick's unfavorable review was yet another in what would be a steady train of negativism by the *Village Voice*, although the *Voice* did favor the Cocteau with several positive reviews in later seasons.)

Hoping to fare better with a production of a play by Ibsen than with a staging of the Massinger work, Adamson presented for the Cocteau's fourth play (in December, 1977), a comedy by the Norwegian, *Love's Comedy*, a rarely-staged work in couplets. (There is no record of any other staging of this play in New York City.)[134] She stated that she was tempted to try a production of *Hedda Gabler*, but that she considered the more obscure work a particular challenge. Ibsen's verse play aimed at social criticism; in fact its reflections on marriage drew indignation from the Norwegian public. Smith pronounced the play unworkable for the company, and admitted that the Cocteau did not do the

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Norwegian comedy well. He suggested a need for better comic actors, maybe a more mature approach.[135] Harris Berlinsky, who had recently joined the company, recalled that "in this Ibsen work if you drop a line you are lost." He did forget part of the script, and lapsed into "Norwegian" (actually gibberish) whenever that happened.[136]

Despite Smith's melancholy view of the 1978 production, Tish Dace, reviewing for *SoHo Weekly News*, found Berlinsky's performance as the merchant Gulstad to be strong, while those of Andy MacCracken as Falk and Michele Farr as Svanhild were judged inexperienced.[137]

Adamson felt that after doing three neglected classics and one reasonably well-known one, the season needed a crowd-pleaser that would boost revenue, particularly by providing an important drama for the school matinee series. Shakespearean plays had been the reliable choice for such purposes before, and since Shakespeare's writings were most-often demanded by teachers, Eve Adamson complied with the popular will.

Thus *Hamlet* was offered as the fourth play of the season, beginning in January 1978, and directed particularly at school audiences. Harris Berlinsky remembered one minor disturbance, and it was on the stage and not, contrary to expectations, in the matinee audiences. During one performance, someone forgot to carry the poison to Gertrude, so Barbara Schofield, improvising for a moment in that role,

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feigned a heart attack instead of taking poison. (This incident reminded Berlinsky of a like situation, in which during a production of Sheridan's *The Rivals* [1986-87], a member of the audience had a heart attack. All performers just stopped what they were doing and stared out. They just watched. And when the man reached the lobby they resumed.)[138]

Adamson recalled that since the presentation of *The Cenci*, there was no offering which gave the Cocteau a really solid, financial take-off point. This mounting of *Hamlet*, fortunately, provided a sizable jump in receipts. Many schools received allotments of money to be used for theatre visits at this time, and for twelve weeks the theatre offered productions of *Hamlet* three times per week.[139]

Craig Smith saw the production as one that encouraged him to study the Guinness Book. He imagined that he played the title character 150-200 times. *Hamlet* produced revenue for the theatre beyond expectations because of successful marketing during the high-school matinee series.[140]

Adamson pointed out a problem with the scheduling of the matinee. The actors had to be free to perform three times a week. In 1990 the roster would include just five plays per year). They were performing *Hamlet* Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. The actors needed flexibility in their day jobs. Adamson did not have time to take trips or do anything for herself. Often she sold tickets, then

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crossed over and ran the lights. She was determined not to build anything for *Hamlet* that she could not move herself.[141]

One member of the audience recalled Smith's portrayal of the title figure and, for that matter, the entire production at the Cocteau. Dr. Virginia Miles's letter to Craig Smith, dated 16 September 1982, indicated the quality of the company as seen through that production. She wrote that she and her family "were wishing you were on the stage the other night instead of Christopher Walken at Stratford, where we went to see *Hamlet*. It was unbearably awful." The doctor objected to the directorial changes by Peter Coe, calling him another of these egotistical people who think they can improve on Shakespeare.[142]

Mel Gussow, a theatre critic for the *New York Times*, devoted a feature to his view of high-school audiences. He noted that on the day he attended, 150 students from Farmingdale High School and Baldwin High School and the Benedictine Academy (Elizabeth, N.J.) were in the theatre. This was to be their first brush with Shakespeare in performance. Some went to the delicatessen next door for soda, pretzels, cake, sandwiches, and even in one case, a container of yogurt. While the youngsters were buying food during intermission, a teacher from Farmingdale explained that the group would go for lunch in Chinatown after the show. Despite the students' noisy alimentation (they were warned at the beginning not to eat in the theatre), they

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seemed attentive and were in some ways like a prototypical Shakespearean audience--informal and responsive almost to the point of being participatory. Craig Smith's line "Oh, what an ass am I" was greeted with loud laughter.[143]

When the company invited the critics to the next production, at least one thought that Adamson chose Sartre's *No Exit*, a play about Hell, because of the theatre's location on the Bowery. If *No Exit* was really a dated, pessimistic work as Gary Griffin of *The Villager* believed, why was it chosen?[144]

The evidence from the critics and from one Cocteau actor indicated that the presentation of *No Exit* was received well and that the acting was more than adequate to realize Sartre's work.

Craig Smith recalled that Tom Keever gave a polished production as the valet, that Amy Posner was a credible Inez, portraying all the woman's maliciousness effectively, and that despite the theatre's minimalist production values, Barbara Schofield looked every bit the perfectly attired Estelle.[145] Thomas Fuld conceded that Potter was guilty of posturing instead of acting, using flamboyant gestures and eye-rolling as a substitute for characterization.[146]

Thom Calandra of *The* [Kingsboro College] *Kingsman* was grateful that the Cocteau did not present the characters in *No Exit* in a camp style, but rather in a way that was thoughtful.[147] Christopher Sharp of *Women's Wear Daily*

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praised Coral Potter calling him fine, and even had a good word for the physical layout of the theatre, which he called one of the most comfortable and one of the best maintained off-off-Broadway theatres.[148]

For the penultimate presentation--of Ben Jonson's *Volpone* beginning in May 1978--Adamson explained her choice as one dictated by her desire to show her audience a type of humor almost unknown on the television screen: a mordant comedy. Adamson defined this as a work which drew its humor from denunciations of specific groups in the society rather than from a series of silly situations.

Smith considered his role as Mosca a fulfilling one, which in which he was free to invent gestures provided that he restrained himself when the character seemed to deteriorate into caricature. Smith also did not consider the sparseness of the production a deterrent to audience enjoyment, since he felt the Cocteau patrons were pleased to enjoy Jonson's verse.

In his review for the *New York Times*--the only critical notice on record--Thomas Lask revealed that he was particularly taken with Harris Berlinsky's portrayal of the dodering Corbaccio. Lask called the Cocteau "a good place to hear *Volpone*."[149]

The final production, Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, opened in April rather in May. This was the "free event for subscribers" for which the Cocteau was now known; reviewers

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have generally ignored the theatre's "extra" presentation, considering it as one that probably suffers from inadequate rehearsal time.

'Tis Pity, like *The Cenci*, is a shocking play even by modern standards, in that Ford portrays the incestuous relationship between two siblings, Giovanni and Annabella, as purer than those of the other people who formed their society.

Eve Adamson, in a press release dated May 1978, described the Cocteau as not a showcase theatre, not one that attempts to move plays to Broadway, but rather as a group evolving into a repertory company that could become the idea of a national company. At the time of the interview, the Vivian Beaumont theatre in Lincoln Center had shut down, leading to a number of calls and requests by Beaumont theater subscribers. Craig Smith added some commentary to the release, recalling this audience to be searching for plays they think they would like to see, and evidently thinking the Cocteau company can satisfy that need.[150]

Reporting for *The Villager*, Bruce Adgate recalled that three years earlier, the Bouwerie Lane Theatre was often empty. Now things had changed for the better. But he was concerned about the number of works executed each year, estimating that "packing this much into one season demonstrates considerable ambition, but little wisdom." As he viewed the roster of plays, he judged that actors would

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have little opportunity to study their roles, create characters or uncover what it is the plays are trying to say. The results could be disastrous, with the actors doing little other than reciting their lines--rarely listening to, much less reacting to one another. This kind of mechanical performing would give theatre a bad name. He would prefer that a company do only one show a season if that would improve the acting.[151]

Having enjoyed another basically successful season, the Cocteau described itself in some new ways in its yearly application for funding. Redefinition was the watchword that year. Having achieved the establishment of a rotating classical repertory with a resident company, Adamson continued her focus on providing a unique experience for New Yorkers. She declared that her audience was divided broadly into two groups. The first half is composed of New York's theatergoing public, a heterogeneous and demanding group. And since the larger institutions were turning more and more to revivals of well-known classics, the function of the Cocteau would be one of providing the public with those rarely performed classics that may be seen only once in a generation of perhaps in a lifetime. Her aim was to continue choosing much of the repertory from neglected but important theatrical works. Adamson described the types of audiences that came to the Cocteau that season as "everyone from Ph.D.'s to milkmen."

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Adamson considered the second part of her audience to be high school and college students who cannot afford to attend Broadway or the larger institutional theatres. These students needed to see the works they study come to life on the stage, and their growing attendance over the past few seasons had demonstrated the fact that the Cocteau has served that need.[152]

Adamson received a modest increase in salary during the 1977-78 season, to $4600, while Coral Potter, as administrative director, received $1,600. As general manager, Craig Smith received $3,900 while Victoria Rose, the adminstrative assistant received $2,300 and Tom Keever, the technical director, got $4,070. Box office receipts were $40,000, up from $32,000 the previous year. Attendance for the year was 19,700, up from 11,477 the previous year. The increase in audience size was explained as a result of the successful implementation of the activities listed in the NYSCA application--a one hundred percent increase in subscriptions. But Adamson was disturbed that unearned income had not taken the same jump. This problem she attributed to the NEA's ignoring of the theatre for a number of years, but reported that steps have been taken to overcome the obstacle. Most important, the board of trustees had evolved from an intimate group of friends of the theatre to a self-determined body learning to take its fiscal responsibilities seriously, which, in Adamson's view

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was a slow and painful process, but not an uncommon one in the growth of arts organizations.[153]

Craig Smith considered the year a particularly good one, as well he might, given the doubling of the subscription base. He elaborated on the season as follows:

> Eve was influenced by the production of *Henry V* that she saw in London with the RSC. This influenced her selection of costume material [for *Volpone*]--she was impressed by Farah, who designed for *Henry V* in England. We did big swooping gold curtains, red on one side and bright metallic gold on the other. When Volpone would say, "Good morning to the world and good morning to my robe," the robe would come down glittering. We were now moving to a kind of simple sophistication. *Volpone* was a fun play.
>
> But *A New Way to Play Old Debts* was convoluted. It takes tremendous concentration to get action out of that play since Massinger is not as good a writer as Ben Jonson or, of course, Shakespeare.
>
> When we do a play like *A Cocktail Party* or *'Tis Pity* with difficult language, we spend much time with the text, everyone reading and thinking, "What does this passage mean?"
>
> You should stay some time for the symposium we have after certain performances. The audience show sophistication; most of them are college grads. You can tell during the performance if the audience is getting the jokes. They chuckle where they are supposed to chuckle. You make some adjustments if you are not reaching them; we make subtle changes from day to day.[154]

There was cause for optimism by the Cocteau players at the end of the seventh season, four of which they had performed in the Bouwerie Lane Theatre. With the need to boost ticket sales to fill a hall three times the size of their original storefront at 43 Bond Street, they were encouraged by box office figures. The 1977-78 season

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brought the company a growth in receipts from the previous year's, and there was hope that the National Endowment for the Arts, which had ignored Cocteau applications for funding in the past, would take cognizance of the existence of the theatre with its almost unique vision, or mission.

On a more mixed note, the quality of the acting ensemble had always been uneven (as it would be at least through 1990). Turnover among the acting company was large, often as much as fifty percent annually, with the younger performers eschewing the admittedly low compensation and moving on to other opportunities. Craig Smith, Coral Potter, and Harris Berlinsky were to remain with the company to the present, Mr. Potter dying prematurely in 1990 at the age of 49. But Ms. Adamson could not hope for a uniformly polished cast unless she could solve the omnipresent dilemma: a shortage of funds.

Despite the inability of the theatre to pay wages sufficient for actors to survive without holding other jobs, actors could look forward to high-level training while they were with the company, and given the occasional visits by critics from the *New York Times* and the more frequent visits by reviewers from other journals, the performers could hope for eventual discovery by more affluent employers or, at any rate, could include favorable reviews in their résumés.

During the four seasons 1974-1978, the Cocteau mounted presentations of works, most of which were unfamiliar in our

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country. Stagings included well-regarded dramas of Shakespeare (five in all), Jonson, Pinter, Goldsmith, and Sartre, together with less-conventional works by Ibsen, Brecht, Anderson, Wilde, O'Neill, McKeown, Pinter, Ionesco, Ford, Williams, Molière, Massinger, and Shaw.

Only one musical was attempted, that being an adaptation of Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo* by a member of the Cocteau acting troupe. Comedies shared the repertoire about equally with more serious drama and tragedy, and Europeans rather than Americans dominated the list of playwrights.

The Cocteau, if not prosperous, was a survivor in a business that had relentlessly struck down the less enterprising. Eve Adamson and her company had survived during the critical years of the founding during a time of increasing withdrawals of potential audiences to the comfort and thrills of the cinema and television. The adolescent years had seen a growth in audience and attendant box-office receipts, particularly during the 1977-78 season, graced with a large school audience for *Hamlet*. As the Cocteau moved into its middle years--1978-1982--it would test the waters, so to speak, by staging additional works both well-known and neglected.

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CHAPTER FOUR: Notes

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CHAPTER 5

Midlife Cross-roads and Crises - 1978-81

Broadway theatres set a new record of attendance during the 1978-79 season: Almost ten million people paid $13 million for tickets, making the box office receipts for Broadway the highest ever for the sixth consecutive year. Worlds apart financially, the off-off-Broadway theatres struggled to survive, some by catering to the lowest common denominator among patrons of non-commercial houses, others like the Cocteau by focusing on a small, distinct constituency. The Cocteau staged nine plays during the 1978-79 season; two of the nine are by American writers, the remainder European. The Cocteau season was as follows:

1978-1979

07/78-09/78	*Volpone*	Ben Jonson
08/78-11/78	*A Mad World, My Masters*	Thomas Middleton
10/78-05/79	*Hamlet*	W. Shakespeare
11/78-04/79	*Exit the King*	Eugène Ionesco
12/78-02/79	*The Cid*	Pierre Corneille
10/78-02/79	*The Scarecrow*	Percy MacKaye
02/79-05/79	*As You Like It*	W. Shakespeare
03/79-06/79	*In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*	Tennessee Williams
04/79-06/79	*The Changeling*	Thomas Middleton

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While many theatres, both on-Broadway and off, include works by Shakespeare in their repertoires, few choose to present plays by a another Elizabethan writer, Ben Jonson. While contemporary television programs emphasize situation comedies, the American public at large remain deprived of a genre that for want of a better term could be called intellectual comedies.

One of the major examples of intellectual comedy is *Volpone,* Jonson's best-known work, consisting of a verse play satirizing the political and social follies of his fellow citizens. Adamson felt that the work should open the eighth season of her theatre, particularly because its sharply satiric tone made a welcome contrast with the typical fare of television comedies and films. Since the production was a carry-over from the previous season, Cocteau actors would gain a respite from the task of learning lines for a Cocteau première. Her direction would not give her audience the chance to guffaw or smile condescendingly. By this time, Adamson had learned that other things being equal, playing works in straightforward ways rather than with campy histrionics would help her to attain artistic success.

The artistic director felt that the actors who were with the Cocteau for the longest periods were the most reliable. (Actors have been willing to continue for years with the

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theatre company at low pay because of their desire to improve their performance.) Adamson decided that Craig Smith would be most successful in eliciting "malicious vigor" in the role of Mosca, while she cast Coral Potter as the title figure because of the rapport the two actors felt with each other. Adamson felt the production realized her vision and was pleased to be able to accomplish much in the costuming of the characters and evoking an ambiance of pageantry.

Polly Morrice of the *Village Voice,* the only critic who described her impressions of the presentation, devoted particular attention to James Payne's costume designs, which she called ingenious in that, given the limited budget with which Payne had to work, he "paid rapt attention to the gold and glitter that the play requires."[1]

A play by Middleton, *A Mad World, My Masters*, was the second production beginning in August 1978, staged during a newspaper strike. Like Ben Jonson, Middleton used mordant comedy--in this case to satirize male lust and universal greed. In the play, a husband walks in unexpectedly while his wife and her lover are deep in intimate conversation together. The lover, whose name is Master Penitent Brothel, is undergoing a conscience-stricken period, and is singing the praises of the husband and of fidelity. The eavesdropping husband, long since cuckolded, could not be more delighted. Thoroughly gratified by his wife's choice

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(According to the records, the Cocteau was first to stage the play in New York City. Three years later, the Off Center Theatre mounted a production, opening 7 January 1982.)[2]

Adamson did not try to update the play or to alter it in the name of relevance. She likened such a technique to that of "playing Mozart with a moog synthesizer." She recalled that her pacing was quick; her aim was to convey a lightness that would keep the action sparkling and to dissipate any weighty atmosphere that audiences may have expected.[3]

Craig Smith was challenged by his role as the wife's lover, which required him to do multiple impersonations. Smith recalled one actor with artificial, bushy eyebrows which, in his opinion, looked like two purple caterpillars over his eye.[4]

At the conclusion of each production of *A Mad World, My Masters*, Craig Smith appealed for contributions to the theatre. Walter Kerr, describing his impression of Smith in a commentary broadcast on WQXR, the radio station of the *New York Times*, stated that if Craig Smith had been as sincere and straightforward in the rest of the play as in his concluding speech, the play would have been worthwhile to watch. Kerr, though amused by the production, called the play itself obscure and doomed to remain obscure. This comment was taken by the Cocteau company as a compliment, since Adamson, among others, is perfectly willing to stage

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plays that are neglected because of flawed writing.[5]

Donald R. Wilson in the *SoHo Weekly News* called this presentation one that took over 300 years to make its New York première, considering the Cocteau Repertory rendition as funny and fresh as Middleton could want. Craig Smith was again commended, in this case for moving smoothly through a variety of impersonations. Wilson enjoyed a scene that Kerr had also praised, in which actor John Bower tells a sex-starved married woman (played by Amy Posner) that he wants to atone for his lecherous activities.[6]

The third offering, *Hamlet*, was presented to high-school audiences during matinees set aside exclusively for them. The first performance was in October 1978.

There were problems with the *Hamlet* production. Not only did Craig Smith's pessimism about the entire student matinee program seem justified by the behavior of some youngsters in the audience, but Harris Berlinsky also had a change of heart, at least temporarily, when some bustling among the spectators turned some of the performances into throwing matches for the high-school "groundlings." According to actor Harris Berlinsky, nothing in the production--which featured well-choreographed sword fights and rapidly-paced action--could have provoked this outbreak of boredom and unruliness by the youngsters. Harris Berlinsky, then in his second season with the company, explained what occurred as follows:

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follows:

> We had to stop the show a few different times because kids were throwing things to the actors. We would admonish them: "If you do not stop, everyone would have to leave." That happens. Over the years I found that I would prefer to do plays for inner city kids as opposed to others. They seemed to have more interest in what they are seeing possibly because they had never seen it before. This is what we would do in the matinees--reaching out to kids who never experienced theatre before. Some years ago we would announce first to them: "This is not like TV--what is on stage is actually happening this moment." They were brought up with TV and had a TV mentality.- "This is for real--if you never experienced it before, please behave correctly." And they did. We tell them: "Please do not eat, at least with your mouth open." The middle-class kids were riotous, far more so than the inner-city people; when the lights went out we would hear sounds of a full-fledged riot.
>
> The middle class kids were throwing paper clips. Their supervisor did nothing. Eve went down the aisle, lights came up, and she said: "If this does not stop, I will have to ask you to leave the theatre."
>
> Maybe there is hope. Maybe these young people will read *Hamlet* before they see the play. A lot of them did. I found that the kids could pretty much understand *Hamlet*. You'd sometimes get this "what the hell is going on" attitude from adults, too."[7]

Berlinsky stated further that he supports the teaching of some Shakespearean works in high school.

Smith recalled his sword fights in the production of *Hamlet*, which he considered the best segment of the show, particularly for the high-school matinees. John Bowers played the role of Laertes to Smith's Hamlet, and Smith choreographed an involved duel for them. Smith became confused by the dialogue during one swordfight, skipping ahead a page or so, and missing the part of the dialogue in

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which Gertrude is to drink the poison. The actor just looked at her and could see her saying to herself that she was supposed to expire. At that point, she collapsed.[8]

Craig Smith recalled also an incident involving Mel Gussow, reviewer for the *New York Times*, of whom Smith observed: "It's hard to get a rave from him but he is not nasty--a man of integrity." The morning that Gussow came to see a school matinee performance of *Hamlet*, Smith was nervously thinking that the traditional audience would assume that *Hamlet* was performed in a style suitable only for children. Smith's reminiscence was this: "Michael Clarke, who was *Orlando* in *As You Like It*, was *Horatio* in this *Hamlet*. He often overslept. That morning (we did not know Gussow was going to visit), Clarke overslept. We delayed the curtain while Gussow twiddled his thumbs. We were angry with Michael but we hoped Gussow would understand. That Friday, his review was entitled, 'Waiting for Horatio.'"[9]

Adamson's fourth presentation that season was of Ionesco's *Exit the King*. The play, which had its first performance at the Cocteau in November 1978, is an example of the French playwright's return to a more conventional form after his experiments with *The Lesson* and *The Bald Soprano*. Adamson chose the work particularly to show the Cocteau audience that to judge a playwright by two or three works is to err in the direction of stereotyping, in this

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case to think that Ionesco composed only absurdist dramas. Ionesco's play, adapted by Cocteau's guest-director Karen Sunde, is an exploration of death. Ionesco concentrates not on a single cancer victim, but on an archetypal man discovering and attempting to defy his mortality.

Karen Sunde, the guest director, together with Tom Keever, the set designer, chose scenery that abstracted the environment into uniformly gray and tattered curtains.

Craig Smith recalled his playing the title figure, an old man who, under Sunde's direction, did not display the typical mannerisms of such characters--the doddering about, the pandering for laughs, the bludgeoning for allegorical significance. Instead, like other human beings of his age, his character was hopeful when he should have been, and scared when that emotion was called for. Smith considered the production--which was Americanized in its expressions--to be sound, as it enabled the performers to feel at home in their roles.[10]

Trish Dace, reviewing the Cocteau presentation in *Other Stages*, enjoyed what she considered good performances from Phyllis Deitschel as a little maid and from Barbara Schofield as one of the king's wives.[11]

For the fifth production, Corneille's *The Cid* was chosen by Adamson to begin in December 1978 because she wanted the company to experiment with staging a neoclassical work in the neoclassical style. Martin Reinard, an actor with the

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company who played Lady Bracknell in the previous season's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, was the guest director.

Craig Smith described the logistics of the presentation:

> When we did this--and nobody in his right mind would do this play--we did a successful production. We did it in neo-classical style, facing the audience. The gentleman who had played Lady Bracknell in another season, Martin Reinard, directed the play. I was terrified watching it in rehearsal. Martin did it in the style of the Comédie Francais, so we had a backdrop, a shallow stage where the proscenium is. It was played only on the forestage and had two chandeliers hanging from the ceiling and people with gorgeous costume. Would there be an audience for all that?
>
> We really don't give our audiences enough credit. They bought the style, and *The Cid* is great story-telling. Why not do it in modern style? No reason: This style really worked and it was highly unusual, really heightened for the audience. They had never seen anything like this. We delivered arias. There was little action. At one point the princess slapped Roderick. The audience gasped because everything else was so contained. I was afraid the entire audience would walk out at intermission, but they liked the play *because* of the style. And because it was declamatory does not mean it did not have great passion.
>
> The audience--they bravoed, they adored it, they ate it up. The actors had a lot of difficulty with it, because buying into that style as an actor is alien; we want to move, to emote, to feel the part and not just stand there and contain all the passion. The audience wondered: when will this break out? There's a kind of suspense. Finally the littlest thing, the smallest gesture, that may explain why kids reacted in horror to the ghost in another production--of Hamlet.[12]

The production was reviewed by the *New York Times*, the *New York Post* and two community newspapers. Barbara Crossette of the *Times* found that the company was building a strong reputation for finding and staging some

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infrequently performed classics of the theatre. She praised the previous season's production of *The Cenci,* adding that the presentation of *The Cid* at the Cocteau may have been the first New York performance of the play in English. Crossette quoted Adamson, who explained that *The Cid* is not simply a rare thing dredged out of a trunk, but a classic and a risk for which the actors were ready.

One reason that the classic is rarely performed is that the alexandrine verse makes translating difficult, and further, that this was the kind of play that could be done only with a company accustomed to working with poetry. The Cocteau used John Cairncross's 1973 translation into blank verse. The production required tight ensemble playing, with gestures and movement at a minumum, and it required an attentive audience for its declamatory style, according to the artistic director. The Cocteau, because of its experience with the neglected and the unusual, with an audience base prepared to accept conventions alien to American theatre, was one of the few companies able to stage a worthy production of Corneille's tragedy of the conflict between duty and passion, she added.[13]

Calling the production of *The Cid* flat and strained, the critic for *The Villager* praised the acting of Harris Berlinsky, one of the few members of the repertory company who never went to acting school, but who received all of his formal training directly from Eve Adamson. Judy Thrall

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called Berlinsky's portrayal of the king "natural in a room full of reproductions." She praised James Payne for lighting the stage with candle-bearing chandeliers which cast shadows over the actors' faces.[14]

And Clive Barnes, a critic for the *New York Post,* recognized that English translations of the Corneille work do not usually bear up well (though he praised what he considered a graceful translation by Caincross). The Cocteau players, according to Barnes, did not rise to the occasion, but looked like clothes-horses and tended to mumble when they should have expounded. He was pleased that the company gave the play its first New York showing. Barnes found much to praise in the acting of Karla Baker as Chimene and Andy MacCracken as the title figure.[15]

The choice of Percy MacKaye's *The Scarecrow* was as intimidating as that of *The Cid.* Adamson sought the challenge of introducing this relatively obscure American play to her audience. The play by MacKaye, based on Nathaniel Hawthorne's story, "The Feathertop" (about a scarecrow that had turned into a man), takes place in a Massachusetts town in the late seventeenth century. Goody Rickby (Blacksmith Bess) connives with Dickon (Lucifer) to get revenge on Justice Merton for leaving her with a son. They build a scarecrow, give it life, and call it Lord Ravensbone. Merton's daughter falls in love with the scarecrow, who assumes his own character, but is shortly

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discovered to be a dummy by Rachel's magic mirror. Ultimately Ravensbone is transformed into a man through his love for Rachel.

Smith called the work a crowd-pleaser, one that worked well. The title figure was played by Harris Berlinsky and as the production opened, the audience came face to face with a witch, hammering at her smithy trying to make a scarecrow.[16] Coral Potter played Dickon, the Devil, who had asked the witch to make a scarecrow. While the audience looked to the right, the witch pulled the figure out of the smithy, which is the brick enclosure with the fire. Smith described the performance as follows:

> So the audience is looking over to the right, and in full view we took the scarecrow and substituted the live Harris [Berlinsky] and nobody saw the switch. There was Harris; the scarecrow comes to life. He gains a soul and wants to keep on living. I am not tremendously well read in American theater, in theater in fact. We were looking around for early American work suitable for us to do. She [Eve Adamson] did not find much, but found this one and it worked. It called for a kind of realistic setting which we were not great at. There is not a great deal to find, thought MacKaye came from a theatrical background--from his father.
>
> Harris is up there confronting his humanity and would look in a two-way mirror. Gradually he would turn into a man, but when he looked into the mirror he would see a scarecrow. I was the scarecrow behind the mirror and he would talk to the mirror and I was looking at the audience with a pumpkin-head to look like a scarecrow. It's a sweet play. *The Scarecrow* is difficult as it calls for magic and the kind of production we were successful at because we make simple choices, but it is frightening because of all the stage effects needed. The Bible exploded as Dickon jumped out of it. It's hard to pull that off. The audience should respect that we cannot do this as well as the movies.[17]

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Adamson agreed that *The Scarecrow* would be difficult to produce and praised Berlinsky for making her show work. She added:

> The pipe that the title figure carried would always have to be lit because the Devil said the scarecrow would be dead as soon as the pipe went out. Someone behind the set had to keep feeding him a fresh pipe as technically a pipe cannot be kept going when it is held. We had twenty pipes and a stage manager hidden behind the curtain, and the actor would sneak a look back. The stage manager was hiding in the forge, keeping the pipe lit. We went through all twenty pipes in that performance.[18]

Berlinsky was pleased that Adamson allowed sufficient rehearsal time for a work that depended to a large extent on the execution of "tricks." In his view timing must be learned, for without it the play could be ruined.[19] The designer for this difficult show, a trustee for the company, explained that the show was a very complicated one. Coral Potter almost lost an eye in an accident with the forge, according to James B. Nichols, who put some of the show on videotape. (The spokesman is president of Nicholodeon Productions, no relation to the children's cable channel, and has videotaped some of the Cocteau's work.)[20]

Harris Berlinsky reminisced about his part in *The Scarecrow* and about the lighting designer, James S. Payne:

> Jim Paine began with Eve when she began the theatre over at the Bond Street store. He along with Eve started the company.
>
> Technically the most difficult show I had to work on is *The Scarecrow*. It's a nightmare. There were so many things going on simultaneously on stage, five or six or

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> seven actors involved in technical things. Passing lit pipes--I had to have a lit pipe at all times. One would have this furnace back stage and it would be passed to me so that when the pipe was returned to me it was lit.[21]

A critic from the *New York Post*, Marilyn Stasio, paid homage to the Cocteau for presenting a work which, she explained to her reading audience, "is so rarely performed that if you bent over to tie your shoelaces, you would miss its infrequent revivals." Stasio termed the Cocteau an enterprising company, but called the production of *The Scarecrow* badly designed, unevenly directed, and at times atrociously acted. Harris Berlinsky's skills were declared inadequate despite what Stasio conceded was a fierce commitment to the character. She rejected what she called "clodhopper performances and silly-looking stylized designs." Punctuating the frequent accusations that the Cocteau was uneven in its distribution of acting talent, Stasio warned that "the Cocteau does not seem to know how to protect its angels from its imps."[22]

Judy Thrall of the *Villager*, like the other reviewers, commended the Cocteau for reviving a worthy classic and went farther than the others, calling the entire cast admirable and set design intelligently stylized,[23] while Tish Dace of *Other Stages* congratulated the Cocteau for what she perceived as improvement with the passage of time. Rescuing Percy MacKaye from near theatrical oblivion counted as a service to this city, in Dace's view. The reviewer was

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pleased that the company did not prompt laughter in the wrong spots, nor did it render Ravensbane's tenderness to Rachel preposterous.[24] On a positive note as well, Christopher Sharp of *Women's Wear Daily* acknowledged that he considered the company able to "bewitch an audience with the same easy flair with which the Devil in this play creates a man from a scarecrow."[25]

Arthur Sainer, writing for the *Village Voice*, warned that the Cocteau is not the superior company under which the play might be a stunning piece of theatre. In the opinion of the *Voice*, the acting ranged from adequate to pedestrian.[26]

Emory Lewis's review for *The Record* restated the objections of many reviewers. He found that the sets had always been a weak elements in the productions of the Cocteau. He nonetheless gave each of three actors a balanced report of pluses and minuses. Lewis found that Harris Berlinsky, although adept, had not thoroughly explored the choreography of the part. Lewis was bothered that Berlinsky's rigidity as the scarecrow did not diminish by calibrated degrees as he became slowly human. Karla Barket was found to be pleasant, although Lewis felt that she did not project her voice adequately. And Coral Potter as the Devil "moved his body with the sinuous grace of a flamenco dancer," wrote Lewis.[27]

After *The Scarecrow*, the company turned for its seventh production of the season to *As You Like It*, which ran from

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February 1979 through May 1979. At one point it played in repertory with Tennessee Williams's *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*.

Harris Berlinsky considered Shakespearean presentations to be a strong point of the company. He elaborated on the choice by Adamson of *As You Like It*, and why he enjoyed acting in the production. Berlinsky described the presentation as follows:

> *As You Like It* was a strong production. Eve did a real strong concept with that and we transposed scenes, took some liberties. Visually we were in the court and everybody was dressed in a black robe, looking alike, kind of satiny, long-flowing robes with bits of silver. People had bald caps so no individuality existed. After Roslyn escaped to the forest of Arden (I played both the duke in the court and his brother in the forest), there was an opening in the black robes and there was this chandelier we made of silver tubular material hanging on center stage.
>
> At a point in the play when we were going to Arden, all the people started taking off robes to expose glittery, bright gold costumes underneath. We would hang black robes on chandeliers in a way to form a tree. We took the whole environment, dark and oppressive, and turned it in one transition into a tree with everything bathed in golden light. What a scene! One huge tree was all there was in the set, then the light and costumes changed. It represented that Arden is within all of us, the need to be free of oppression, the need for individuality. If we just discarded these exterior things, we can build this wonderful tree in the forest. It really, really worked.
>
> Gerald Blunt composed the music for us, sophisticated stuff. Incidental music . . . that is not right. It was background music. He would get together and orchestrate 15 to 20 pieces, we would give it to a recording studio to record the music and use it in the play. This was sophisticated, slightly dissonant music.[28]

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There were no press reviews of the presentation.

Eve Adamson chose *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel* as the company's penultimate production of the season, and directed the work in a way different from the style of many other directors. *In the Bar,* which played at the Cocteau from March through June 1979, is late Tennessee Williams, the playwright's experimentation with a new way of writing. The play chronicles the despair of creators who have lost control of their art, and to that extent, one could surmise an autobiographical element in the play. The actors were each given incomplete sentences to say. Adamson noted that each sentence ended with a period in the text, and decided to have the lines read as they were written. One theory, according to Adamson, is that Williams was going through troubled times when he wrote the work, and that this is the way people sounded to him. In the play Williams waxed articulately--according to Adamson--on the ethereal, creative, and artistic side of one person, compared to the bestial, sexual, and brutal aspect of another. Elaborating, Adamson said:

> I loved that play. Some think of it as a later work that showed Williams going downhill. I don't agree that his later plays were a sign of downhill movement. If you read everything in the play as an interrupted sentence you would lose the audience in five minutes. You have to do it with full emphasis, following the punctuation. Use full declarative sentences as indicated. I would say to the actors, "Do it this way," with Pinteresque pauses, and the audience can fill in the rest. We would just stop the action by every pause.

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> In American training, we are told every pause and silence must be filled in with busywork. What I did was to stop everything with each sentence. The audience did fill in the rest. Also I did not do this as a tableau--that's too self-conscious. What does it mean? OK. Now I am not the artistic director so I don't have to be so nice as I was when we did the play. I say, who cares if Williams said, "This is a symbol of . . ." Why should he need a symbol? If he wanted to make clear what he was saying, he could have written an essay. It's what reverberates in you; it does not have to be a thought-out statement that "the theme is . . ."[29]

Adamson felt some pressure from subscribers to do new works occasionally, particularly one by a noted writer like Williams. During Thanksgiving weekend 1978, a German film company rented the theatre to record some of Williams's readings from his own plays. In this way, Williams began his relationship with the theatre. He had asked Eve Adamson what types of works were regularly done. Hearing that the company had produced *Suddenly Last Summer* and *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*, Williams told Adamson that *In the Bar* was his favorite play, and asked Adamson to do it again.[30]

Thomas Fuld recalled his attendance at a performance of the play, *In the Bar*. He described the production as follows:

> The first production was not the one I saw; I saw the second 1978-79 when Williams came to see the show. That was special; I will always remember that. I was house manager for a few seasons and my daughter was involved with the Cocteau, so I felt closer than the average board member to the theatre. I was invited to the operation when Williams was there to help guard him from being stormed. Some evenings he was there during performance and I would make sure nobody mobbed him. He did not seem to mind being mobbed. I didn't want to see the headline, "T.W. killed in the Cocteau."

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> We did 18 preview performances. They opened the show in September after summer previews, and that show sold out. Word of mouth was excellent. Limos were lined up on the Bowery, Alexander Cohen and his wife were there, there was a flurry of interest about moving a show to Broadway.
>
> But Frank Rich brought things into perspective. The show was not so good, not up to the T.W. stuff, and the audience went to half-house and then to quarter-house. The people who came down thinking they had seen a hit left when Frank said no. The actors told him: "It's not us; it must be in the writing." That is a big thing to say to Williams. He looked at Eve, he did not say "I am Tennessee and you are Bowery actors." He accepted our criticism and rewrote it. He had to go out of town before it opened. Eve and Williams differed about the ending. Eve liked another way better. Williams said, "No, that is not what I wrote; I am not happy about it." She laughed and changed it to his way.[31]

Reviewers were confused, for the most part, about Williams's aim with this play. Judy Thrall of *The Villager*, for example, stated simply that what stood out clearly was that each one is so much a part of the others. She was enchanted by the communication in incomplete sentences, interpreting the style as a demonstration that the others' thoughts and feelings are the same as those of the people to whom they were speaking. She found the sentence fragments disconcerting but because of Berlinsky's playing of Mark and Adamson's direction, she called the play one that was worth seeing.[32]

Adamson had long been a champion of Jacobean plays and attempted as the final play of the season a presentation of Middleton's *The Changeling* not so much to give balance to the season (after all, a Middleton play, *A Mad World, My*

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Masters, had been staged a few months earlier), but to play out her joy in directing a drama of that genre. The plot concerns Beatrice-Joanna, in love with Alsamero and trying to get rid of her fiancé, Alonzo. De Flores, her father's ugly servant, kills Alonzo and demands Beatrice-Joanna's submission to him in payment. There is a comic subplot set in a madhouse. Craig Smith enjoyed acting the role of the title character in that play, and called attention to his colleague, Coral Potter's contribution. Potter played de Flores, Barbara Schofield, a long-term member of the company, was Beatrice-Joanna. A set of macrame--big ropes looking like a spider web--formed a jail cell. The madmen were caged up front, always watching the action, dressed in distressed woolen material. At one point the madmen break out and overtake the entire place; according to Craig Smith, Adamson directed this with skill to show that the madness was really taking over. Then the others started to reveal woolen rags--a powerful image conjured by Adamson.[33]

Adamson had heard that the subplot of the play would not work, and that many productions are done without the madhouse scenes, but she found that the opposite was true. Rather than cut back and forth from the main plot, she had the mad people hovering around the action--more and more appearing so that the operations went on simultaneously like two worlds ultimately merged.[34] Adamson also felt that Coral Potter's portrayal of De Flores was one of his best.

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Potter had to keep the audience thinking whether Beatrice-Joanna was deflowered by a beast or by a noble savage manipulated by a rich kid.

Adamson had always liked to send people out of the theatre asking questions, to engage theatergoers so that they would debate who is the good guy. The director can give her interpretation, according to Adamson, who is nonetheless opposed to imposing her views on the audience. Adamson compared her role to that of a serious voter observing an election campaign in which the voter chooses the lesser of the two evils. She believes that it is fine to point out corruption and not to make the villains sympathetic, but rejects the idea of subjecting the audience to a fierce, corrupt world for two hours. Audiences like to see redemption, in her view.[35]

Tish Dace, reviewing the play for *Other Stages,* pointed out the semiotics of the name De Flores, and indicated that the playwright wanted to show the moral self-deception of a murderess who thinks that honor consists of a maidenhead. Dace endorsed the Adamson production stating that "the production appreciates the confusion of values in a changeling child." While she enjoyed Coral Potter's rendition of a character who is physically repellent, she questioned the casting of Potter, a handsome actor, in the role of De Flores. Yet Dace's review could not have pleased the company, as she called Adamson limited by the ineptitude

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of the company.[36] Nor did the company fare better by a review in *The Villager* by Merle Ginsburg, in which Ginsburg regretted the director's inability to do much with the cast, calling the acting unimpressive.[37]

Looking back at the 1978-79 season, Adamson recalled the particular commercial success of her production of *Hamlet*. Because *Hamlet* had proved itself a consistent crowd-pleaser, the Shakespearean tragedy was given 58 performances that year, compared with only eighteen each for *A Mad World, My Masters* and *Volpone*. The presentation of *Hamlet* also accommodated the most theatregoers, 6,201 during that year, compared with just 1,124 and 1,112 for *Volpone* and *A Mad World, My Masters*, respectively.

Before the season, the *New York Times* had dropped Mel Gussow's regular series on the off-off-Broadway scene from the Sunday *New York Times*. Craig Smith, acting as publicist for the Cocteau, presented Abe Rosenthal, the publisher of the *Times*, with a petition signed by members of the theatre audience imploring the restoration of the Gussow series. Smith argued that Mr. Gussow's column was a definite asset to the growth and development of off-off-Broadway theatre--which in Smith's view had burgeoned in the last decade to become the most significant movement in theatre in this country. (According to a phone survey conducted by the Cocteau, a majority of the theatre audience first heard of

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the Bouwerie Lane Theatre through the *New York Times*.)[38]

There was no immediate indication of results from the letter, but in 1990 Mr. Gussow's column could again be found in the Sunday *Times*. Gussow did not, however, restrict his topics to off-off-Broadway theatre.

Financial figures and statistics of audience size are not available for the 1978-79 season. Notwithstanding the voluminous files retained in the Cocteau administrative office, there are numerous instances of incomplete records, torn, yellow, and indecipherable reports--these gaps are to be expected from a theatre company that was created on a shoestring and struggling throughout its history for reasonable fiscal security. What is admirable is that the enterprise had the foresight to maintain the quantity records that it held throughout its history.

The season of 1979-80 in the New York theatre world was dominated by continuing friction between producers and the Actors' Equity Association. Some theatres feared they would have to increase actors' salaries by 300% if the pay scales demanded by the AEA were approved. During the year, the Off-Off Broadway Association sent a group of representatives to City Hall to demonstrate--with masks of tragedy--asking Mayor Koch to mediate the dispute between the association and the AEA. Meanwhile Broadway theatres had box office receipts that were once again at a record high with 9.62

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million tickets sold.[39]

Mel Gussow of the *New York Times*, called the future of off-off-Broadway doubtful because of the new Actors Equity showcase code scheduled to go into effect 1 September 1979. Under the code, off-off-Broadway theatres would be required to pay a fixed sum of 15 to 20 percent of their gross annual income to the Equity actors employed in their productions. The representatives of the off-off-Broadway alliance considered the proposed payment system inequitable to non-Equity actors and other artists in the off-off-Broadway community. According to Willard Swire, associate executive secretary of AEA, after September 1, Equity members could appear in off-off-Broadway theatres only under the terms of the Equity code. One alternative would be for theatres to use only non-Equity actors (a practice favored by the Cocteau).[40]

While this was unsettling to off-off Broadway generally, the Cocteau was not directly affected as the theatre was unhampered by AEA requirements. During the 1979-80 season, the Cocteau performed these works:

1979-1980

08/79-09/79	*Exit the King*	Eugène Ionesco
09/79-06/80	*Kirche, Kutchen and Kinder*	Tennessee Williams
10/79-12/79	*Hamlet*	W. Shakespeare
10/79-01/80	*He Who Gets Slapped*	Leonid Andreyev
11/79-02/80	*Ruy Blas*	Victor Hugo
02/80-06/80	*The Tempest*	W. Shakespeare
03/80-06/80	*In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*	Tennessee Williams

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This was largely a season of revivals. Since critics of those daily and weekly publications that reviewed the original stagings rarely returned for revivals, there was an absence of critical notices. Ionesco's *Exit the King* received no press coverage; nor did members of the Cocteau have vivid memories of the presentation, which was the company's first offering of the 1979-80 season which ran for just over one month during August and part of September 1979. In the case of the Cocteau's second production, the comedy *Kirche, Kutchen and Kinder* by Tennessee Williams beginning in September 1979, the playwright allowed the Cocteau to produce the play provided that no script would be printed for regular distribution to the public and that no reviewers would be invited. There were no previous productions of the play in New York City.[41] This giddy play could be offered only to an experimental, intimate theatre company that thrived on risk. A bizarre mixture of soft core pornography, hallucinatory comedy, and social commentary, *Kirche*, whose full name was *Kirche, Kutchen and Kinder: An Outrage for the Stage*, had been seeking a home during the late 1970s. Mitch Douglas, a literary agent at ICM, became Williams's agent and suggested the Cocteau for the staging of the play. A German television company had been there to film a reading by the playwright. Since Eve Adamson had given full staging to *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*, and because Williams still had affection for that

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failed work, Douglas asked Adamson to stage it for Williams's special benefit.[42]

According to Adamson, Douglas cared for Williams's work and wanted the best for him. At a revival of *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*, Williams was besieged by people so that the agent thought himself functioning as much in the role of a bodyguard as he did in those of producer and agent. To this agent, Williams seemed like a bewildered little man, as if he always needed to be headed in the right direction, which is probably why there was always someone living with him who saw to the practical side of life, according to his biographer.[43]

Douglas added that the writer had great faith in how Eve Adamson was handling the material. In fact, he kept the Cocteau as a stand-by for *Clothes for a Summer Hotel* if Broadway did not produce it. Williams, working at the Elysée Hotel in Manhattan, revised *Kirche* on little scraps of paper, according to Adamson. The artistic director felt that as a play, it was as badly structured as a later full-length play was well structured. (She was alluding to *Something Cloudy, Something Clear,* presented during the 1981-82 season.) She judged Williams as a man full of paranoia about both plays, about the productions and everyone in his life at the time, but she did not fail to note a certain nobility and courage in him.[44]

According to Donald Spoto, one of Williams's biographers,

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Kirche, Kutchen and Kinder is remarkable for illustrating a paradox: It reveals Williams trying to shock an unshockable society and unshockable audience. Williams's agent discovered a masochistic streak in Williams which, he believed, made him want to undermine a work before the critics or audience disliked it. He insisted that the play be done and, said Douglas, Eve and her company gave it their best.[45] Adamson, aware of the weaknesses in the play, called it a work-in-progress to keep the critics out. In fact she was certain that "the press would roast him on this."[46]

Thomas Fuld observed that the play had some beautiful moments, beautiful writing, and much that was weird and strange. To Fuld, Williams was quite right in refusing coverage from the press. Fuld believed the play probably offended subscribers, who would get upset for a day and would come back. The sexuality was blatant, Fuld reported, and the subject matter often difficult to grasp.[47]

Williams wrote the introduction to a multi-volumed set of his plays, in which he said that he loved the Cocteau for performing the most exciting production of his work of his since *The Glass Menagerie* was first staged by another company. He autographed the book, adding that he had requested a new presentation of *In the Bar*. At that time, he also gave Adamson the manuscript to *Kirche*. While worrying about the reception afforded to *Clothes for a*

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Summer Hotel on Broadway, he was terrified about the potential response of critics to *Kirche*. Adamson assured Williams that she would not invite the critics to the Cocteau for *Kirche*. Adamson indicated that this promise was what cemented bonds between them; it was important that the play be done. This was the world première of the work, and Adamson reported that she loved it.[48]

The production of that work was not a smooth one. Harris Berlinsky complained that Williams was re-writing all the time. Yet the actor felt rewarded by his role in a difficult work. Berlinsky enjoyed having a well-known living playwright giving him and the company dialogue all the time, being there at rehearsals, and laughing.[49]

Craig Smith saw much in the world première, and described his enthusiasm with these words:

> This is an incredible comedy subtitled, *An Outrage for the Stage*. What it is is a surrealistic farce about a young male hustler who is married and has two children, living in a fantasy house in SoHo. He wife is an axe-wielding cartoon character who would chase the hustler around. He wheeled around in his wheelchair to avoid her, but he was not actually an invalid. When his wife left the room he would get up, walk around, talk to the audience. The wife's father was the last Lutheran minister of the island of Staten and was fond of eating kidney beans. The minister was having an affair with the organist, a ninety-year-old woman.
>
> Two kids were involved, very large, nubile youngsters dressed in children's clothes, who the young hustler was trying to prepare for the twentieth century world by selling their bodies.
>
> Why is the play obscure? It was never published, but was done in a workshop production; we are the only people who have ever done the play. We have copies

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> of it which are the only extant copies. There are some wonderful speeches, some vintage old Williams stuff. People were outraged by it because they wanted to see *The Glass Menagerie* and this it was not.[50]

Smith was asked to clarify his statement on audience preferences. He replied:

> People will not give a writer like Albee or Williams any room for lateral movement. It must be straight up. Audiences tend to insist that they write in the same genre and do it better each time. It is a lack of generosity by many people, not just the critics, but the audience too.
>
> The audiences may not have loved *Kirche*, but we went all out for it. Everything was done in soft sculpture, the kitchen scenes with a stove--cartoony--everything slightly melted and off-base, but in bright colors. While we reminisced in a particular scene on stage, a vine leaf would crawl. All of this was in Williams's stage directions; he had an incredible flair for the visual. The set designer found it difficult to manipulate the vine at night. Flowers would spring out as people talked, then Daisy would come out, a bright neon surreal doll. We were allowed to do it in workshop; it was not opened to review. I think it would have been great to have it reviewed though it would not have reviewed well. Our production was really good.[51]

During one of the performances of *Kirche*, the whole set collapsed. Smith was sitting on the stage in a wheelchair, playing the part of the narrator. He told the audience that the play could not go on, that it was now physically impossible to continue. Smith remembered his turning to the audience and saying, in a voice emulating that of Tennessee Williams: "We're having some problems,/So give us permission,/To take a short break,/A brief intermission." The audiences adored that, Smith recalled. The company went on and completed the show.[52]

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(*Kirche* was destined to have at least one additional problem. Karla Barker, who played the pivotal role of the organist, was having personal problems. Smith remembered her coming in one night at 7:30 and performing her role in *Exit the King*. She was to go on again at 10:30 as the Miss Rose in *Kirche*, but suddenly quit with fifteen-minutes' notice. The Cocteau has no understudies. In the audience was a former company actress, Barbara Sloan, who was with the company for two years. She had never seen the show, was there for the earlier one, and was going to stay for the second. Adamson asked her in the lobby to come into the dressing room and she fit into the costume and went on as Miss Rose. She memorized her lines--a feat that Smith considered amazing, since she knew nothing of the set or the script. She acted the role for a few more performances, then Jere Jacob continued when Jacob came back.)[53]

The role of the wife in the Williams play was performed by Phyllis Deitschel (who later played the title character in Shaw's *Saint Joan* and also had filled the role of Rosalind in the 1978-79 *As You Like It*.) Craig Smith said that Deitschel was a devout Catholic, a good, churchgoing person who came into theater because she felt she was called by a higher power. Since *Kirche* is a bawdy and ribald play in which the wife had to say risqué things, Smith worried about her capacity to perform the role. But according to Smith, when asked whether she could handle the role, she replied

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that she would have no problem. And, Smith decided, she was very funny, totally off the wall in the actor's terms. She ran around in a red dress with a hatchet. The role of Hotsy was played by Harris Berlinsky in drag, and this was a man raising two children to be prostitutes.[54]

Despite the ban on critics, there was one review. An obscure, one-page newsletter, *Home Planet*, guessed that *Kirche* would outrage any member of the audience who expected to see something similar to what Williams had done before. *Kirche*, according to the reviewer, is a black comedy in which the plot had no meaning, and in which seeking meaning is folly. Richard A. Whipple, who wrote the renegade review, was impressed by the work's total feeling and impact and enjoyed particularly the acting of Craig Smith. Whipple was impressed with Smith's athletic prowess, since the actor was required to perform cartwheels whenever he got out of his wheelchair. According to the young hustler in Williams's work, the malingering in the wheelchair allowed him to isolate himself in a SoHo loft (his *Kirche* or church) to meditate and work on his memoirs. Whipple, the critic, felt that the hustler can be none other than Tennessee Williams himself at his judgmental best with a flourishing of insight. The *kutchen* was explained as really a symbol for show business on Broadway. The "johns" whom the hustler was training his kids to attract symbolize writing for the commercial stage, according to the reviewer. Williams

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himself, at the time, was writing a new play for Broadway. In a lyric tone, he ended the play with a view on the meaning of life: "Our existence is magic; devoutly believed in, the green of the heart withers not--if you defend it from the seasons of corruption and reflect on beauty."[55]

Craig Smith performed the role of the hustler, John T. Bower and Christina Sluberski were cast in the roles of the son and daughter who were expelled from kindergarten after fifteen years' attendance, and production values were by Douglas McKeown, all under the direction of Eve Adamson.[56]

Tennessee Williams wrote to Adamson some months after the production, an open letter which he may have designed for publication wherever Adamson would see fit to send it. He recalled the Cocteau productions of *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel* and *Kirche, Kutchen, and Kinder* with warmth:

> I met Miss Adamson and her repertory company through their brilliantly luminous and concise revival of one of my least popular plays, the one which all but entirely took off from the earth's remaining stability as I myself was at the point of doing in the last year of the sixties. I refer to *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*. In a work written under such conditions, the playwright is the voice of his unconscious mind. Cries of a jungle-bird savagery are apt to mingle with the whispers of pure revelation: neither is easily accessible to those not willing nor able to understand the nature of those deep recesses of an artist's last retreat before a reality that he is no longer able to cope with, to exist in.
>
> Eventually a critic may come along who can interpret that recess. In Eve Adamson I discovered a director who could comprehend like a critic such as the hypothetical one that may or may not some day come to take the coded messages of a collapsing reality and make intelliglble meaning of them. Miss Eve Adamson

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> had the power to interpret and make an integrated and sympathetic stage presentation of a building photographed in the frozen instant of its act of falling.
>
> . . . . She took a work in progress and despite the limitations of a compny not all of whom could be properly cast in their roles, she staged it with such inventiveness, both lyrical and comic, that it played to good houses although it had been stipulated that the press could not be admitted.
>
> *Kirche, Kutchen, und Kinder*, which I had subtitled with humorous intent *An Outrage for the Stage,* is unlikely to surface during my time . . . . I doubt that what Eve Adamson and her theatre did with it will find it a forgettable experience. Now Miss Adamson is staging a third play of mine and I will soon be in New York for consultation.
>
> It may very well be that I no longer have a critical following in New York with the exception of two or three exceptional gentlemen of the press.[57]

Much has been made of Williams's alleged decline, the period of the later plays, in which some critics blamed Williams's dependence on alcohol and drugs for the alleged deterioration of his creative skills. The letter he sent to Adamson shows that the writer understood the loss of favor with which he was treated, though he did not agree with the majority of critics who had considered his creative life over. Smith and Adamson knew that many critics considered Williams's later works to be worth little. Yet Williams sometimes called one or the other of his later works his favorite. At the end of his career, according to Smith, his writing was psychedelic, and Smith labeled *Kirche* a ribald farce, a grotesque cartoon. But this element was counterpointed, Smith said, by a great naturalistic

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lyricism. People came and waited for the man who wrote *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and wanted him to rewrite it. At a symposium in the Bouwerie Lane Theatre that followed some presentations, someone said, "Mr. Williams: why no more romance and naturalism and realism?" He said, "These [later works] are my real plays; those plays were not." Smith adored both *Kirche* and *Something Cloudy*. *Kirche* was playing at the Cocteau at the same time that a Broadway theatre was performing *Clothes for a Summer Hotel*. Williams and his agents wanted to protect the writer's reputation. *Clothes* did badly, but Smith said that the company had great fun with *Kirche*.[58]

Harris Berlinsky remembered the year that Williams first came to see a staging of *In the Bar*, a hard season which included matinees, occasionally a late night show at 10.30, and rehearsals early the next morning, then another show that night and another late show--and the coming in on Sunday for still another. His fondest memory was that of Williams's coming down and working with the company, and the writer's unforgettable imitation of Tallulah Bankhead. Berlinsky called the months in which the Cocteau performed *Kirche* the high point of his career with the ensemble. The image he retained was of Williams sitting in the audience treating the actors like true professionals.[59]

Adamson, like the rest of the Cocteau members, found the experience of working with Williams exhilarating, and

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considered the artist one who "affirmed the joy of being alive." She enjoyed particularly the slapstick scene that comes out just after the line, "Anyhow, now, before the light expires, this I must say, every man's life must be redeemed from the squalor which is inherent in human existence by some touch of beauty." At that point, she recalled, "all hell broke loose in the audience."[60]

Adamson revived *Hamlet* for the company's third production of this 1979-80 season. The play was in great demand during the preceding year by high-school teachers and some instructors at community colleges.[61] Adamson remained convinced that the matinee series would be the major money-maker for the Cocteau, and her insight proved correct as once again, seats were sold out for the presentation of Shakespeare's tragedy. Adamson recalled that this presentation was performed and received in much the same way as the Cocteau's version of *Hamlet* during the 1978-79 season.[62] There were no reviews.

The subsequent production, which was the fourth of the season and which opened during the same month as *Hamlet* (October 1979), was Leonid Andreyev's *He Who Gets Slapped*. This revival must have been considered an anticlimax by the actors; Harris Berlinsky complained that the play was too large for the ensemble amd that it could not be done on a Comédie Francais scale.[63]

By the evidence provided in reviews, one may conclude

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that Adamson's direction was smooth and capable, avoiding the extremes of over-sentimentality and of the sardonic.

Berlinsky played the title role, a performance which one reviewer called incredibly talented. Judy Thrall, reviewing for the *Washington Market Review*, praised the actor for avoiding a sentimentality that would be all-too-easy to slip into. She was awed by the way Berlinsky quickly changed the face of the shy man-next-door--in an instant, the face became that of an imp or a pugilist or a prince. Craig Smith, often the recipient of major roles, designed the lighting for *He Who Gets Slapped*, while Charles Elliott built the sets. Thrall called the Cocteau Rep's quarters "the beautiful Bouwerie Lane Theatre," and conveniently--at this junction in which a new decade of Cocteau productions would be performed--the reviewer reminded her readers that the company specializes in performing neglected classics, is resident, and presents its plays in rotating repertory so that actors learn the basics of ensemble playing. She called the repertory company "one of off-off-Broadway's finest," and added that it was "as glorious as can be found anywhere in the city."[64]

For a rendition of Victor Hugo's *Ruy Blas,* the fifth presentation of the season (beginning in November 1979), the company used handsewn garments. While Adamson generally followed a minimalist policy on production values throughout her career, she acknowledged that *Ruy Blas* was, more than

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anything else, a costume drama. *Ruy Blas* was the play that opened Dumas and Hugo's Théâtre-Français in 1838 and is considered a meditation on the nature of power, using melodramatic devices to make its points.

Throughout the Cocteau's history, people would offer their services on the sewing machine as volunteers. For building sets, not generally considered a hobby as sewing might be, Adamson would have to use her technical directors. Thomas Fuld recalled that his daughter frequently visited the Cocteau to sew, at just about the time that she was old enough to do that for others. He remembered that everyone seemed to be sewing for *Ruy Blas*.[65]

At this time, the Cocteau was offering a half-price proposal for the month and for the following one. The production of *Ruy Blas* and the (virtually) unreviewed presentation of *Kirche* could be seen on a two-for-one basis. A feature in a community newspaper of Peter Cooper Village and Stuyvesant Town (*PCV News*) on Manhattan East Side published a feature, indicating that *Ruy Blas* was part of the repertory of French Romantic theatre which has rarely been performed here, the story of a commoner elevated to the position of ruler of 17th century Spain in its declining glory. The (anonymous) reporter quoted Craig Smith's affirmation that the Cocteau is part of the Bowery-NoHo area participating in the rebirth of one of the fastest growing arts communities in the city. Tickets were offered at $5

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each, which enabled the purchaser to see each play for $2.50.[66]

In a substantial feature in *Other Stages*, Holly Hill analyzed *Ruy Blas* and its production history, noting that the Cocteau had been playing Romantic dramas straight instead of in a camp style, and that Eve Adamson was so satisfied with the company version of *The Cid* during the previous season that she had decided to do a similar work. The theatre periodical *Sketch*, a British journal of the late 19th century, called *Ruy Blas* unsurpassed by any known drama in any language, according to Hill. (Jean Cocteau himself adapted the play for the screen in a 1947 film starring Jean Marais and Danielle Darrieux, while in 1957 Jean Vilar directed Gerard Phillipe in the title role in a revival by the Theatre National Populaire.) Adamson suggested that the major challenge for the actors was to project the passion and flamboyance within the French presentational style--which depends almost entirely on voice and body position.[67]

Following *Ruy Blas*, the Cocteau presented *The Tempest* by Shakespeare as its sixth offering of the season. The play was produced largely for school matinees, though it ran in repertory from February 1980 through June of that year. The play is well-suited for high-school audiences but a challenge to a company with a low budget for production values. Harris Berlinsky, who played the role of Caliban, called the production special. He enjoyed working with

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Coral Potter as Prospero, Phyllis Deitschel as Ariel, and George Dicher as Oreo (he played the wife in *Kirche)*. Also in the cast were Craig Smith in the minor role of Gonzalo, while Miranda was played by Christine Stuberski. The spirits were represented by the company. The production was spare, done with two people dressed in black as in the Japanese puppet theatre. The scenery was manipulated by people dressed in black and the audience apparently accepted the convention.[68]

From the evidence of a single review, Michiko Kakutani's in the *New York Times*, Coral Potter's acting was the problem with the Cocteau presentation. He was considered one-dimensional as Prospero, a role that calls for the display of a rounded figure who comes to terms with the world. Kakutani called his rendition of Prospero lacking in compassion. The critic held that Potter lacked compassion as the stern Prospero, so that the audience misses a human dimension, which is to say, a feeling that Prospero'a actions derive from his own reconciliation with the world.[69]

For the final production, Williams's *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel* was revived beginning in March 1980; since the novelty of the production had worn thin after the Cocteau's previous interpretations of this play by Williams, there were no reviews.

The Cocteau had opened the season with a practice that

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had become traditional: reviving a play from the previous year's repertoire if that play was successful; but even if not so, the Cocteau would revive a production if a season of completely new plays should prove too costly. In the event of a large turnover of acting personnel, the theatre would be unable to rehearse a new cast at short notice, so that the remainder members were depended upon to pull together with a revival of the play presented in May of the preceding season.[70]

The Cocteau staged 228 performances during the 1979-1980 season, earning a box office total of $63,000 from an audience of 20,000. Though audience totals remained relatively stable, the earned income was considerably higher than that received during the 1977-78 season. The additional $21,000 resulted from the higher tickets prices--admission to the Cocteau was available for $6 rather than the $3.50 of the 1977-78 season, and if every seat were sold for this price, income would be even higher. Complimentary tickets were given as in the past to selected people on fixed incomes (as senior citizens are euphemistically called by the Cocteau), and reductions were offered to groups, particularly to high-school students. (The complimentary ticket program is described in more detail in a subsequent chapter.) The 1979-80 season brought one administrative change to the theatre: In the past Coral S. Potter, who frequently played the lead in plays, was doing extra, paid

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duty as administrator.

When the season opened, the board announced the appointment of P. Carson Wiley to be managing director, giving him responsibility for long-range planning, direction and operation of the business management activities. She would supervise the administrative staff, act as liaison with the trustees, and play a major role in developing fund-raising activities. Wiley was given credit for the negotiation and signing of the contract for Tennessee Williams's *Kirche, Kutchen and Kinder*. Her principal base before the appointment was California--like Eve Adamson's--specifically at the University of California, Davis, where she was director of a student program. Even with the new employee, only four administrative staff people got paid at all, a legacy that had continued, sadly, through the 1989-90 season. To fill any gaps, the theatre would make use of interns and work-study employees, but since volunteers lacked the commitment of paid personnel, Adamson chose to keep the paid administrative staff of four. But the director recognized that no one really works for nothing. In order to satisfy the needs of the staff and the actors, roles would need to be apportioned in a more-or-less rotating basis, so that every actor got a chance to be a lead or a featured performer. Enough volunteer help would need to be recruited to avoid a breakdown of administrative staff morale.[71]

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This 1979-80 season appeared to be the one in which the theatre company gained a feeling that the ensemble would survive, at least for several years to come, and, under the fiscal administration of Carson Wiley, the trustees drafted and approved an official statement of duties and responsibilities. The outcome of the board meeting of 10 December 1979 was that several *de facto* practices were codified. These included the need for long-range planning, the assumption of more financial responsibility, and the recruitment of additional members.[72]

Board membership was considered an honor as well as a responsibility, as is the case with many boards of directors, particularly those associated with nonprofit corporations that provide a public and artistic service. Yet one could scarcely say that there was much interest in joining the Cocteau trustees. One item illustrated the most sensitive and difficult task of the individual members: the responsibility to raise contributions from their friends, associates, and strangers, by telephone, by personal contact, by any legal means. To impress on those not already committed to the Cocteau or even to theatre in general is a task that at best is onerous. Board members were pledged to donate an annual minimum sum to the Cocteau, $1,000 at that time. Given the nature of the typical board-embracing people in middle and upper management of media and advertising firms others successful in the professions

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like law--the amount required could not be called taxing.

During the season that ended with *The Tempest*, Eve Adamson as artistic director earned $5,700, while the managing director, surprisingly, earned almost double that amount. There was no explanation for this discrepancy. Carson Wiley's wages totaled $10,400, while Craig Smith as audience development director made $4,800. Three other people received income as members of the principal administrative staff: Tom Keever, production manager, got $5,250, Albert Walston, the administrative assistant, was given $4,950 and Stephen Sena as box office manager received $400.

The New York theater season 1980-81 was marked by the biggest total gross ever received by Broadway stages--approximately $200 million, according to the League of New York Theatres and Producers. This was also the season of a major survey by the Off-Off-Broadway Association (founded in 1972 and later known as the Alliance of Resident Theatres) that indicated to no one's surprise that off-off-Broadway audiences, on the average, had attained higher educational levels than regular theatergoers to Broadway. As described later in this chapter, Cocteau audiences were ranked among those with the highest average levels of education.[73]

Adamson's choices for the 1980-1981 might *all* be called neglected classics, some more obscure than others. The

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plays were:

1980-1981

08/80-10/80	*The Roman Actor*	Philip Massinger
11/80-12/80	*The Witch of Edmonton*	Thomas Middleton
12/80-02/81	*The Dybbuk*	S. Ansky
12/80-01/81	*Pericles*	W. Shakespeare
03/81-05/81	*Life is a Dream*	Calderón de la Barca
04/81-05/81	*The Alchemist*	Ben Jonson

Adamson once again opened the season by disinterring a classic performed only once before in New York City--at the Mercer-Brecht theatre in March 1973, according to records.[74] Phillip Massinger's *The Roman Actors* was staged by the Cocteau from August through October 1980, and deals with one of the Caesars who has a favorite Roman actor, the greatest of all. They were best friends, but then the Caesar believed that the actor was having an affair with Caesar's wife. On trial, the actor has an apology for acting. Craig Smith noted that one of the Cocteau subscribers wrote her doctoral dissertation on the play and brought it to the attention of Eve Adamson. Smith gave his overview of the production by describing the staging:

> Since Caesar's favorite goddess was Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, Adamson put a statue of the icon upstage. In the second act Minerva got closer and larger, and in the last act a huge cutout of Minerva was mounted on the stage. When Caesar has his bad dream (he had killed his friend, the actor), the lights went off the head of Minerva, which was highlighted in luminous paint. So you see this huge head in total darkness; a simple bold choice like that, an unusual choice you might not think of, worked well and took the place of a complex set.[75]

Adamson agreed with Smith that the Cocteau should do the

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Massinger work, not only because it worked on the Cocteau stage but because it gave the audience an important commentary on theatre itself.[76]

Before the Cocteau staged the work, many in the audience, one may presume, had never heard of the writer. Yet he was a principal dramatist to the King's Men, England's leading acting company of the day, and was writing at a time that theater was under attack. The play's defense of theater as a legitimate and vital force in society was particularly noteworthy, according to *Newsday* critic Leo Seligsohn.[77]

Adamson and Craig did not have vivid memories of the production, and the evidence from critical notices was also unclear. One weekly called this a staging that had shown the actors "finally got it together," while another weekly, in its only official coverage of a production at the Cocteau, considered the presentation to be an abomination. Once again, reviewing had proven itself to be a highly subjective craft.

Seligsohn, writing for *Newsday*, praised the simple Roman setting, the costumes, lighting, and original transitional music by Joseph Blunt. He applauded Adamson's use of the tableau and her way of giving actors access to the stage by means of the center aisle and doors from the street, which, he felt, had the effect of turning the whole theater into Rome. Seligsohn saw a Pirandellian quality in Adamson's staging, in which the audience was left wondering who is the

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real Roman actor of the title, Paris (the actor-friend) or Caesar. Massinger had examined the line between unreality and reality.

The Village Voice sent Michael Feingold, a critic, to the theatre--which the weekly journal had not done frequently in the past--and while those Cocteau plays viewed in the past by Feingold had generally been given negative to tepid receptions, the critic felt that the company had, in the interval, pulled its resources together. Feingold also answered Seligsohn's query about why the play has taken so long to arrive in America: He saw Massinger as an austere and pale writer, without the richness of Shakespeare or Webster. Feingold acknowledged the debt that the theater-going public owe to the Cocteau whether the plays are well-done or poorly executed: He expressed his gratitude to Adamson for unearthing plays like *The Roman Actor* and presenting many of them handsomely and competently. He implied that the Massinger play is an antidote to much that has been done on the Romans by Hollywood.[78]

The *New York Times* also visited the Cocteau but did not agree with Feingold on the merits of the production, though like Feingold, its critic applauded the company for staging the neglected work. John Corry found the acting altogether too bloodless and refined (a point acknowledged by Feingold, who had said Adamson's staging stood a bit stiffly on its Roman dignity). Corry added that the group were not

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performing as an ensemble but concentrating too much on themselves, reserving much of his objection for Coral Potter, whose speech he often found to be languid.[79]

Though accustomed to mixed reviews, the Cocteau performers were stunned by John Simon's review in *New York* magazine, although a portion of that reviewer's notice is still used in Cocteau advertising material, to wit: "[The Cocteau has been] offering the most interesting repertoire of neglected classics, old and new, to be found anywhere in these parts." The public relations staff of the theater did not issue the complete text of the review, part of which reads as follows:

> This utterly mouth-watering repertoire is being done in hair-raising fashion. Yet you cannot really get mad at this company. They are a touchingly dedicated lot, and toil, under undoubtedly straitened circumstances in manifold ways. Thus one of the leading actors is also the press agent, and the Associate Director is also billed as Makeup Instructor.
>
> But you *can* regret that these folk, who might have some perfectly good other talents, should insist on being actors, for which they show not the slightest aptitude. . . . . As done by these Coctelians, however, without any real craft (never mind art!), with the blank verse, for instance, delivered either as if by remarkably silent sewing machines or by life-size marionettes pumped full of rant and rodomontade--with the acting, in short, a Pandora's box of vices in which only Hope is kept solidly trapped--the play becomes unendurable. I could not more keep my mind on it than I could my eyes and ears on flies slowly and buzzingly expiring on flypaper. To escape with my sanity, I could not even wait for intermission and inconspicuous disappearance.
>
> In other words the Jean Cocteau Repertory regularly and just about without competition performs plays I am dying to see, but probably never will--certainly

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> not at the Jean Cocteau Repertory, where I would more likely die of seeing them. . . craft--to say nothing of art--is way beyond the reach of hordes of practitioners . . .[80]

Reviewers on the staffs of neighborhood newspapers have generally been more generous with the Cocteau than those working for the major dailies and weeklies. The *Village Voice* and the *New York Times* have tended to demand the same level of quality of Cocteau performers that they have always insisted on with those on the Broadway stages. Corry of the *Times* had praise for the *intentions* of the troupe, calling them lofty at times, but believed that the Cocteau's *execution* of plays is often less than at the highest level. Michael Feingold of the *Voice* had been avoiding the Cocteau for years and went to *The Roman Actor* only because he considered the prospect too interesting to pass up. In stating that with the Massinger work the company had pulled its resources together, he was implicitly revealing that he, too, admired the company's intents but felt wary of the Cocteau's execution.

Glenn Loney, writing for a *Others Stages* magazine, added his findings: He noted that "the Cocteau is an adventurous, ambitious ensemble but one whose artistic reach often exceeds its thespian grasp."

For the second production during November and December 1980, Adamson chose Thomas Middleton's *The Witch of Edmonton* because of what she considered an American fascination with withcraft and mysticism. (The Cocteau production history

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credits Thomas Middleton with the authorship of this work, but others ascribe the play to William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, and John Ford.) Rowley, Dekker, and Ford wrote the play in 1621, attempting to exploit popular interest in the execution of Mother Sawyer, a convicted, confessed witch. In the script, Sawyer is presented as a forlorn, persecuted old woman who longs for revenge on her self-righteous Christian oppressors. The Devil appears to her as a lecherous black dog, setting in motion dire plots and silly pranks.

Adamson recalled Craig Smith's playing of the simpleton son of the witch's chief enemy, a role that found him playing with the devilish dog (who was characterized by J.D. Eiche in a realistic dog suit). What impressed Smith in particular was what he considered some fine ensemble acting, through which he believed the play was realized. Actors would appear out of stone smoke-holes or from under Mother Sawyer's skirts. (Sawyer was played by Phyllis Deitschel.)[81]

From the evidence of reviews, the Cocteau had realized the intentions of the authors in a production that was staged well and acted evenly by the ensemble.

Glen Loney, writing for *Other Stages*, was pleased "to see a forgotten play given such an effective staging." Loney originally attended the Cocteau four years earlier for a presentation of *The Cenci* expecting little or nothing in

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terms of production values. He was impressed with the intellectual and visual concept of the staging (given the small stage at the Bouwerie Lane Theatre), though like many other reviewers, he felt the actors were not quite up to the challenges set for them. He considered some performers at their best--even better than Peter O'Toole's Old Vic *Macbeth* and Michael Moriarty's *Richard III*. Loney enjoyed Craig Smith's portrayal of the simpleton son of the witch's chief adversary and praised also the playing of a lecherous black dog by J.E. Eiche, who wore a dog suit for the act. Loney had visited the Cocteau from time to time during the seventies; his comments on *The Witch of Edmonton* were a segment of his most favorable review of the company[82].

Noting that the company had still been staging eight or nine productions per year in the past but that the Cocteau offered only six in its 1980-1981 season, Craig Smith explained that he and his associates had been losing potentially valuable rehearsal time. He attributed the favorable notices for *The Witch of Edmonton* to the new policy of cutting back on quantity in the interests of quality[83]

The third presentation, which opened in December 1980, created a turnout of people who had never before been to the Cocteau. For S. Ansky's *The Dybbuk*, Orthodox Jews who had not known of the existence of the theatre on the Bowery purchased enough tickets to fill the house for each

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weeknight performance. They were encouraged to attend by the same word of mouth that urges Armenian-Americans, Italo-Americans, African-Americans, and others to attend shows depicting their own cultures. To many individuals in these ethnic groups, theatre *per se* is of little interest. But such ethnic and religious groups will attend presentations that focus on their own mythologies.

The Dybbuk, by Shalom Anski, was used as the basis of an opera by Queens College faculty member Joel Mandelbaum as well as many modern writers of horror stories such as Williams Peter Blatty, whose *Exorcist* exploited the gory aspects of the tale. Ansky wrote of a figure in a white bridal gown who writhes and twists, horrifying her wedding guests. The beautiful bride had been possessed by a demon, or dybbuk, which had welded itself to her because of a broken promise made long ago to wed a particular man whom she does not love. Phyllis Deitsche, who had been with the company for several years, was cast in the role of the troubled Leah, a part that Thomas Fuld did not remember with pride. The trustee felt that Deitsche, probably on instructions from Eve Adamson, made excessive use of contortions, in effect emphasizing the lurid and melodramatic aspects of the tale over the spiritual. Fuld felt that Adamson occasionally leaned toward the commercial in her direction, in this case producing a scrim behind which the bridegroom ascended to heaven "in the manner of a

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Radio City Musical Hall Christmas Show."[84]

Liese Weiss, a student at Queens College who reviewed the play for the college newspaper *The Phoenix*, lamented the sensationalizing of the theme of the play which she now equated with grade-B horror movies.[85] Weiss would have underplayed the possession, or defined it by a new set of physical symptoms. Adamson, then, had been found guilty of using hackneyed devices despite the presence of sophisticated audiences.[86]

A turning point in Cocteau history was the signing of Toby Robertson. Robertson's name brought a wide audience to performances of *Pericles*, the fourth production of the season beginning in December 1980. (The production doubtless influenced Joseph Papp to produce the play at the Public Theatre some four years later. According to Thomas Fuld, a trustee, Papp, in a press conference, noted that he "saw *Pericles* somewhere in some theater and I thought it was a good idea, so I'm doing it now.")[87]

Fuld enjoyed the Robertson version for the concept: The director had reset the show in a brothel, giving a Brechtian approach to the play. According to the trustee:

> It looked like a scene from *Threepenny Opera*--there were song, dance, music, a night-club atmosphere. Craig [Smith] was looking like Joel Grey in whiteface and he was quite a character. The play got a tremendous response, the reviews were wonderful, it brought in a lot of new people and was a big surge upward for the company. The board was happy because trustees have long believed that the theatre suffered from low visibility. We wanted the theatre to be better known. Sometimes I say I am on the board of

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> the Cocteau and people look at me with a "what's that" attitude.[88]

Harris Berlinsky had strong memories of the production. Berlinsky felt that Robertson had preconceived notions of how the play could be done in a professional way. The actor compared directing styles, equating his role in *Pericles* to his acting in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* directed by Chris Martin of CSC. Robertson had a no-nonsense, straightforward style of getting good acting, according to Berlinsky. He would imbue line readings with his own style. Berlinsky also remembered fondly the company's receiving a nomination for an OBIE. (The presentation of the OBIE, or off-Broadway awards, is made annually by the *Village Voice* to persons working in the communities of off-Broadway and off-off-Broadway theatre.)[89]

Craig Smith recalled Robertson as "a crazy man who came to the theatre twice--to do *Pericles* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*." According to the actor, Robertson was not an easy man with whom to work, but Smith respected Robertson's craftsmanship in getting right down to the work, one who said, "This is the play and this is how we are going to do it," and made it all work. He stated that the opening night of *Pericles* was the most exuberant evening of his life as an actor, recalling that at the end of the show, "people stood up, not just trickle by trickle, but by a power that came from the audience and threw us backwards." That, he said, was the only time such a reception ever occurred at final

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curtain.[90]

The show was not without audience incident. At the close of the first act of one presentation, a man stood up and said to the audience in an authoritative voice, "Go home. You should not be watching this. This is Germany in the 1930s. This is terrible." The audience thought he was a plant of the director, but the man quickly convinced them otherwise. According to Craig Smith, *Pericles* may have disturbed the man because the play was updated, showing a decadent Berlin with a Marlene Dietrich look-alike singing in a café. Had the man stayed for the second act, he would have seen that this society without morals would be condemned for its immorality. He seemed to be saying that this was bad simply because the actors were showing how Germany was during the late 1930s. He thought that this was agitprop theatre and that the company was preaching decadence, glorifying the Berlin of the stage--transvestism, incest, risqué people who seemed not to care about anything except sex. Smith explained that in fact the ensemble did have a plant in the audience who came up as the Pericles of a play-within-a-play. That actor was sucked into this awful world; the theatergoer was offended.[91]

Craig Smith recalled his role as the narrator in the style of Joel Gray and added that the production was important since the theatre was in bad financial shape. According to the actor,

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> . . . we contacted Robertson, the artistic director of the Old Vic, who had been working out of his own Prospect Theatre Company--a very well respected man. He had done *Pericles* and wanted to work in the U.S. He came over, directed a spectacular production, won an OBIE, got a sold-out house for the duration, and got incredible reviews. There was no set at all, just a carpet and some pillows, all set in a brothel, a play within a play. The first night we got standing ovations. You don't get standing ovations in the city--on Broadway you do, but those are tourists. That's because they paid so much they have to convince themselves they liked it. But we got the ovations because the show really was working. This *Pericles* is a picaresque, episodic, unwieldy thing as a play and Toby set the whole action in the brothel so as people walked in, there were transvestites walking around smoking cigarettes and talking to the audience. The actors dressed as women in high heels looked decadent. We had a plant in the audience who was called up stage; he ended up being Pericles. We gave him the script and said, "Now you are Pericles," It had music. A real decadence. Calling someone up was not in the original script, it was a total liberty on the director's part. This gave a sprawling episodic play something you could grasp and hold on to.[92]

Thomas Fuld agreed with Craig that the Cocteau production of *Pericles* was a turning point in that the theatre got many from the press to attend in fairly large numbers.[93] Smith was succinct: "Audiences loved it, critics loved it, it saved out butts, because we were in such bad financial shape."[94]

No one with a background in theatre would be surprised to hear that a major name as actor or director will deliver a sold-out house, even one with a non-commercial ambiance. It will surely bring in critics, as Tennessee Williams's first visit did. *Pericles*, in fact, received nine reviews, the largest number to date for the Cocteau. As to whether Smith

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was correct in stating that all the critics loved it, one must briefly consult the archives of recent dramatic criticism. Mel Gussow of the *New York Times*, who had praised the Cocteau for bringing back neglected classics, noted first that Robertson turned the play inside out, and all that was missing to make it seem like the musical *Cabaret* was the song, "Wilkommen." Gussow believed that since the play was not first-rate Shakespeare, directorial license would not be contraindicated, so that despite what he considered excesses and occasional awkwardness in design and performance, he felt the evening was unusually inventive and entertaining. He also credited Robertson for seeming to have inspired young American actors to exceed their previous accomplishments. He praised even the singing, by stating that one actress, Deborah Houston as Marina, had a fine voice. This notice was a particularly arresting commentary as the Cocteau has never been prominent for singing talent. Gussow called the company increasingly venturesome.[95]

Mel Gussow used the occasion of Robertson's visit to applaud the Cocteau approach in the *New York Times* and to give his views on the direction. Gussow gave credit to the English director for turning it into something of a hybrid between Genet's *The Balcony* and the musical *Cabaret* without subverting the nature of the work. Gussow saw the play as still a fanciful epic about lost children, miscreant friends, and virtue triumphant. He considered the approach

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outrageous and somewhat absurd, particularly the scene in which Perices competes with other knights for a matrimonial prize, with the contestants in jogging shorts and shirts as though they were taking part in a neighborhood Olympics at a health club. Though anachronistic, the scene had a clear purpose, which Gussow called a mocking of male chauvinism in and out of Shakespeare. He praised the acting of Elton Cormier as the father and Deborah Houston as the daughter who recognizes him (the latter sometimes doubling as her own mother in other scenes), and appreciated the original music of Carl Davis and Jim Cummings.[96]

The Queens College critic agreed with Gussow that Robertson made a good choice in turning the play into one colossal wink at the audience. Barry Walden commended Craig Smith in *The Phoenix* for "elegantly playing the role of M.C. in the vein of the Joel Grey character", and like Gussow, the critic granted particular praise to Deborah Houston, though not for singing talent but for her handling of two reconciliation scenes.[97]

Clive Barnes of the *New York Post* found quality in the work as well. In an implicit derogation of Eve Adamson, Barnes dismissed the company's previous stagings as often a little flaky, but rejoiced that now, suddenly, unexpectedly, they had "acquired an internationally known director, Toby Robertson, and the company lives and breathes." He praised Robertson for re-writing parts of the play in such a way

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that he turned Shakespeare's less-than-credible plot into a hint that Shakespeare was simply laughing up his sleeve.[98]

Terry Curtis Fox reviewed it for the *Village Voice*, declaring that the play itself is "unalloyed dreck," with numbing multiples such as two shipwrecks and three resurrections, but that Robertson discovered the Shakespearean core of the work. Despite Fox's cavil that Robertson seems to be saying only straight sex is appropriate (though one could interpret the whole work as one showing the players ennobled by grabbing more and different sex roles), the *Voice* critic called the result "extraordinary, as exhilarating an experience as I have had in a New York theatre this season."[99]

Holly Hill of the *SoHo Weekly News* praised Robertson's juggling act which she labeled "dazzling." Hill, too, alluded to both *Cabaret* and *The Balcony* as inspirations for Robertson's concept. And like her fellow critics, she found the company superb.[100] A vote for the production came also from the reviewer of a community newspaper, Florence Stevenson of *Park East*.[101]

One can but wonder about the true feelings of Eve Adamson who, although praised rather frequently by critics for her directorial vision, is now hearing from every reviewer of *Pericles* that Toby Robertson had been the chief architect of an enormously successful production. Granted that Robertson's background and acclaim demand our attention and

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respect, and anyone familiar with the functionings of a theatre company knows that the director's role, if not as strong as that of his colleagues in the film industry, is bound to make an imprint on the presentations. Adamson was directing a company not generally of the caliber of the Old Vic, yet one might suspect that she had stifled a whimper at all the media attention given to her guest director.

In March 1981, the fifth production that season--*Life is a Dream*--was staged, because the play is one of Adamson's favorites. For that presentation, and for the production of Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*, there were neither memories from the company nor press reviews. (The Calderón play was presented again during the 1989-90 season, and at that time would be directed by Adamson as a guest, as she had resigned just a few months before that presentation.) Adamson did not recall why *The Alchemist* was chosen for the final offering and staged during April and May 1981, particularly since Ben Jonson was represented by the previous year's staging of *Volpone*.

A skeletal account of finances during the 1980-81 season indicated box-office receipts of approximately $60,000 (a bit less than the $63,000 received during the previous season). Audience attendance figures were not available in the company files.

The seasons described--1978-81--were the middle years of the Cocteau Repertory Company. By June 1981, the company

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had established itself as a group dedicated to the performance of both well-known classics and unusual works. Toby Robertson and Tennessee Williams had visited the theatre, events which not only raised the morale of the entire staff but also gave the company considerable publicity.

The company had demonstrated its ability to attract high school pupils and college students for the great crowd-pleaser, *Hamlet*, in a matinee series which had its share of humilitations for the performers and directors because of the playing of adolescent pranks.

While the company could face the 1981-82 season with a reasonable sense of security--particularly since more jolts from the outside world of directors and playwrights would jostle them into even greater efforts--there remained the peril of looming insolvency. Bankruptcy had been a phenomenon that was not unknown to off-off-Broadway theatre from its inception.

If the Times Square area was not entirely free of crime during these years, the contemplation of a trip to the Bowery during one's valuable hours of leisure to be subjected to unmfamiliar works was daunting to all save committed students and lovers of the dramatic arts and pupils being taken there.

Audience fears were taking a toll. Holly Hill, reporting for *Other Stages*, declared openly that the Cocteau was in

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imminent danger of folding. The Cocteau faced a $20,000 deficit requiring attention lest the doors close permanently during the months ahead.[102]

The Cocteau's troubles did not arise from excessive generosity to the actors, who were compensated only for school matinees, or $82 a week for twelve weeks out of a forty-two-week season. Nor was the actors' dedication an issue. Many served the company while holding full-time jobs. Harris Berlinsky was a police administrative assistant and Coral Potter a note-reader typing from court transcripts. No returning actor received more than $50 per week when the Cocteau began to give honorariums to such personnel. Nonetheless this new $50 per-person per-week expense shared some blame for the $20,000 deficit, and only the most optimistic projection of new subscriptions (given the $8000 cut in the New York State Council of the Arts grant), could get the theatre back in the black.

Some material for melodrama was present as the 1980-81 season drew to a close. Hill urged friends of theatre to subscribe for $18 the season, to make contributions (even a dollar), and to encourage corporations to make tax-exempt donations. Hill quoted Adamson: "I'm a fighter. But the state of desperation is real and it's ironic that the crisis should occur just when we are artistically stronger and closer than ever to our goal of a permanent, paid company."[103] As though it were anticipating financial

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problems at the Cocteau, OOBA, or the Off-Off-Broadway Alliance (later to be named the Alliance of Resident Theatres), surveyed member audiences and in mid-1981 issued to the Cocteau the theatre's first sophisticated marketing report. The survey questioned 4,747 theatergoers at 28 off-Broadway and off-off-Broadway houses. The study distinguished between off-Broadway and off-off-Broadway, which in 1981 meant that the latter usually gave fewer performances per week and had different contractual arrangements with the performers than did off-Broadway theaters. Despite the smaller sums needed to purchase off-Broadway tickets, the survey found that off-Broadway audiences had, on the average, incomes above $25,000 (46% reported so) while only 41% of Broadway audiences enjoyed such levels of income. Seventy-two percent of off-and off-off-Broadway audiences were college graduates against 46% for Broadway audiences. (The national incidence of college graduates was 22%.) Thirty-nine percent of off-off-Broadway audiences pursued or had pursued graduate studies--the same figure as for off-Broadway. Sixty-three percent of off- and off-off Broadway audiences worked in fields not related to the performing arts, while twenty-three percent said they knew someone in the cast. Most said that they wanted to see unusual plays and attend noncommercial theater.[104]

More important to the Cocteau family was the report that focused directly on them. The marketing appraisal indicated

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that patrons of the Cocteau--a generally older audience than that served by most other theatres--felt loyal to the theatre group, had subscriptions to other companies in New York, and made modest contributions to help finance the Cocteau.[105] An examination of brochures and announcements of varying formats indicates that the Cocteau administration did indeed modify its advertising to stress the particular strength of that company--the performance of neglected classics by a resident, repertory company.

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CHAPTER FIVE: Notes

1. Polly Morrice, "Theatre," *The Village Voice*, 27 September 1978, 110.

2. Billy Rose Division.

3. Eve Adamson, interview with the author, New York City, 28 February 1990.

4. Craig Smith, interview with the author, New York City, 274. February 1990.

5. Walter Kerr, "Jacobean Comedy Obscure," *New York Times*, 3 November 1978, C3.

6. Donald R. Wilson, "*A Mad World, My Masters*," *SoHo Weekly News*, 14 September 1978, 8.

7. Harris Berlinsky, interview with the author, New York City, 21 March 1990.

8. Craig Smith, interview with the author, New York City, 18 June 1990.

9. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

10. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

11. Tish Dace, "*Exit the King*," *Other Stages*, 16 November 1978, 6.

12. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

13. Barbara Crossette, "*The Cid* Tests Mettle of Cocteau Players," *New York Times*, 1 December 1978, C10.

14. Judy Thrall, *Le Cid* Revived," *The Villager*, 8 January 1979, 13.

15. Clive Barnes, "On the Town," *New York Post*, 11 January 1979, 39.

16. Like the majority of off-off-Broadway houses, the Cocteau does not have a curtain.

17. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

18. Eve Adamson, interview with the author, New York City, 14 March 1990.

19. Berlinsky interview, 22 March 1990.

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20. James B. Nichols, trustee, interview with the author, New York City, 31 May 1990.

21. Berlinsky interview, 22 March 1990.

22. Marilyn Stasio, "Revival of *Scarecrow* is Eerie, But Fails to Stand Up," *New York Post*, 23 January 1979, 39.

23. Judy Thrall, "Cocteau Company Adds Two to Rep: One Tender, One Funny," *The Villager*, 19 October 1978, 13.

24. Tish Dace, "Drama Review," *Other Stages*, 16 November 1978, 6.

25. Christopher Sharp, "Theater," *Women's Wear Daily*, 1 February 1979, 37.

26. Arthur Sainer, "A Lively Fossil," *The Village Voice*, 6 February 1979, 111.

27. Emory Lewis, "'03 Satire Opens Cocteau Season," *The Record*, 11 October 1978, 30.

28. Berlinsky interview, 21 March 1990.

29. Adamson interview, 14 March 1990.

30. Smith interview, 27 March 1990.

31. Thomas Fuld, interview with the author, New York City, 31 May 1990.

32. Judy Thrall, "Tennessee Williams on the Bowery," *The Villager*, 12 January 1978, 5.

33. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

34. Adamson interview, 14 March 1990.

35. Adamson interview, 14 March 1990.

36. Tish Dace, "Moral Self-Deception," *Other Stages*, 2 May 1979, 11.

37. Merle Ginsberg, "*The Changeling*," *The Villager*, 3 May 1979, 15.

38. Letter to Abe Rosenthal, *The New York Times*, by Craig Smith, publicist, dated 11 January 1978.

39. *New York Times Index*, 1979-80.

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40. Mel Gussow, "Equity Dispute Clouds off-off-Broadway's Future," *New York Times*, 30 August 1979, C14.

41. Bill Rose Division.

42. Donald Spoto, *The Kindness of Strangers* (New York: Ballantine, 1985), 375-76.

43. Ibid., 376.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid., 377.

47. Fuld interview, 22 March 1990.

48. Adamson interview, 14 March 1990.

49. Berlinsky interview, 22 March 1990.

50. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

51. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

52. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

53. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

54. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

55. Richard A. Whipple, "Theatre," *Home Planet*, January 1980, 5.

56. Ibid.

57. Letter from Tennessee Williams to Eve Adamson, Key West, July 1981.

58. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

59. Berlinsky interview, 22 March 1990.

60. This recollection was found in John S. Patterson, "Tennessee Williams's Latest a First for off-Broadway [sic] Group," *The Villager*, 20 September 1979, 15. Mr. Patterson, conforming to the prohibitions of the playwright, did not review *Kirche*. By her recollection "all hell broke loose," one assumes Adamson meant that the audience delivered a considerable round of applause.

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61. Among the college instructors requesting *Hamlet* was Dr. Richard Donovan, teacher of English at Bronx Community College, and currently a trustee for the Cocteau.

62. Adamson interview, 28 February 1990.

63. Berlinsky interview, 22 March 1990.

64. Judy Thrall, "Theater," *Washington Market Review*, 10 September 1979, 13.

65. Fuld interview, 22 March 1990.

66. "Culture on the Bowery," *PCV.St Views*, December 1979, 5.

67. Holly Hill, "Jean Cocteau Sets *Ruy Blas*," *Other Stages*, 7 January 1980, 9.

68. Berlinsky interview, 22 March 1990.

69. Michiko Kakutani, "Stage: Cocteau Players Present *The Tempest*", *New York Times*, 16 March 1980, V/1.

70. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

71. Adamson interview, 28 February 1990.

72. The text of the practice follows. 1) To support the established artistic aims of the Jean Cocteau Repertory and to provide for the perpetuation of the organization through active participation in long-range planning, identification of goals, and the design of strategies to achieve these goals;
2) To review and approve the annual objectives of the organization;
3) To conduct the business of the corporation in accordance with the by-laws of the corporation;
4) To employ the artistic and managing directors, in whom the artistic and management leadership are vested, and who are responsible for implementation of the strategies designed to achieve the goals of the organization;
5) To assume financial responsibility for the organization in the following ways:
a. approve and authorize the year budget,
b. direct and monitor the financial affairs of the organization,
c. raise funds as required to ensure organizational stability and growth,
d. personally contribute to and subscribe to Jean Cocteau Repertory on an annual basis,
6) lend advice, counsel and assistance to the managing director;

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7) provide for a responsible and effective board through identification and recruitment of active and committed members.

73. *New York Times Index*, 1981, s.v. "theatre."

74. Billy Rose Division.

75. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

76. Leo Seligsohn, "Theater Review," *Newsday*, 4 August 1980, II,1.

77. Leo Seligsohn, "Theater Review," *Newsday*, 4 August 1980, II,1.

78. Michael Feingold, "*The Roman Actor at the Cocteau," Village Voice*, 6-12 August 1979, 115.

79. John Corry, "Theatre: Cocteau Repertory Stages *Roman Actor*", *New York Times,* 14 August 1980, C24.

80. John Simon, "Craft and Art," *New York*, 1 September 1980, 44-45.

81. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

82. Glen Loney, "*The Witch of Edmonton," Other Stages*, 25 September 1980, 7.

83. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

84. Fuld interview, 22 March 1990.

85. Liese Weiss, "*The Dybbuk*: A Yiddish Tale Possessed," *The Phoenix* (Queens College), 23 February 1981, 11.

86. Ibid.

87. Fuld interview, 22 March 1990..

88. Fuld interview, 22 March 1990.

89. Adamson interview, 14 March 1990.

90. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

91. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

92. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

93. Fuld interview, 22 March 1990.

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94. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

95. Mel Gussow, "The Theater: Toby Robertson's *Pericles*", *New York Times*, 15 December 1980, C1.

96. Mel Gussow, "New York's Stages Brush Up Classics," *New York Times*, 9 January 1981, C1,3.

97. Barry Walden, "Shakespeare's *Pericles*," *The Phoenix* (of Queens College), 2 March 1981, 11.

98. Clive Barnes, "*Pericles* is Short of Princely," *New York Post*, 17 January 1981, 31.

99. Terry Curtis Fox, "The Right Rite," *Village Voice*, 6 January 1981, 55.

100. Holly Hill, "*Pericles*," *SoHo Weekly News*, 23-29 December 1980, 8.

101. Florence Stevenson, "Reviews, Reviews, Reviews," *Park East*, January 1981, 10.

102. Holly Hill, "Cocteau's Woes," *Other Stages*, 4 December 1980, 2.

103. Ibid.

104. "Theater Study Rates Caliber of Audiences," *New York Times*, 22 July 1981, C19.

105. The survey indicated the following: 1) Audiences did not patronize the TKTS booth (that offers discounts to Broadway and off-Broadway productions) as much as do Broadway visitors, and they attended Broadway shows infrequently;
2) They had turned against Broadway because of the expense (90%) and because they felt it is too commercial (48);
3) They are a very special group--non-professionals who are more likely than the average to make a special effort to know what is going on in the theater. Thus they are the prime off-off-Broadway theatre audience;
4) They felt loyal to the Cocteau and appreciated promotions through TDF and mailings;
5) They wanted real theater value for their money;
6) They should be offered deals such as dinner discounts in nearby restaurants;
7) They are older and more middle-incomed and for the most part do not work in the performing arts. In addition the Cocteau is more successful than the other theatres

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surveyed in attracting an audience from outer boroughs, with Cocteau attracting the most educated audience;

8) Plays like *The Dybbuk* can draw an outer-borough audience--specific plays reach out to specific (read: ethnic) audiences;

9) Half the audience are parties of two, 40% are larger parties, heavily subscription and TDF users;

10) Double the number of audience members surveyed said they like the Cocteau because they identify with the particular theatre--they like the helpfulness of the staff and cleanliness of the theatre, easy of parking and of arranging for tickets;

11) They like to go out to dinner as well as enjoy theater;

12) Some had subscriptions to at least one other theater group--about one-third--30% had 3 or more subscriptions;

13) One-fifth claimed to have made a contribution to a theatre this year, an average of $16.

The major conclusion that Adamson drew from the report was that since overall, people say they go to the Cocteau to see unusual plays, the brochures should emphasize Cocteau strength in that area.

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CHAPTER SIX

The Mission Continues: 1981-85

As the 1981-1982 season for the Cocteau Repertory Theatre began, Tennessee Williams, evidently pleased with his visit to the theatre during performances of *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel,* returned as guest director of his new play, *Something Cloudy, Something Clear.* The schedule for the season was as follows:

1981-1982

08/81-10/81	*Something Cloudy Something Clear*	Tennessee Williams
11/81-01/82	*Two Noble Kinsmen*	W. Shakespeare
12/81-02/82	*The Revenger's Tragedy*	Cyril Tourneur
02/82-04/82	*The Golem*	H. Leivick
04/82-05/82	*The Count of Monte Cristo*	Marshall Borden

Tennessee Williams's *Something Cloudy, Something Clear* opened in August 1980. Williams asked the Cocteau company to produce the work rather than submit it to a Broadway management. One month before the opening of the play, the author described the reasons for his choice of theatre by stating simply that "Eve Adamson's staging of *Kirche, Kutchen and Kinder* was unforgettable."[1] (The play received no other productions in New York City.)[2]

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Two weeks before the 24 August opening, Michiko Kakutani of the *New York Times* conducted an interview with the author about *Something Cloudy, Something Clear*, also written during Williams's late period. Adamson was with Williams during this interview and frequently offered her views on the writer's work. *Clothes for a Summer Hotel* had closed on Broadway after a disastrous run. Williams was aware that critics considered his playwriting career to be in decline, but asserted that he was a survivor, and recalled that one of his earlier plays was booed off the stage in Boston.[3]

The playwright told Kakutani that he considered laughter his substitute for lamentation, pointing out that *Something Cloudy* released some of his emotional content by recalling his experience of growing up in Provincetown, Mass., in 1940. There he had met Tallulah Bankhead and Jackson Pollock and, more important for him, his first great male love--a young Canadian draft dodger named Kip. Kip, unaware that he was dying of a brain tumor, had fallen in love with a woman and declared that his affair with Williams was over. Williams left for Mexico. Adamson referred to *Something Cloudy* as a memory play. Interpreting the biographical aspect of the work, she told the interviewer from the *New York Times* that by the end of the evening it was very clear that August (the Williams character) was existing in two time frames at once--as the young man in 1940, and as an older man today. The action was internal, taking place in

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the consciousness of the playwright.[4]

Adamson stated that as Williams got older, his work became increasingly abstract, evolving like Shakespeare's (e.g. *The Tempest*) and Picasso's. Adamson felt that after a commercial success with *The Night of the Iguana* in 1961, Williams was moving toward a more impressionistic form, in which time and memory became the dominant motifs. For example, *Small Craft Warnings*, written in 1972, did not rely on a narrative line. *Clothes for a Summer Hotel* wandered through the past and present to recount the story of Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. Williams agreed that his style was changing, adding that the time had come for him to give himself more license, though "one often writes more than the critics will allow." Explaining the mixture of past and present, particularly in *Something Cloudy*, he held that when one gets older, the past and present begin to merge as one realizes that time runs short. Williams recalled the negative notices other writers received in their later periods--Eugene O'Neill and Henrik Ibsen, for example--and insisted that he would continue to write, regardless of reviews, to turn what he considered his borderline psychosis into potential creativity.[5]

Something Cloudy, Something Clear was set by a beach shack on Cape Cod during the summer of 1940. The play features August, a beginning writer, who is revising the play intended for his debut on Broadway. He is infatuated

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with Kip, a handsome Canadian dancer and draft dodger, who is visiting with a wealthy and protective young girl named Clare, reputedly his sister. When Clare goes off with a gangster friend, August takes advantage of her absence to lay suit to the sexually ambivalent Kip. Kip reveals that he is terminally ill and unable to reciprocate August's obsessive passion. August, at this time, must deal with crass producers. Thematically, then, the play is a retelling of the tale of conflict between art and commerce.

Craig Smith, no stranger to performances of Williams's plays, called the period in which the company mounted *Something Cloudy* a heightened time for the Cocteau; ten years after the staging, he found talking about his role emotionally difficult. What Smith recalled clearly was that Williams was in residence for the entire run to guest-direct this autobiographical tale of his first playwriting experience. Despite the actor's ten years' experience with the Cocteau, Smith felt exhilarated during that 1980-81 season.

Smith was wearing two hats, handling press relations and acting, during this important phase of Cocteau history. He was assigned the press job for budgetary reasons, as the theatre could not afford to hire more administrative staff. As though playing a leading role under Williams's eye were not sufficient cause of Smith's surge of emotions, at one point he was speaking to the producer of the Today Show on

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television, while keeping the head of Entertainment Tonight on hold. "*They* were calling *me*!" he recounted, citing the high point of his theatre career.[6]

Williams was present during some rehearsals of *Something Cloudy* and responded well to director Eve Adamson's criticism. Adamson often asked him whether he was willing to correct a scene or two; she felt that something was not working. Williams was open to her suggestions and made some alterations in the play. One might expect the focus of the theatergoing public to be on the text of the play rather than on its performance by the Cocteau company, given the rumors of Williams's decline and the prospects for a comeback. Cocteau actors feared that the public would overlook Craig Smith's performance as August, which Smith considered one of the best roles of his career, and one in which he felt confident about his abilities. To some extent, the company were correct in their assumptions; yet Craig's overview of the production--particularly of his own role--was reflected in the notices. Smith credited his good work largely to the experience of acting together with Dominique Cieri, who filled the role of Kip's mother, Clare. (Cieri had started with the Cocteau during the previous year's production of *Life is a Dream*, and is now a playwright who has had readings in New York and productions in Philadelphia and California.) She had told Smith after the run of the Williams play that she did not feel she would

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excel as an actress and that she would try her skill at writing.[7]

The production received seventeen reviews and feature articles. After the opening, reviews were published in papers from the *Atlantic City Insider* to the *Floral Park* (Queens, N.Y.) *Bulletin.* William Green in the *Insider* observed that Williams *had* to present his new work in an off-off-Broadway theatre, attributing this to a decline after his *Clothes for a Summer Hotel,* which made him unwelcome in the more commercial theatres. But Green was sympathetic to this latest work which, however, he found lacking in the dramatic punch of the earlier pieces. Green was able to see Williams's own, inimitable style in the play. Green found Craig Smith excellent in the main role as the embryonic playwright, "playing so casually that it looked as though he were living the part rather than performing it."[8] According to Dan Isaac of *Other Stages,* the real heart of the play is August's dealings with two young beachcombers, who turn out to be even more vulnerable and waif-like than the playwright. What is cloudy to Williams is a moral ambiguity created by his seduction of the young and vulnerable Kip, but Isaac found that Williams was unable to link various isolated scenes (such as that of people dying lonely in hospitals) with the central plot. The reviewer called Craig Smith's portrayal of the shy playwright a gentle, beautiful performance.[9]

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Marjorie Gunner of the *Floral Park Bulletin* called the play "little life and less art."[10] Ron Mullen of *The Villager* saw the play as an "autobiography of spirit rather than of flesh, a fragile delicate piece of theatre handled with taste and sensitivity by the Cocteau company, especially Craig Smith," whom the critic considered mesmerizing in the role of the author.[11]

The *New York Native*, a New York weekly newspaper with a predominantly gay readership, sent a critic to the Cocteau for the first time, ostensibly because of the play's motif of homosexuality. Terry Helbing was impressed that "not since *Vieux Carré* had Williams included so openly gay a character in one of his plays, and never before was he in the central role." Helbing pronounced *Something Cloudy, Something Clear* Tennessee Williams's gayest play, noting that August's sexual predilections are quite clear from one of the beach scenes. But Helbing perceived that the moving and touching moments appeared too infrequently, making the evening "mind-deadening and numbing."[12]

Another reviewer attributed the problems she had with the play to the Cocteau company, whose members, she felt, were unable to reach the depth that is in the play; this was despite Adamson's smooth and intelligent direction. Paul Barish of *The Villager* did not see the passion talked about by Kip, Clare, and August.[13] And though Bill Irvine of *The Villager* called the play itself "marvelous,"[14] Brian Bradley,

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in a review broadcast on cable television channel D, felt that the script still needed some work and that moreover, the 100Cocteau production did not do it justice. Bradley saw the new work as a logical progression of the writer from *Vieux Carré* and *Clothes for a Summer Hotel,* but he did not believe that *Something Cloudy* equalled the dramatic conflict present in those earlier works.[15]

Clive Barnes of the *New York Post* added that much of the material in the new play had been used in Williams's autobiographical *Memoirs* a few years previously, in what he called a "cozy, chatty, fireside tone--wry, melancholy, unashamed," and thought that the emotions worked better in a book than on the stage. Like the two other critics just mentioned, Barnes faulted the company for staging the play with "a little more mist than was strictly desirable and with inconsistent acting." Only Craig Smith was credited with doing a fine job.[16]

United Press International critic Glenne Currie ignored the quality of the production, choosing instead to summarize the play and warn that Williams should have left this episode in his memoirs, because "he had not taken the pains to make a viable play out of it."[17]

One can understand the embarrassment of Thomas Fuld, then president of the board of trustees, who felt angry about the almost unanimous critical skepticism. Favorable notices were needed to attract a wider potential audience to

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the Cocteau, which might expand the subscriber base dramatically, and even enable the company to move to a theatre in a more desirable location with more seating capacity. But this was not to be, and Fuld discharged some of his anger at the results in a letter to Williams as follows:

> I am so very pleased that you allowed the Jean Cocteau Repertory to present *Something Cloudy, Something Clear*. It is without any doubt a very important work that will survive the simpleminded vindictiveness of those who claim to be critics, those who are obviously blind in both eyes and without a shred of artistic sensitivity!
>
> I want to tell you that I have been moved and deeply touched by your play each time that I have seen it. The beauty of the human relationships, the struggle of the artists, the love which conquers time and events, shine out brilliantly through your words.
>
> Our audiences have also been touched by your very special genius. I listen to them each night and I know that this is true. They are returning two and three times and bringing new friends with them to share in this wonderful experience. We will do everything in our power to draw these audiences in.
>
> Your play deserves to be seen by the widest audiences possible, and I feel sorry for those few who will let others, who do not know better, keep them from experiencing your vision. We must stand together against the philistines who cannot allow the light that you bring to the world to be diminished by the sound and the fury of idiots who have nothing to tell us.[18]

This visit by Williams to the Cocteau in 1981 was to be his last with the company. The writer was found dead in his suite in New York's Hotel Elysée fourteen months later at the age of 71. In a *New York Times* feature following the

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playwright's death, Mel Gussow indicated that *Something Cloudy, Something Clear* was produced at the Cocteau, and that the critical disfavor with which the play was greeted was duplicated by several other late plays with small runs--*Slapstick Tragedy, The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, Boom!, The Seven Descendants of Myrtle,* and *In a Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*.[19]

Adamson absorbed the critical disfavor and, as planned, moved to a Shakespearean work, *Two Noble Kinsmen*, as the company's second production of the season, beginning in November 1980. That play could not in any sense be ranked with *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*, two of the crowd-pleasers that brought large school matinee audiences to the Cocteau. Craig Smith agreed that the play is rarely done: in his words, "the theatre kind of dusted it off to give it a stab." But Smith called the play worthy, something with a ceremonial quality that could appeal to an audience open to non-commercial theatre experiences. He praised Jeffrey Eichee and David Fuller who portrayed the titled young men, but regretted that the production did not pay off. The cast of the play is a large one involving groups of hunters, countrymen, and country wenches, thus requiring the Cocteau players to embrace multiple roles--which they did with satisfactory results, according to Adamson.[20]

Thomas Fuld, who had maintained a high-profile since he joined the trustees in 1972, agreed that *Two Noble Kinsmen*

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was an obscure play that Shakespeare may not have written, but called it a wonderful story about the theatre, how it operates, and how the audience interrelates with the theatre. He recalled that each year two subscribers would come to the theatre in wheelchairs, despite the fact that the Cocteau is not really prepared with what the federal regulators want for the handicapped. It was always necessary to carry these people up to the audience area, and the actors and stage managers have always done so, usually using the side entrance. The handicapped person could either stay in the chair or go to a front-row seat. Since one scene of *Kinsmen* was choreographed with heavy shields, there was always a fear that the shields would fly off the stage. Sometimes they would roll to odd locations, and some of the actors worried that the shield would roll of the stage and hurt someone who could not move swiftly out of its way. One day a shield fell and rolled toward the lady in the chair. Everyone held his breath lest the theatre have a lawsuit, but it stopped just in front of the woman. She tried to pick it up but it was too heavy. Afterwards she said the whole thing was wonderful--that she relished the incident.[21]

Craig Smith retains memories of Patrick Boyington, called by his fellow actors "P.B.," who played opposite Craig Cook and with them formed a trio as the three queens in the production. All were dressed in black with masks: they sang

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songs and did what Smith now calls an awful job trying to pass themselves off as women.

There were no reviews of the production of *Two Noble Kinsmen*.

Adamson chose for the company's third production (which opened in December 1980) Cyril Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* because of her partiality to plays written during the reign of James I of England (1603-1625). In fact, Adamson intended ultimtately to produce all of the better known tragedies of the era. Toby Robertson returned to the Cocteau just prior to the opening of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and a season after his successful directing of *Pericles*. Craig Smith considered the presentation a most successful production of a Jacobean drama.

Robertson modernized the play, highlighting a jazz score to be played on tenor saxophone. Moreover, all the visual elements, most notably the costumes, were done in plastic, transparent material. The duchess wore a big brassiere with lights, which gave the effect of decadence, and tried to be funny and sexy in brilliant red robes. At the end, the stage was littered with bodies, as is often the case with Jacobean tragedies. Craig Smith felt that the audience had a good time. He did not consider this kind of theatre to be escapism in any way, since "the audience must pay close attention to the words." Smith considered that he gave a dignified and credible performance in the role of Theseus,

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with Harris Berlinsky acting as comic relief in a number of roles.

Most critics disagreed. While Robertson's direction was praised, the Cocteau company itself received a scathing attack. Once again *The Village Voice* critic, Julius Novick, speculated whether the company had improved since he had seen them last, and concluded that they had not. The *Voice* critic saw the actors as energetic performers plunging through with willingness and speed, but unable (as the reviewer quoted from the tragedy), "to weep truly; that's a gift from heaven." Novick felt that that gift of true feeling had not been distributed amply among the players. Novick was aware that the play was mounted, in his words, on a small stage with a small company and a small budget, but he found that David Fuller in the role of Vindice was articulate without being clear, whereas Craig Smith as Lussurioso and Coral S. Potter as Spurio "elicited more sparks of crackling melodrama." He then dismissed the troupe, echoing what John Simon had said of them the year before: Tragedy, according to Novick, was evidently beyond these actors. The deepest parts of the play were not realized, notwithstanding the technical ability of the actors.[22]

Two smaller publications were more supportive of the performers than the *Village Voice*. Michael Cavallaro of *The Brooklyn Daily Bulletin* expressed his views as follows:

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"The company is extremely talented. Special praise goes to David Fuller as Vindice."[23] Another community weekly (*The Co-Op City Times*) agreed. According to Ellen Cosgrove, the theatre critic for the publication, "The play has been admirably resuscitated by the Jean Cocteau Repertory . . . [which] has again done an outstanding job of revivifying a neglected play . . . and with fine acting.[24]

Like Julus Novick of the *Village Voice*, William A. Raidy of the *Staten Island Advance* liked the cellophane and wet-look costumes, calling them positively inspired, but unlike the *Voice* critic, he found David Fuller in the lead role to be splendid as Vindice.[25] Clive Barnes of the *New York Post* virtually mirrored the *Voice* critic in saying, essentially, that it is a good thing that the Cocteau exists to bring back neglected classics, but that they will have to use some more expertise to present them properly. In an implicit criticism of Adamson's performance as artistic director, Barnes praised Robertson's job with *Revenger* as seeming to make all the difference. Still, Barnes found some actors always dependable, and these included Craig Smith who was called a "full-scale villain in a neatly melodramatic mold," David Fuller and John Arndt who were deemed effective as revengers, and Harris Berlinsky and J.D. Eiche, who provided comic relief.[26]

In another celebration of Robertson's talents, a newspaper called simply *P.S.* gave a congratulatory summation

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to the Cocteau's history, praising their willingness to give the theatre community classics that no one else would perform. Robertson's direction for *The Revenger's Tragedy* according to Ted Otten, reviewer, made the play something more than a historical curiosity.[27]

Judy Thrall of *The Villager* called the Cocteau company a fine one, even compelling, with actors operating at their peak,[28] and Jeremy Gerard, employed by the *SoHo Weekly News*, emphasized that the Cocteau was "continuing with its excellent work by a strong company of actors in the service of an adventurous policy of seeking out material rarely available and presenting it with real flair."[29] Mel Gussow, writing for the *New York Times*, disparaged Robertson's direction, saying that he swept us headlong into the strife without allowing us the time to reflect or even count the corpses. But unlike Novick, he praised as unusually meritorious the performance of David Fuller as Vindice, whom he called an actor with a confidence to match his malice.[30]

Adamson, still flush from her success with *The Dybbuk* during the previous season, decided once more to stage a play with a Jewish theme. The fourth production of the season, which opened in February 1981, was Leivick's *The Golem* (man of clay). The play deals with a champion of his people, a golem called Joseph, who must foil attempts of Christian priests and monks to slaughter Jews on the pretext that they had shed Christian blood for ritualistic use

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during Passover. This was no conventional production, as its guest set designer was Chris Martin, formerly artistic director of the CSC Company on Manhattan's East Thirteenth Street. Martin is generally considered a talented director and, while Martin's visit could not generally be considered as exhilirating as those of Toby Robertson and Tennessee Williams, Craig Smith was particularly excited by the presentations. Martin had created a ragged, patchworked, ground cloth on a raked stage and surrounded it with a menacing barricade suitable for a ghetto, thus exploiting the Cocteau platforms' natural ambiance on a low budget. Adamson cast Harris Berlinsky as the maharal and used John Schmerling as the title figure; she tried to keep the atmosphere in flux between reality and mysticism through creative use of lighting and scrim.

Craig Smith recalled the special nature of this play as one of those ethnic crowd-pleasers which, in this case, led to large ticket purchases by Jews who were not frequent theatergoers. The Cocteau received reviews not only from *The Villager,* but also from the *Jewish Journal*, the latter newspaper having made its first trip to the Bouwerie Lane. Smith recalled people coming in to see *their* legend, their *Jewish* legend on stage. When Leivick wrote the play, Craig Smith explained, he used a Christ figure as well as the golem. When Christ entered, the blood of the audience started to boil. "People complained, and we had to say that

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this was the play, not the legend *per se*," Smith had said in an attempt to appease the hostile group in the audience. They thought the company were taking liberties with what Smith called the "incredibly difficult langauge in this difficult play."[31]

Eve Adamson had recollections of her own, and stated them as follows:

> I always felt particularly ill-equipped to do these great Jewish classics that I filter through my WASP mentality, so I told Harris to talk some Yiddish. This is a huge, sprawling play, one I had to shorten, but all the imagery was the playwright's and we would have irate people when we showed the Christ figure and a would-be Jewish Messiah in addition to the title figure. The Christ figure was called The Man with the Cross. "How could you bring this Christian image into this play?" they said at the symposiums. They blamed *me*. How could you do this to my legend? Many of the yelling people were wearing wigs. These people rarely attend theatre.[32]

Doris Diether, in her theatre column for *The Villager*, stated her appreciation of Eve Adamson's direction for its gentleness, particularly for not clobbering the audience with messages. For Diether, the production ended too soon. Diether called the experience a miraculous one, one of the best ever at the Jean Cocteau.[33]

Michaelina Cavallero, the reviewer for the *Jewish Journal,* joined the critics at the theater for this presentation. Cavallaro called the Cocteau production an outstanding effort which conveyed the play's intensity of emotion and impact. Cavallaro particularly enjoyed Harris Berlinsky's portrayal of the maharal and John Schmerling's

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of the golem, while giving appropriate credit to Eve Adamson's direction, which Cavallo saw as hovering between reality and mysticism.[34] While that reviewer also found the lighting effects brilliant, another said that the creative use of light and dark was unable to solve the problems of the admittedly difficult play. Ellen Fine, writing for *Other Stages*, censured Adamson for using the original text, which she called slow-moving, murky, lacking focus and fragmentary.[35]

The *New York Times* sent its off-off-Broadway critic, Richard Shepard, to view *The Golem*. Shepard agreed that the problem was more in translating the feel of the play than in the translation of the words alone, but he called Harris Berlinsky impeccable as the sensitive rabbi.[36]

The season ended on what Adamson called a silly note. The company staged, for its fifth production in April and May 1981, a musical version of Dumas *pére*'s *The Count of Monte Cristo*, of which Craig Smith said, "the less said the better." Smith, who performed in the role of Edmond Dantes, admitted that the Cocteau did not have singers worthy of the lyrics. He was embarrassed throughout the Douglas MacKeown adaptation of the play--an adaptation which Smith called somewhat like the way *Don Quixote* was turned into *The Man of La Mancha*. Smith considered the company not up to the singing, though he said that "some tunes were kind of nice."[37]

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Thomas Fuld, who continued to attend every production of the Cocteau, felt that with this production "everything went wrong all the time." He explained as follows:

> The singing was off, it was too big a concept, and they did not have enough rehearsal time. The designer had to show the sea, so in back of the set, they had a little ship on a stick so that it could go across the stage with the music signifying the passage of time. The first night, the ship sank and, "Oh, gosh, this may be a foreboding of the show," I thought.[38]

As compensation, perhaps, during the run of *The Count*, the company received notification from the New York State Council on the Arts, which had become the Cocteau's leading contributor, that the theatre group would receive $10,000 in assistance. (The check was received one month later.)[39]

Rent for the 1981-1982 season was set by Honey Waldman, landlord, at $20,250, an increase of $12,650 over the 1974-75 season seven years previously. (Rent figures are not available for the period 1975-1981, and box-office statistics are not available for the 1981-82 season.) The artistic director and the managing director each received $9,680, or less than $1,000 more than each received the years before in compensation. The actors shared $25,125 among themselves, a token increase over the $50 per week which each actor, on the average, received during the previous season. The Cocteau prepared for an annual two months' holiday (from the theatre and not from workaday jobs) while contemplating the next season.

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Like most off-off-Broadway houses, the Cocteau had an ongoing pattern of giving seats out on a first-come, first-served basis, but shortly after the 1981-82 season, the policy changed to one of selling reserved seats. A letter sent by one subscriber to Eve Adamson may have been the cause. In an anonymous communiqué the subscriber inquired:

> Could you tell me what "first come first served" means at the Jean Cocteau--a theatre whose work I sincerely respect? At the recent showing my wife and I approached the first row--four seats of which seemed to be unoccupied. It turned out the four seats were not free according to a young woman who was guarding them and who informed us she was awaiting the arrival of friends. I asked if her friends were in the theatre. No, she replied, but they were coming. I said, "But my dear young lady, that is the difference between numbered seats and first come, first served--the body must be present. You simply cannot reserve four seats . . . I have been going to theatres for years and have never heard of that." The usher delivered an astonishing lecture to us. She said that so long as one has the number of required tickets one could reserve as many seats as one wished. . . . I told her, "You should really quit ushering off-off Broadway and look for another job."
>
> Guess what? The other guests did not show. . . . I wonder if there should be some kind of notice as to how many seats one person can reserve?[40]

The 1982-83 theatre season in New York looked dismal. After seven consecutive years of records made and broken in the Broadway theatre, the national recession was having its effect. Nor did the generally unfavorable reviews of new productions help. By the middle of the season, paid attendance had dropped 22 percent from the level of a year earlier, gross receipts had fallen 13 percent, and 15 of the

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39 Broadway theatres remained dark. Yet some felt that theatre attendance was inversely proportional to bad economic news, recalling that during the Great Depression, the film industry had done a brisk business. George Wachtel, director of research for the League of New York Theatres and Producers, cited a drop in receipts of 30% compared with the season two years prior. Whether a decline on Broadway would be reflected by a similar drop in off-off-Broadway attendance, indeed whether there is any correlation between the two worlds of commercial and non-commercial theatre, was uncertain.[41]

Adamson scheduled the following plays to be performed at the Cocteau during the 1982-83 season:

1982-1983

08/82-10/82	*The Condemned of Altona*	Jean Paul Sartre
11/82-01/83	*Swanwhite*	August Strindberg
02/83-04/83	*The School for Scandal*	Richard B. Sheridan
04/83-05/83	*Saint Joan*	G.B. Shaw
04/83-05/83	*Don Carlos*	F. von Schiller
05/83-05/83	*Philoctetes of Sophocles*	Karen Sunde

A presentation of Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Condemned of Altona*, opened the season in August 1982. The play was chosen by Adamson in some measure becasuse she recalled the pleasure she had once received from reading Sartre's philosophic tract, *Nausea*. Sartre's classic raises political issues: It is a parable on torture and the Algerian War, but includes themes that are metaphysical as well as political. *Condemned* is the story of a Nazi officer

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who is overcome by feelings of guilt over his torturing of prisoners during the war years and has withdrawn to the upstairs room of his father's house.

Craig Smith was outspoken in opposing Adamson's choice of the Sartre play, stating that he had little respect for Sartre as a playwright, and though he found *No Exit* compelling, he considered *The Condemned of Altona* overwritten and in need of editing. He thought, however, that Adamson did a good job of editing the play so that everything was intertwined. Smith remembered the set design as an upstairs and downstairs, requiring that something be done on two floors. The design was accomplished by using a bedspring that floated out into the audience with Smith sitting on the bed and on stage during the entire performance. Then the downstairs was lighted and thereby heightened. The set was designed by Christopher Martin.[42]

The evidence from critics indicates that the Cocteau production of the play by Sartre failed to evoke a visceral response: that Sartre's work was not realized, since the audience retained only cerebral reactions. Nonetheless, Giles Hogya's creative lighting impressed many as did Craig Smith's performance in the role of Franz.

The Cocteau production of Sartre's play received notice from *Theatre Review* magazine, a scholarly journal of features and criticism. Henry A. Garrity, a professor at

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St. Lawrence University, considered the sequestration of Franz (the son mentioned above) as a manifestation of the metaphysical prison on which the family members are all willing inmates. He elaborated that in the staging by the Cocteau, Giles Hogya directed the lights at the back of the stage into the faces of the audience during a flashback scene, in which Franz undergoes interrogation for war crimes. The director's interpretation was manifest, and the audience, though not implicated in Franz's war crimes, is nonetheless declared guilty through its susceptibility to self-delusion. Garrity found fault with the tone of the production which, in the Cocteau interpretation, appeared to him as middle-class drama, one which failed to elicit an authentic shudder from the audience even when Leni reveals her incestuous love for her brother Franz. Garrity felt that the mythic resonance that Sartre intended was not achieved, but that the Cocteau Repertory production was, in his view, a significant event--a triumph of directorial conception and technical design.[43]

The *Village Voice* assigned critic Laurie Stone to review the presentation, the third such writer from that paper to be designated following the assignments of Michael Feingold and Julius Novick. Her view was that Sartre, like Brecht, intended his theatrical works to inspire action, not simply grumbling. Stone found Adamson's direction crisp, and called this a lovely looking production, praising also Giles

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Hogya's lighting and Craig Smith's agility in the role of Franz.[44] Equally admiring was Renfrue Neff who, in her review in *Other Stages*, called Adamson's direction "capable and the work most compelling, with Craig Smith as Franz helping to make the evening extremely worthwhile."[45]

Having received this rare, positive response from the *Voice*, Adamson handed the direction of the next offering to Susan Flakes. Flakes was considered an expert on Strindberg, and Adamson, who felt neutral about the Swedish playwright, conceded the importance of presenting some of his works at the Cocteau provided that capable direction could be found.

Swanwhite was written in 1901 while Strindberg was under the influence of the Belgian symbolist, Maurice Maeterlinck, prior to the Swedish writer's move to a more full-blown expressionism. *(Swanwhite* had never been staged in New York City, according to records.)[46] Directing *Swanwhite*, the second production of the 1982-83 season (which opened in November 1982), Flakes used improvisation as a rehearsal technique, but Smith felt the play did not work: Perhaps because it is inaccessible, a total fairy tale, there was nothing for the audience to hang on to, in Smith's view. Flakes added a prologue and an epilogue to a play whose presentation was considered by some critics to be a failure despite some fine performances, principally because of what they considered a lack of directorial authoritativeness. Holding the Strindberg work one that was too remote for the

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audience, Smith commented on the set design:

> The company played the work as if inside the theatre dressing room of Strindberg's second or third wife. Strindberg comes in by himself and imagines a play and the fairy tale would happen.[47]

While Craig Smith felt that this production did not work, there is some evidence that the actor's judgment was too harsh. Clive Barnes of the *New York Post*, the only critic who attended the production of *Swanwhite*, was impressed by the talent of Judy Jones, who performed in the title role.

Barnes introduced his notice for the *Post* by quickly summarizing the Cocteau mission. He described the general run of plays presented as not precisely lame ducks, but, rather, misunderstood eagles, and he asserted that they are plays one would not normally encounter. Barnes considered Smith excellent as the aging and grizzled Young Prince (which is to say, Strindberg himself), and commended Judy Jones for her possession of "an inflamed tremulousness proper to Swanwhite." What the play needed, according to the reviewer from the *Post*, was more authority, since *Swanwhite* was a dramatic curiosity that needed strong direction. This was not to say that he urged his readers to avoid the Cocteau that month, for he included his standard counsel: "When else will you ever get the chance to see it?"[48]

For the third production, which opened in February 1983, Adamson revived *The School for Scandal* because of her

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belief that Sheridan's work is the finest English comedy of the eighteenth century. She admitted, however, that the production did not work since the players could not impart the necessary charm. Adamson had called in Robert Moss of Playwrights Horizons to guest-direct the play.[49]

There was no press coverage of the production of Sheridan's work.

The company launched its matinee school performances for the year in April 1983 with George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*, the company's fourth production, a work which Eve Adamson considers to be Shaw's best play. In a publicity statement addressed to drama teachers of all schools on the Cocteau mailing list, Craig Smith, still operating as press director, apprised drama teachers of the matinee plans. Teachers were informed that the ensemble had staged *Hamlet, Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet* and *The Tempest* for over 20,000 students from over 300 schools in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut; that the Cocteau was not Broadway with 1500-plus seats, nor was it televised Shakespeare sandwiched between snacks and conversations on the phone. It would be a live theatre experience with excellent sightlines and great acoustics and "actors so close you could actually reach out and touch them." He promised visiting classes a fast-moving production full of Shaw's wit, humor, and passion, and one to which they could relate particularly in that it features a fourteen-year-old farm girl as heroine.

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He invited teachers to come to the theatre at any time as his guests to preview the production.

Despite his own words in the press releases, Craig Smith was disappointed with a *Saint Joan* which, in his words, did not work. He felt that the portrayal of the title figure as an insouciant teenager was overdone.[50] On the other hand, Harris Berlinsky recalled that he was inspired by the performance of the title figure by Phyllis Deitschel.[51] Craig Smith had been concerned about how Deitschel, would work out. He had this to say about her:

> She [Deitschel] must be one of the world's great people. We were auditioning actors--I would sit in--and Phyllis did a piece from a Greek play, and I felt something was unusual about her. She had a severe look. I think she is beautiful but she is not what people would call classically beautiful. I pushed to have Phyllis called back--others thought she was interesting enough, but something clicked with me. She joined the company and was with us for several years.
>
> Her Saint Joan--well, there was just something beatific about that woman. She was an animal rights person then and she spent time upstate with a shelter for animals wounded by cars. If a car hit a rabbit, you would take the rabbit to this place for rehabilitation. She worked there for four or five years and is now in Texas going to veterinary school.[52]

No reviews are on record for that production, but many teachers wrote letters commenting that the Cocteau deserved praise for sharing their expertise with students after performances while the dramatic experience was still fresh, and expressing gratitude to the actors for speaking with groups that attended. Some students wrote that the

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discussion added much to their appreciation and rounded off an extra-special day. (The company members remain for about a half hour after the performances of school matinees.)[53]

For the fifth production, Eve Adamson chose to mount a production of Friedrich Schiller's *Don Carlos* in April and May 1983 as a particular challenge for the actors. *Don Carlos* is a work positing the theme of man's struggle for freedom of thought, but one which Adamson considered a difficult play with convoluted plotting. Actress Judy Jones performed in the role of the queen, while the role of the title figure was assigned to Patrick Bronson. The set was designed by Robert Schwartz. The ensemble represented a militaristic group, soldiers who marched up and down the aisles of the Bouwerie Lane Theatre. The language, according to Craig Smith, was about the most difficult to learn of any play he had come across, though according to him, "the work was worth it because of its beauty."[54]

Harris Berlinsky agreed that the play was difficult despite the accessible translation by James Maxwell that the Cocteau used. He recalled that on opening night, the script proved so demanding that actors were saying all kinds of things that were not in the script. He remembered that his fellow actors were terrified standing on that stage. Judy Jones's rendering of the role of the queen was extraordinary, in Berlinsky's opinion. Berlinsky recalled her just standing and saying everything beautifully. He

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considered Jones's decision not to return the following season to be a tragedy for the company.[55]

The *Village Voice* sent a fourth reviewer, Robert Massa, to the Cocteau to observe the performance. Massa's review, the only one available, called the play "pure poetry," but the critic felt that the monotonous nature of its recitation made the audience work too hard to follow the dialogue. Judy Jones, considered by Berlinsky to be extraordinary, was rated by as "dignified." [56]

An adaptation of Sophocles's *Philoctetes* by Karen Sunde, was the season's closing work for May and June of 1983. Smith recalled the author of that adaptation as an actress who now makes her living as a playwright, and one whose works have been performed in regional theatres. Sunde had been associated with Chris Martin at the CSC and directed both *Exit the King* and *Philoctetes* at the Cocteau.[57]

Sunde did not greatly alter the classic, which was written by Sophocles in 409 B.C. In the tragedy, Odysseus and Neoptolemus had come to the island of Lemnos to get the archer Philoctetes; it was prophesied that his magic bow could end the war with Troy. The title figure had been marooned for years because of a wound which smelled so bad that no one would go near him. Deceived into traveling toward Troy, Philoctetes refuses to leave, but Odysseus orders Neoptolemus to take the magic bow and arrows to Troy, and let the archer remain on the island unarmed to starve.

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Neoptolemus defies orders only to do the bidding of the demigod Heracles, who commands them to go to Troy to end the war.

Berlinsky called Sunde's translation a merely literal one of the play, unlike Lowell's adaptation of *The Oresteia*.[58]

As had been typical of Cocteau sets under Adamson's leadership, the design was simple and illuminated by Gregory W. Laird.[59]

In her review of the production, Tish Dace of *The Villager* praised Craig Smith's performance for its power, while finding Christopher Jarrett as Odysseus wanting. In her words he played the role as if he were a new occupant of the White House. Like many other writers, Dace extended congratulations to the Cocteau Repertory for giving audiences theatre that they could get nowhere else in the country.[60]

Another reviewer, Joseph Moses of *Other Stages*, found that the unity of place of the Greek tragedy worked against the small stage of the Cocteau by not allowing a change of scene; nor was that critic pleased by the cramped aisles the actors had to use throughout the performance. He did not care for Sunde's modernization of Odysseus--to the point in which "the lead actor began to resemble a Madison Avenue account executive on holiday in the Greek Isles." Craig Smith's performance as the title character was mythic enough, according to Moses, so that Christopher Jarret's

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rendition of Odysseus was not believable as counterweight, because he "did not evoke the heroic proportions required of the play." Despite these negative comments, the critic found that the play took the audience "beyond catharsis to renewal."[61]

During the season, the Cocteau had announced performance times for school matinees--five Wednesdays at 10:00 a.m. and 1:30 p.m., (a schedule that would some years later be changed to Thursdays at 1:30).[62]

During the time that Flakes had the director's reigns during the production of *Swanwhite*, the artistic director of the company, together with representatives of Circle Repertory Company, Classic Theatre, Merry Enterprises Theatre, and SoHo Repertory Theatre were making a trip to the Soviet Union at the invitation of the Copyright Agency of the USSR. The trip, which lasted from 28 January to 11 February of 1983, was the first by a large U.S. theater delegation to visit the USSR since 1975. During the stay, Adamson and her colleagues visited major centers of the country's theater life in Moscow and Leningrad and saw productions at leading theaters. They met Soviet counterparts such as Georgy Tovstonogov, chief producer of the Leningrad Academic Bolshoi Drama Theater; Galina Volchek, chief producer of the Moscow Sovremennik Theater; Vladimir Andreyev, chief director of the Yermolova Theater

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in Moscow; and also the playwrights Victor Rozov, Edgar Radzinsky, Alexander Shtein, as well as actors from the various theaters. They issued a joint communiqué speaking of the need to expand contacts in the field of dramaturgy and theater, that apart from everything else, "will help to build confidence between the Soviet and American peoples."[63] What was to emerge from that meeting was a visit by Soviet playwright Edgar Radzinsky to the Cocteau to direct three of his plays.

Reports of financial gains and losses are not available for the season, a year in which Adamson's selections comprised a blend of the obscure and difficult with the celebrated and equally arduous. Craig Smith, who continued to double both as actor and press agent, was frank during his interview for this study, outlining both his disappointments and his inspirations for the season. He had opposed the choice of Sartre's existentialist play, he believed that the authorship of *Philoctetes* should have been credited to Sophocles, and he had particular commendations for Phyllis Deitschel, who acted the title role in Shaw's *Saint Joan*.

While the Cocteau could never be called financially successful--unless fiscal health could be said to be simply freedom from debt--some financially successful off-Broadway theatres were themselves emulating the big theatres of New York's West Forties. As the 1983-84 season began, some

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doubted that these groups---now a kind of buffer between the glamor of Broadway and the experimentalism of off-off-Broadway--could maintain their integrity in view of their commercial success. The off-Broadway theatres had grown steadily since their expansion in the early sixties, now nurturing prominent actors and Pulitzer Prize-winning plays.

From 1980-83, Broadway had taken 39 plays from off-Broadway and regional theatres including *Master Harold . . and the Boys,* and *'night Mother,* while in other years musicals like *A Chorus Line* and *Aint Misbehavin'* moved to Broadway and became popular successes. Lynne Meadow, artistic director of the Manhattan Theatre Club, stated that she had repeated calls from Broadway producers about the plays staged by her off-Broadway company. To punctuate the attraction of non-Broadway houses, Jane Moss of the Association of Resident Theatres (formerly called the Off-Off-Broadway Association, which was founded in 1972) pointed to the statistics: two million people attended off-Broadway and off-off Broadway productions in 1982. Moss considered the Cocteau Repertory an institutional off-Broadway company, which like others of this type has a single artistic director whose vision has given its plays an identity--Playwrights Horizons, for example, for wit and sting, and Circle Repertory for lyric realism. Yet in 1982 the off-Broadway theatres cumulatively registered a deficit, and the

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Phoenix Theatre and the Chelsea Theatre were forced to close after decades of operation. Moss cited the slowing of business activity on the off-off-Broadway circuit during the early 1980s.[64]

While Moss did not draw a distinction between off-Broadway theatres like the Manhattan Theatre Club and off-off-Broadway like the Cocteau, she might have emphasized the clear separation between the two, in that the former category is far more likely than the off-off-Broadway houses to be patronized by residents from the most affluent New York City neighborhoods. The Manhattan Theatre Club had left the East Seventies for its new stage on the West Side at the City Center without losing its principal, Upper-East-Side clientele. The Cocteau, on the other hand, has always had a subscriber base with substantially less income than that of subscribers to MTC, as a 1988 marketing report would show. In fact, the Cocteau did not change its format or mission during the period of increasingly slick plays that were being presented in the 299-seat off-Broadway theatres.

The Cocteau company prides itself for remaining true to its mission throughout its tenure, despite financial pressures suggesting a retreat from presentation of neglected classics to an embrace of more commercial fare. One indication that such a change could bring a more affluent audience to the Bowery is a 4 September 1983 essay

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in the *New York Times* by Richard Gilman, in which the writer acknowledged that people go to theatre for all sorts of reasons--to celebrate birthdays and anniversaries, to influence a potential business deal, to show themselves as conspicuous consumers, to be in the presence of glamorous personalties, to fulfill a cultural duty, and to be *au courant*. Gilman posed the question: Are there people who attend theatre--particularly serious offerings by Shaw, Ibsen, Chekhov and others (all of which have been staged by the Cocteau)--to be changed? Gilman believes that people go to the theatre to be *confirmed* in their prejudices, to be consoled, to have their lives re-stated and not exposed to the perils of potential change. He cited Aristotle's belief that theater's function was to bring about purgation, while in recent centuries theater evolved into a diversion, a series of thrills, an exercise of skill, and a re-telling of profundities to which the spectator could hold his deepest self aloof. Gilman concludes that only a very small number of people, mostly young, still go to the theater in search of a transforming experience.[65]

Attuned to the same pitch was Walter Kerr, who wrote in another edition of the *New York Times* that the 1983-84 season needed a play with teeth. Mr. Kerr has generally written about the Broadway stage rather than its alternatives, but his article indicates that in a city with so many seats catering to people who seem to be able to

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afford them at least once annually, New York did not have a single play with bite, a play driven headlong by its own truth-seeking energy. Kerr called for a work which has the power to energize an audience, wake it up, and set it in motion.[66]

While Kerr did not mention the Cocteau or any other off-off-Broadway establishment--those theatres which *do* attempt to present the work that Kerr favors--the Cocteau players eschew those commercial works which, despite their possibilities, are not written to shake people up.

Adding to the debate during a symposium in February 1984, some leading drama critics, speaking to members of Drama Desk and New Drama Forum, discussed what critics, editors, and reporters might do to improve theatre. Clive Barnes, drama critic of the *New York Post*, concluded that nothing really new is going to happen on Broadway and suggested that the responsibility of critics is to look at off-off-Broadway to foster new drama. John Simon (who visited the Cocteau only once during that company's nineteen years on the Bowery), expressed his dismay that few classics were given productions. But, he found that off-off-Broadway cannot afford really good productions of the classics. His conclusion was that "a theatre like the Jean Cocteau is absolutely on the side of the angels."[67]

But Simon believed, nonetheless, that the Cocteau and many other off-off-Broadway theatres, cannot afford to do

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classics well. A large number of reviewers, even when casting negative votes on Cocteau productions, nonetheless offered their best wishes to an organization committed wholly to the production of the classics.

The 1983-84 season was one that showed the Cocteau faithful to its commitment to the classics. That was a year that two presentations received a large number of reviews, in the first instance because the play, *Judas,* contains controversial themes and the promise to lift spectators out of their complacent attitudes, and in the second, because the work, *The Beaux' Strategem,* is a post-Restoration piece rarely produced in the United States. The following was the roster of Cocteau presentations for 1983-84:

1983-1984

09/23/83-01/22/84	*Judas*	Robert Patrick
11/05/83-05/20/84	*The Beaux' Strategem*	George Farquhar
12/03/83-03/16/84	*King John*	W. Shakespeare
02/09/84-04/20/84	*Epicoene*	Ben Jonson
03/22/84-05/20/84	*Aeschylus' Oresteia*	Robert Lowell
04/17/84-05/19/84	*Antiquities*	John Arndt

Adamson had never presented a medieval drama in her repertoire of plays, nor had she intended to, but she selected *Judas* as a next-best option. Robert Patrick's portrayal of the betrayal of Jesus was presented at the Cocteau from September 1983 through January 1984 in modern dress, with the title figure depicted as a young intellectual wrapped in the mystery and romance of Jesus' teachings. But the play, which was selected as the Cocteau's

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first offering of the 1983-84 season, is really neither Judas's nor Jesus's. The urbane, witty, intelligent and civilized person is Pilate, attired in a three-piece suit: the model of a modern business executive who wants nothing more than peace and quiet. Judas is portrayed as a good man, not a throat-cutter, talked into doing what Pilate wants him to do--to betray Jesus.

Fuld considered the show unusual, even for the Cocteau--a stunning production with great publicity, according to the trustee. In his attempt to further publicity, he let himself go on television, an experience he termed terrifying. Through a Metromedia contact, he arranged for an interview with Midday Live on Channel 5, hosted by Bill Boggs. He thought he was simply acting as coordinator to have Eve Adamson and Craig Smith on the program, but they wanted someone on the board to talk about fund-raising techniques.[68]

Fuld had a friend, David Tapper, who owned a production company that did video productions and commercials. He was doing a program every Sunday called "That's the Spirit" on the RKO station, WOR-TV. Tapper told Fuld that it would be a good idea to do the show with *Judas* a part of the Sunday service, and with the involvement of priests. Tapper felt that this would give the audience a different view of Judas; he wanted to see how the viewers would respond. Tapper went to the Cocteau with a camera crew and taped segments of the

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show, which aired on Channel 9 with comments from people in the religious community involved with the program. According to Fuld, this television program brought new people to the Cocteau to see *Judas* live; many of them became subscribers.[69]

A release by Peter Weller, press contact for Tapper productions, informed the media that *Judas* would present the story of Jesus' ministry through the eyes of an unlikely Gospel character, Judas. The play would be directed by Eve Adamson and star John Emmert in the title role, with Craig Smith as Jesus and Coral S. Potter as Pilate. The program would be followed by a discussion with teenagers of the Catholic Youth Organization on the insights offered by the play.[70]

Permission to tape the play was given by the playwright, Robert Patrick, known principally for his authorship of *Kennedy's Children*. Patrick had one condition: The scenes in their edited form were not to exceed a cumulative total of 15 minutes in any single program.[71]

In previous locations in other localities, the play received good notices by other out-of-town papers and journals, like the *Lompoc Record* of Lompoc, California, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Scottsdale Daily Progress,* and *New Times*.

The evidence from the critics is that the production was overlong and talky, a fault for which one can blame the

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script or blame the director for not editing the play. The acting was considered to be on a high level by some reviewers, uneven by others.

In New York, Tish Dace reviewed the Cocteau presentation for *Other Stages*. Dace had frequently attacked Patrick for writing uneven plays and had received answers printed in several newspapers. But she found nothing flawed about this interpretation of Judas's life. Dace found that the author outstripped most American dramatists in epigrams, intelligence, versatility, analytical acumen, energy and perception, calling this a work of genius. Dace considered Coral Potter's depiction of Pilate his best performance to date, found Harris Berlinsky's role as Peter to be fine, but pronounced the rest of the cast merely competent.[72]

Clive Barnes, whose *New York Post* reviews for Cocteau productions had been largely tepid, found the production of *Judas* to be forceful and fascinating. According to Barnes, "Despite the frequent windiness of Patrick's dialogue, the Cocteau production, though not perfect, had a staging by Adamson that was succinct and precise so that this was a play to see and a company to nurture."[73]

Like some other critics, Don Nelson of the *New York Daily News* (a major daily that visited the Cocteau infrequently) found the play prolix. "One needs to sit for almost three hours of a largely talky play," he complained, adding that he found the company's acting questionable. Nelsen saw the

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message as man's attempt to forge an individuality at the same time he is striving for unity and oneness. Mary, to Nelsen, was the stereotypical Jewish mother who drives her boy to get ahead, and one can almost see her saying, "Meet my son, the Messiah." Coral Potter was held to be overdoing Pilate's suave rationalizing, though Potter is normally a deft performer, according to the critic.[74]

Oleg Kerensky of *Backstage* also found the production too long with too many complex themes, and perceived Pilate as the principal character, in that he plays the part of sophisticated governor training Judas as a Roman civil servant, and seems to have a homoerotic relationship with him. Kerensky accused the company of using actors not sufficiently charismatic and commanding to dominate the play.[75] William Raidy, reporting for the *Jersey Journal*, found the play too long, and suggested judicious cutting. He gave credit to the Cocteau for being adventurous enough to produce the work, but since ninety-five percent of the review deals with the playwright and the concept, no space was devoted to the acting. He did praise Eve Adamson, however, for deft staging.[76]

Sy Syna, a reviewer from the *New York Tribune*, agreed that the play was too long, then added that was is a "talky bore with bad acting, directing and set design. To call this play corny is to berate a vegetable." In a sharp rebuke to the Cocteau, he called Adamson's direction "deteriorated,"

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Lynn Treveal's acting "obnoxious," and with the exception of John Emmert (as Judas), he judged that "all of the others reek of decadence."[77]

Carolyn Albert, the theatre reviewer for the *Greenpoint* (Brooklyn, New York) *Gazette* for over a decade, found the spartan scenic design fascinating (she believed, like Adamson, that imagination is the best scenic designer), urged the director to make cuts, and was enchanted by "fine poetry and incisive dialogue."[78]

The reviewer for *Show Business* should be counted among those with a view diametrically opposed to those of mainstream critics. G. Teller Martin agreed with the others who cited the flaw of length, yet said "this *Judas* was a first-rate production, moving along rapidly, engrossing and entertaining, with the language a joy--a rare treat."[79]

Adamson selected *The Beaux' Strategem* as the second production because the play has some features of Restoration comedy (of which the artistic director was fond) combined with the amusing dialogue of early eighteenth-century plays.

The production had a set and lighting design by Giles Hogya, a college instructor who served as designer for many Cocteau productions during the eighties. Hogya, who had an even greater affection than Adamson for the comedies of manners, felt that the Cocteau had realized the author's intentions. The director used the entire company with no doubling, presenting the play absolutely straight, "with no

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one's bumping into anyone else," as Adamson recollected.

From the evidence of critics who attended the production, the Cocteau staging suffered from uneven acting, inadequate scenic design, and a lack of a directorial focus.

One drama critic, Peter Wynne of *The Record*, favored the selection of this play as a good vehicle that defends both marriage and divorce, in that Farquhar put together two plots--one of happy courtship, one of unhappy marriage. Like many others, Peter Wynne criticized what many others did: the "Cocteau's tacky set, augmented with a very few props and uneven acting." His overall impression was that the company's aims had rather outreached its resources. Yet he praised the group for keeping the prices of tickets down to a minimum, a policy upon which Eve Adamson had always insisted. (In 1983 tickets were $8.50 each--considered a bargain especially insofar as sixteen actors were used for *Beaux*.) Wynne recommended that his readers see the play, as "it makes a lot more sense on stage than on the printed page," and thought that intelligence in the Cocteau Rep production "rewards in understanding even when it fails in style. . . [*The Beaux' Strategem* is] a hilarious play that simply isn't to be found in the more earthbound theater of our day."[80]

The anonymous critic from the *Shakespeare Bulletin* gave particular credit to the lighting designer and praised Stephanie Lett's interpretation of Dorinda and John Emmert's

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of Aimwell.[81] Jean Brody, reviewing for *Back Stage*, expressed pleasure that the company produced the work all, but found that the presentation lacked the directorial focus that such a satire requires. The acting, according to the critic, was inconsistent because of designer Giles Hogya's lack of a point of view, so that all the production did was to throw this old show up on the boards. Many of the minor roles were found poorly acted, but the reviewer enjoyed Lynn Treveal as Mrs. Bountiful, Craig Cook as the morose Scrub, and Jonathan Cantor as the ladies' maid.[82]

Yet another critic found the production a winner, the sort of play that makes one want to return to the theatre. Debbi Wasserman, writing for *Westchester and Fairfield Country Life,* considered Stephanie Lett a vivacious Dorina, and Margaret Dulaney's cynical Mrs. Sutton to be someone "worth our attentions." Wasserman protested that not all Cocteau shows are top quality, but found that this one realized the writer's intentions.[83]

In determining the choice of a play to follow the Farquhar work, Eve Adamson kept in mind the human resources at her disposal among her actors, designers and trustees. She decided to stage one of Shakespeare's histories, *King John*, since she felt confident that her company had the ability to realize the play's intent.

For the design Adamson called upon a trustee, James B. Nichols. He had been a member of the board for several

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years and was to remain in that capacity at least through 1990.[84] Harris Berlinsky recalled Nichols's help in the third work of the year, *King John* and his own acting role in the production. According to Berlinsky:

> Jim Nichols would go behind the set and devise some technical paraphernalia that otherwise I don't think we could have done the show without. Even though *John* is not a major work of Shakespeare, doing anything by him is like coming home to an old friend. We did a production of *King John* and we had to move the stage; at that time we had a platform set that could be removed and lowered. We had a gaping hole in the middle. There was a deep chasm in the middle of the stage and someone had polyurethane on the stage so that walking could be considered dangerous if you do not walk gingerly. I had this leap I had to do across the chasm and I jumped and almost landed on the patron in the front row of the auditorium.[85]

From the evidence of the critics, the Cocteau presentation of *King John* was in one reviewer's opinion a thoughtful one--crisp, well acted, and clearly articulated--and almost worthless in the opinion of another.

Robert Massa reviewed the Cocteau staging of *King John* for the *Village Voice*, and found the production "thoughtfully played out with battle scenes choreographed to a synthesizer-made Gothic music." Massa also praised the cast for not mumbling or internalizing, and said that he "felt like tapping along with the rhythm of the poetry."[86] Massa's review offers evidence that the *Village Voice* does not consistently write harsh commentary about Cocteau productions.

On the other hand, Sy Syna of the *New York Tribune*, whose previous criticism of another play was devastating, headed

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his notice on *John*, "*King John* a Poorly Produced Version of a Bad Play." Syna had no doubt that the Cocteau would eventually produce the play. He admired the Cocteau company's ability to play *John* in rotating repertory with several other shows. Yet he urged readers to go only if they are curious about what this play might be like on the stage, as in his opinion "a poor production of a bad play by the Bard is better than no production at all." He attacked Adamson for cutting some characters and allowing the costumer, Jeffrey Wallach, to use what Syna called

> a hideous camouflage cloth that made everyone look like a bloated, spotted salamander. Adamson's casting of women in male roles is the reverse of the Shakespearean practice. Adamson is an exponent of the stand-and-deliver approach to Shakespeare, since she believes that is all her actors know how to do. There isn't a speck of reality in this entire production. The absurd battle scenes seem recycled from a third-rate kung fu movie. The set looks like the entrance to the Staten Island Ferry.[87]

Syna's reviews of Cocteau productions have been consistently harsh, and by comparing Syna's notices to those of other critics, one might conclude that the reviewer for the *New York Tribune* appears to be unduly negative.

John Bower of the *New York Native* challenged his readers to find another company that provided the variety of obscure plays in a single season that the Cocteau offered: *Judas*, an epigrammatic, intellectual and religious work: *The Beaux' Strategem*, a comedy of wit; and *King John*, an early history play of Shakespeare. Like many other critics, the writer for the *New York Native* called his readers' attention to the

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cast's wide variation in experience, which, he believed, resulted in some awkward moments, yet he was pleased to find the production a passionate one. Singled out were Joseph Blunt's score, Christopher Jarrett's choreography, Harris Berlinsky's role as the bully king, Coral Potter's acting the imposing French monarch, and Patrick Boyington as the powerful Dauphin. He praised Stephanie Lett as the lovely Lady Blanch, and Lynn Taveal as the menacing and regal mother of John. The most remarkable actor, at least in this play, according to the *Native*, was Craig Smith as Faulconbridge, "a funny, impertinent, grandiloquent forebear of Falstaff."[88]

Mel Gussow, writing in the *New York Times*, admired Adamson's straightforward, balanced production, particularly one in which "she abridged the text without wounding it." But like Bower, he criticized her arming soldiers with rifles and dressing them in camouflage. The attempt at relevance, he found, was irresolute. And like Bower, Gussow called Craig Smith one of the best actors at the Cocteau as "he captured both sides of the man: the dash of a Hotspur with the disrespectful honesty of a Shakespearean Fool." Recognizing that some players lack experience, he praised Harris Berlinsky as John, John Arndt as Hubert de Burgh, Miles Mason as the Earl of Salisbury, and Patrick Boyington as Lewis. Margaret Dulaney gained his favor as Constance, a role that Gussow found challenging since, in the critic's

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opinion, one would "have difficulty finding a more vexatious widow in all of Shakespeare."[89]

Still another critic, Peter Wynne of *The* [New Jersey] *Record,* gave Harris Berlinsky particular praise, but he found the performances of Craig Smith, Margaret Dulaney, Lynn Treveal, and Mary Gratch more than adequate.[90]

Occasionally a non-professional critic would add to the collection of reviews. In the case of this Shakespearean play, a teacher at the Rockland Children's Psychiatric Center who traveled by bus with her group for a school matinee presentation of *John*, wrote that the Cocteau made the characters come alive, and also made Shakespeare understandable and even appreciated by her charges.[91]

Ben Jonson's *Epicoene* was Adamson's choice for the fourth presentation of the season. *Epicoene* was chosen by Adamson to give Ben Jonson a hearing for a work other than his better-known *Volpone*. The play was performed from April to June 1984.

Craig Smith described the play and gave an overview of its presentation as follows:

> This is an incredibly misogynistic play. It is about an old miser whose nephew sets him up to marry a young woman. He can't stand noise, so he marries a silent woman and she starts talking. In the end she is revealed to be a boy. In fact the gentleman playing Epicoene was the understudy for M. Butterfly (the title character of a recent Broadway play). He appeared to be the most gorgeous-looking woman, and men in the audience died when she took her clothes off. I enjoyed doing that play and had a great time. Critically it was seen by a few people who hated it, mostly since it was done in modern dress and in

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> modern times. I am not as objective as the critics since I was busy doing the role and could not see the whole picture.
>
> Elements existed that were really difficult. The misogyny was stressed in the direction so that sometimes it got overbearing.[92]

Smith was surprised by the absence of print reviews for *Epicoene,* particularly since it was guest-directed by Gerald Chapman (who once ran the Young Playwrights' Festival of the Foundation for Dramatists' Guild).[93]

The fifth production, *The Oresteia*, was presented in the Robert Lowell adaptation. This was the American première of the translation, which Adamson admired for what she called its wonderful language.

A trilogy composed of *Agamemnon, Choephoroe* and *Eumenides*, had been translated, adapted, and thoroughly reworked by Lowell.

James Nichols, a trustee of the Cocteau, praised Eve Adamson's paring of the five-hour script for presentation to the Cocteau audience, though he abstained from commentary on the acting. The production of the *Oresteia* brought only one critic to the theatre, Howard Kissel of *Women's Wear Daily*, who called the production smooth and cogent with few moments of impact. He found the cast not up to the demands of rich voices and musicality. Kissel praised Gregory W. Laird's lighting, the minimalist set design of Robert Joel Schwartz, and the wit of Melina Root's costumes. He found the company to be very much at home in the arch style of the

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adaptation.[94]

At the end of the season, the troupe presented a new play, *Antiquities*. New plays like Arndt's are sometimes considered experiments for slots not announced in advance. There are no vivid memories of the production by the company, and no reviewers attended. Nor had the play been mounted by any other New York City theatre.[95]

The letters sent to the Cocteau by teachers who have escorted groups to the theatre during that season are enthusiastic about the value of student visits to the theatre. The teachers pointed to rates as low as $3 per student as an enticement to attend the theatre. A reporter from the *New York Times,* Sara Rimer, described the views of one instructor, Robert Thatcher, who wondered whether his students would feel more thrilled about learning drama if they ventured outside the classroom. At that time he was 39 years old, teaching English at Intermediate School 44 in Manhattan for 14 years. "I've always believed the school building is the wrong environment in which to teach kids about life," he said. "You have to break down the walls." The first play he attended with the youngsters was O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones,* but since the performance was in the evening, only two eighth-grade girls showed up. The word spread that going to the theatre with Thatcher was a way to have a great time. He reported that so many students wanted to attend theatre each week that a lottery system of

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selection was started. The boys and girls had seen performances such at theatres which are in some ways like the Cocteau: La Mama, Equity Library Theatre, the Riverside Shakespeare Company and Second Stage. His classes had attended Cocteau presentations of *King John, Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.[96]

Financial figures for the 1983-84 season were sketchy, at best, and not reliable enough for presentation. However, one might speculate that the effects of the recession of 1982-83 were still being felt and that receipts at the Cocteau were again considerably lower than they were two years previous.

The Cocteau opened its 1984-85 season amid signs that off-Broadway prices in terms of percentage increases would rival Broadway increases. Some journalists worried that the off-off-Broadway theatres would necessarily replace the off-Broadway theaters for those who could not now afford the prices on the more commercial circuits, and that off-Broadway theatres would offer more elaborate and expensive productions than they had staged in the past. If the trend were to continue, in the opinion of these journalists, off-off-Broadway would become similarly slicker and would need to be succeeded by a new genre, i.e. off-off-*off* Broadway. The Broadway prices were not rising according to the law of supply and demand. The 1984-85 season was rated the worst

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in a decade by the League of American Theatres and Producers, with box office figures showing a decline of nine million dollars behind the previous season's 227 million dollars.[97]

If Adamson felt the pressure of commerce from the board of trustees or from the greater society, she showed no evidence of compromising her vision. She continued to include rarely performed plays during the 1984-85 season, although many of her choices were of works that are well known. The following plays were selected:

1984-1985

09/06/84-05/18/85	*Theatre in the Time of Nero & Seneca*	Edvard Radzinsky
10/04/84-12/16/84	*Cymbeline*	W. Shakespeare
11/15/84-02/24/85	*Goat Song*	Franz Werfel
01/17/85-05/08/85	*The Importance of Being Earnest*	Oscar Wilde
05/02/85-05/19/85	*L'Aiglon*	Edmond Rostand
05/02/85-05/19/85	*The Maids*	Jean Genet

Adamson chose the first play for presentation, beginning in September 1984, because of the inspiration she received from a trip to the Soviet Union and the cooperation she received therefrom. If the visits of Toby Robertson and Tennessee Williams to the Cocteau to guest-direct two works were shots of adrenelin to the financially pressed theatre, then Adamson's trip to the Soviet Union to request a visit by an important Soviet playwright would become another important milestone. As stated above, Adamson took the trip to Moscow during the winter of 1983 together with four other directors, where they took part in a theater tour of Moscow

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and Leningrad sponsored by VAAP, the Copyright Agency of the Soviet Union. Their purpose was to interest the U.S. in contemporary Soviet plays.

Much of the publicity surrounding the December 1983 trip to the Soviet Union centered on Joseph Papp, the noted producer at the Public Theatre, who had been one of the five visiting Moscow and Leningrad. He had met the playwright Victor Rozov, and in producing *The Nest of the Wood Grouse*, had staged the world première of the work outside the Soviet Union and the first production of the Public Theatre had produced of a contemporary Russian play.[98] Two directors who joined Adamson and Papp in Moscow and Leningrad were Jerry Engelbach of the SoHo Repertory and Dan Irvine of the Circle Repertory. While Papp was able to choose Victor Rozov's *The Nest of the Wood Grouse*, Irvine and Engelbach had not settled on the kind of script they wanted.[99]

It was during those travels that Edvard Radzinsky's work captured Adamson's fancy. The contemporary works of the Soviet Union could find a niche in Adamson's vision insofar as they were dramatic poems that engage the intellect and the spirit of the audience, and challenge both the actors and the audience.

Adamson had seen the Radzinsky play, *She in the Absence of Love and Death*, and felt, upon meeting the author, "an instant sort of creative recognition." When she returned to New York, she read several Radzinsky plays that had been

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translated into English, and decided that *Rome at the Time of Nero and Seneca* was suitable for the Cocteau.[100](The play was never before staged in New York City.)[101]

Adamson's philosophy was that "theater should send people out talking about something other than who's going to take the baby-sitter home, or where they are going to go for drinks." She took joy in seeing audience members go out arguing with each other about what they have just seen. According to the artistic director, the longer she was in the Soviet Union, the more she felt a responsibility to stage a new Soviet play. Most of the plays she saw were very realistic; thus she rejected them as not compatible with the Cocteau's style. She was really delighted when she discovered Edvard Radzinsky: she did not think there was anyone else like him writing in the Soviet Union.[102]

Adamson noted that the Radzinsky play dealt with the problem of the intellectual in confrontation with authority. The play shows Seneca as tutor and mentor to Nero. The play takes place when Nero is close to 30, and Seneca has left Rome to retire. Nero calls him back. The action of the play occurs in one night outside the amphitheater before Nero's circus will begin--where he is going to kill several people. Seneca is confronted with a variety of people degraded by Nero who will help him act out his life and relationships with Seneca, the greatest moralist who has nurtured the greatest murderer. It becomes an examination of Seneca's

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part in Nero's life, his guilt in remaining silent and not taking action about the horrors all around him.

According to Alma H. Law, Radzinsky's translator, the work had not been staged in the Soviet Union. Law, a scholar at the City University of New York and at Columbia University's Harriman Institute for the Advanced Study of the Soviet Union, said that Radzinsky was one of the first Soviet playwrights in the 1960s to break away from old boy-loves-tractor style of theatre, a style that developed during the 1930s under Stalin. At the time there was great pressure for happy endings and the optimistic show of life at its best in socialist terms.

While working on the translation of *Theatre in the Time of Nero and Seneca*, Alma Law received some suggestions from a Professor Dennis Scott of Columbia University on the problems of the Russian script. Scott liked the episodic form and the consequent rhythms, which, he considered, gave the play a cool tone and sense of speed, even though the script was wordy. The main problem with the Russian script was its excess, according to the professor. The content of each interlocking sequence of the matrix needed trimming. The governing image should be identified, and everything that did not illuminate that image would be cut. Scott advised Law to reduce the set to its bare minimum, a task easily assumed by Adamson during the actual production, wherein only the props and furniture essential to carry out

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the action would be used. Scott found that the language made too much sense, so that we lose the perception that the characters are groping their way through language toward expressing some truth that evades them; thus the audience, in hearing the glib talk, would not believe in the essential isolation and unhappiness of the characters. The existential tragedy, then, ran off the rails into domestic drama, according to Scott.[103]

Unfortunately, Radzinsky was unable to leave for New York to see his play at the Cocteau (there had been a sudden cooling of relations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union). Chaunce Skilling, a trustee of the theatre, called the staging of *Nero and Seneca* a great step for the Cocteau because, he felt, Adamson's stature in the community, and the fact that she had been to Russia and met the playwright enhanced the prestige of the company. Skilling did not believe the trip was undertaken for the publicity, but he felt the bonus that media coverage provided was good for the theatre.[104]

Skilling equated the authorization Adamson received to produce Radzinsky's plays and the arrangement for the Russian's visit to the success in bringing Tennessee Williams to the theatre. As Skilling perceived, "Williams had some things in the trunk in his waning days that had not been produced. He could have selected any theater, but he chose the Cocteau for its consistent quality and he was

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happy to devote his time and his art."[105]

Robert Hupp, currently artistic director of the Cocteau, recalled *Nero and Seneca* as the first show he attended at the Bouwerie Lane, and gave his view on the relevance of *Nero and Seneca* to a classical company:

> The first show I saw here was *Theatre in the Time of Nero and Seneca*. It still stands out as important in that it was a new play with an English-language premiere. Also in terms of content it was important. The play had real impact. Those were exciting times. Our production was exciting and Eve found a new play that really fit her definition of classic, so she really was able to make a marriage of the modern and the classic--very successful.
>
> I agree with Eve that plays much older than the Radzinsky should not be staged as museum pieces. To avoid this, you avoid staging them the way they have been staged before. If you look at classical ballet, they are truly museum pieces as they are slavishly staged as in the past with exact movements. In our form of classical theatre there is no reverence for past productions. The idea is to take a text; there is reverence for the text but we look at how text affects our lives. By interpreting in terms of our existence, we avoid museum pieces.[106]

From the evidence of the reviews, the Cocteau production of *Theatre in the Time of Nero and Seneca* one that was badly planned, and suffering from inadequate costumes, outrageous acting, and emphasis on the didactic.

Herbert Mitgang of the *New York Times* attended a September 1984 staging of the new Russian play, which he saw as pitting Nero, a tyrant who consistently behaved in a monstrous way, against Seneca, the philosopher and playwright who was Nero's tutor and who counseled moderation. Craig Smith played Nero to Harris Berlinsky's

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Seneca, in a production that also featured Patrick Boyington as Amor and Mary Gratch as Venus. Mitgang was appalled at the production, calling the costumes and makeup outlandish: Seneca with a modern Chesterfield coat, Nero with makeup that the critic believed would be better suited to Restoration comedy. Rounding out what he considered a burlesque-show ambiance, the critic considered the presentation offensive particularly because of "the prancing around of Boyington," as he put it, "like an androgynous slave, and the bumping and grinding of Mary Gratch as Venus, all of which suggest not tyranny but burlesque." He faulted the translation, which sounded lumpy to his sensitive ear.[107]

Ari Salant of the *New York Theater Voice* apparently agreed with Mitgang's appraisal, calling the portrayal of Nero more decadent and shrill than the emperor is usually depicted, and the entire drama one that degenerated into crude spectacle. He also criticized the sets by Christopher Martin and Giles Hogya for being more like a white-tiled subway washroom. Not until his final sentence did the critic call the production viable and ably handled.[108]

Mary Campbell of Associated Press newspapers said that the play verged on the uninteresting, because of what she considered chunky speeches of philosophy, but added that it remained interesting because of its compactness--one hour and twenty minutes without intermission--and because of the avant-garde staging (which she did not describe).[109]

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Don Nelsen of the *New York Daily News* called the play heavy and didactic, with Harris Berlinsky miscast as Seneca, since, as he noted: "He cannot pass for a 60-year-old sage." Nelsen could not perceive a modern implication for the dilemma which shows Seneca's attempts to moderate the emperor's behavior after Nero murders his own half-brother and mother.[110] Peter Wynne for *The Record* saw no evil, calling the play simply fascinating and well performed, and one of the best the company has yet mounted.[111] Judy Thrall of *The Villager* noted that this was a play of ideas in which Berlinsky was good and Adamson's staging was sensuous.[112]

Alisa Solomon, critic for *The Village Voice,* found the issues buried under the excesses of stage effects such as smoke and red lights, so that "instead of drawing analogies to contemporary instances of silent acquiescence, or to feel the terror of despotism, the production displayed Nero's kinkiness." Solomon believed the play could operate on a more subtle and suggestive level to parallel the Soviet society of the mid-1980s and see in that what we fail to recognize in our own.[113]

The Shakespearean work chosen as the Cocteau's second production of the 1984-85 season was chosen not as a crowd pleaser, but as one that would help fulfill the Cocteau mission of presenting classics. *Cymbeline* is produced by theatre companies with only moderate frequency, a recent example being Joseph Papp's staging in the Public Theatre as

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part of a Shakespeare marathon in 1990.

Douglas McKeown directed the play at a swift pace, moving eighteen people around the small Cocteau stage without slackening. Judy Jones played the pivotal role of Imogen, Craig Smith the overcredulous Posthumus, John Emmert was Iachiamo, Harris Berlinsky was Cymbeline, Margaret Dulaney was the queen, while Patrick Boyinton played the role of Cloten.

Craig Smith recalled that one night Ms. Dulaney (the queen) became ill and could not perform. The house was sold out. The theatre called Barbara Schofield, who had acted in the past with the company, asking her to come in and read the role. Smith announced the situation to the audience, admitting that the theatre never uses stand-by actors. He joked with the audience about Schofield's readiness to read the role, and offered anyone who wished to leave a refund, and whether one left or remained, he would be entitled to free tickets to see the original cast in the future. No one left and, Smith added that in his opinion Barbara was spectacular. She had to read the entire, huge role.[114]

There was no press coverage of the production.

With her interest in presenting plays that are difficult and challenging as well as neglected and bold, Adamson staged Franz Werfel's *Goat Song* as the third production, beginning in November 1984. (There was only one other production of this play in New York City--by the Guild

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Theatre opening 25 January 1926.)[115] This is a folk tale written in the early 1920s, which combines mystical horror with political undertones. The play is set in the countryside of an Eastern European state during the late 18th century. The horror is from a monster, a goat-like creature born into the lesser gentry and locked away in a hut on the family estate. When it escapes into a ragtag bunch of dispossessed peasants, the creature is hailed as the Antichrist and the whole town erupts into murderous chaos. After the flames are quelled, those left alive are redeemed by the horrors they have experienced.

Adamson recalled that this was a highly theatrical presentation, with her direction creating a series of stage pictures aided by the set design of Robert Joel Schwartz. Craig Smith provided the lighting, this time, fulfilling part of Adamson's pledge to rotate the company so that ideally, every actor gets a chance to do everything.

According to critics, the presentation of *Goat Song* was well-acted. The only review on record is by Michael Sommers of *Back Stage,* who could not find fault with the Cocteau staging: he praised Miles Mason's portrayal of a nihilist student, Stephanie Lett's as the bartered bride, Barbara Schofield's and Craig Cook's as complacent landowners, Harris Berlinsky's as a melancholy wanderer, and Coral Potter's as a sympathetic and good doctor.[116]

Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* was staged

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from January to May 1985 as the company's fourth production of the season. Eve Adamson had consistently balanced the theatre offerings each year, choosing popular and frequently-produced plays to give both the actors and the audience an experience with works that are more commercial than the plays which are rarely staged in New York. The 1984-85 season showed that the balance had shifted toward the production of popular plays.

Giles Hogya directed and designed lighting for the production, and Richard von Ernest designed the costumes. Adamson felt she had realized her aim--that the production Wilde's popular play renewed the spirit of the actors and attracted a large audience. Her view was confirmed by the two reviewers who attended the production and found the portrayal of female roles by men in "drag" to be worthy of the playwright's comic ideas.

Finding no fault whatever, one reviewer, Glenda Frank of *Stages*, called the presentation "one with style and sincerity and truly Wilde."[117] Still another, Arch Brown of *The Villager*, added that some actors are better than others. He wondered whether there is a trend during the season to portray female roles by men in drag, citing the case of Craig Cook's role as Lady Bracknell.[118]

Two additional works were added in May 1985 to be performed in tandem, *L'Aiglon* and *The Maids*, the former chosen to introduce the audience to a Rostand work other

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than *Cyrano de Bergerac*, the latter to reinforce the company's commitment to "modern classics." The double feature recalled no vivid memories by the Cocteau and, as with many of these works generated as a bonus to subscribers, there was no press coverage. (While *The Maids* is a familiar title, there is no evidence of another production of *L'Aiglon* in New York.)[119]

By the end of the season, Eve Adamson, artistic director and founder, had completed thirteen years with the Cocteau; John Bower, the administrative director, had concluded five years; Craig Smith, development director had eleven years to his credit; Andrea Tienan, administrative assistant and box office manager, had completed her first year; and Greg Laird, the technical director, had completed two years.

In its request for funding from NYSCA for one internship that could be renewed annually, the Cocteau pointed out that other interns were assigned by various programs--two, in particular, by the New York City Board of Education. One young woman, Stacey S. Pryor, had applied for an internship, but needed a salary to allow her to live in New York while working. She had been involved with the Cocteau through a Marymount Manhattan College work-study program and required five dollars an hour for a twenty-five hour week. A supplemental NYSCA grant, however, was not forthcoming for that purpose.[120]

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The business staff of the theatre regularly files requests such as this one for grants, often specifying how the funding would be used. The internship program, which has sometimes been funded by the New York State Council for the Arts, is of mutual benefit to the theatre and to the intern. After serving one year, an intern may be invited to accept a regular, salaried job with the theatre. The theatre employs the interns for public relations work, audience development, and editing releases.[121]

During the 1984-85 season, Eve Adamson, the artistic director, received a salary of $6,500, a decrease from the 1981-82 season of $3,100. The Cocteau had still been feeling the effects of the 1982-83 recession and its receipts remained below those of the more successful year of 1981-82. The directors were unable to offer higher pay to the theatre's artistic director, but the same sum of $6,500 was paid to Craig Smith as development director and $6,500, as well, to Gregory Laird, who served as technical director.

The officers of the non-profit corporation were executives in media and law firms. They were Edmund Schwesinger, president; Chaunce Skilling, vice president; James Nichols, vice president; Alvin Deutsch, secretary; and Paul Lanier, treasurer. Other trustees were Lois M.B. Deutchman, Thomas R. Fuld, Sibyl Jacobson, Marsha Porcell, Karen Skilling, and Eve Adamson. There were 1,350 subscribers during the season, each of whom paid $24 to see

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four plays. The price of an individual ticket during that season was $9.00. No data are available on total receipts, attendance, or rent paid.

Several turning points were passed by the Cocteau during the seasons of 1981-85. The visit of Tennessee Williams to guest-direct his own play in a world premiere performance of *Something Cloudy, Something Clear* was, by consensus of the artistic director and her actors, the most exciting development to occur in the Bouwerie Lane theatre, and one that matched the excitement of Williams's previous visits during the stagings of *Kirche, Kutchen and Kinder* and *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*. Officially, no press were permitted to review the first work, insofar as it was considered an unfinished bit of fluff which, Williams feared, would further the gossip that he was on a steady decline. *In the Bar* did receive some press, mostly unfavorable, though the author's appraisal was that the work was the *real* Williams. What truly galvanized the media as well as the subscribers and single-ticket buyers were the sold-out performances of a play written in the recognized Williams style, replete with homoerotic ambiance and melancholy. Acknowledged to be autobiographical, *Something Cloudy, Something Clear*, did not impress the critics, most of whom considered the work amorphous and self-indulgent.

If any choices of Ms. Adamson could be said to digress

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from the production of neglected and celebrated classics by a resident, repertory company, they would be the works recently penned by Edvard Radzinsky. As world première productions--one presented during the 1984-85 season, the other two during the following season--Radzinsky's plays could scarcely be called either recognized "modern classics" or works that had survived the test of time.

With generous donations by NYSCA (specific amounts were not always available from the files) and from other such organizations, together with strong box office receipts and a relentless pursuit of donations, the Cocteau survived when other small theaters faltered. Reviewers often came to diametrically opposite conclusions on the merits of a given Cocteau offering, exhibiting the subjective nature of reviewing.

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CHAPTER SIX: Notes

1. "Something Tennessee," *Other Stages*, 30 July 1981, 37.

2. Billy Rose Division, Library for the Performing Arts, Lincoln Center.

3. Michiko Kakutani, "Tennessee Williams: 'I Keep Writing. Sometimes I am Pleased'," *New York Times*, 13 August 1981, 38.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Craig Smith, interview with the author, New York City, 27 February 1990.

7. Craig Smith, interview with the author, New York City, 18 June 1990.

8. William Green, "Williams's Latest Play is Fine Self-Portrait," *Atlantic City Insider*, 27 September 1981, B1.

9. Dan Isaac, "Tennessee Revisited," *Other Stages*, 17-30 December 1981, 6.

10. Marjorie Gunner, "On and Off Broadway," *Floral Park Bulletin*, 24 September 1981, 7.

11. Ron Mullen, "Theatre," *The Villager*, 25 September 1981, 7.

12. Terry Helbing, "Sinking," *New York Native*, 5 October 1981, 32.

13. Paul Barish, "Stage Vision a Little Cloudy," *The Villager*, 17 September 1981, 15.

14. Bill Irving, "Williams's New Play Is Something Special," *The Villager*, 3 October 1981, 6.

15. Brian Bradley, "Tomorrow' TV Night," Channel D Cable Television, 17 September 1981.

16. Clive Barnes, "More Cloudy Than Clear," *New York Post*, 14 September 1981, 41.

17. Glenne Currie, *UPI*, 23 September 1981.

18. Thomas Fuld, trustee, letter to Tennessee Williams, 14 September 1981.

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19. Mel Gussow, "Tennessee Williams Is Dead Here at 71," *New York Times*, 26 February 1983, A10.

20. Eve Adamson interview, 28 February 1990.

21. Thomas Fuld, interview with the author, 22 March 1990.

22. Julius Novick, "Veni, Vidi, Vindice," *The Village Voice*, 29 December 1981, 35.

23. Michaelina Cavallero, "Promising New Season at Old Bouwerie Lane," *Brooklyn Daily Bulletin*, 8 February 1982, 12.

24. Ellen M. Cosgrove, "Revenge, Sweet but Short," *Co-op City Times*, 16 January 1982, 5.

25. William A. Raidy, "Theater: *The Revenger's Tragedy*, A Serio-Comic Drama," *Staten Island Advance*, 29 December 1981, B3.

26. Clive Barnes, "Bloody *Revenger's Tragedy*, *New York Post*, 26 December 1981, 43.

27. Ted Otten, "Old Blood 'n' Guts Theatre," *P.S.*, 17 March 1982, 3.

28. Judy Thrall, "Theatre," *The Villager*, 3 March 1982, 5.

29. Jeremy Gerard, "Strange Lust," *SoHo Weekly News*, 13-19 January 1982, 8.

30. Mel Gussow, "Stage: "Tourneur's Jacobean Tragedy," *New York Times*, 17 January 1982, 38.

31. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

32. Eve Adamson, interview with the author, New York City, 14 March 1990.

33. Doris Deither, "Theatre," *The Villager*, 18 March 1982, 17.

34. Michaelina Cavallaro, "*The Golem* Offers Food for Thought at the Cocteau Rep," *Jewish Journal*, 12 March 1982, 28.

35. Ellen S. Fine, "Visionary with an Axe," *Other Stages*, 11-24 March 1982, 17.

36. Richard F. Shepard, "Stage: The Cocteau Presents Leivick's *Golem*," *New York Times*, 18 March 1982, C5.

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37. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

38. Fuld interview, 21 March 1990.

39. Letter by NYSCA to the Cocteau, May 1981.

40. Letter by an anonymous subscriber to Eve Adamson, 25 January 1981.

41. Carol Lawson, "Broadway Is in Its Worst Slump in a Decade," *New York Times*, 3 January 1983, A1,C17.

42. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

43. Henry A. Garrity, "*The Condemned of Altona*," *Theatre Journal*, December 1983, 55.

44. Laurie Stone, "Crimes of the Sartre," *The Village Voice*, 27 September 1982, 102.

45. Renfreu Neff, "Satre Reconsidered," *Other Stages*, 5 October 1982, 13.

46. Billy Rose Division.

47. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

48. Clive Barnes, "Swan Surprise from Strindberg," *New York Post*, 16 November 1982, 47.

49. According to the Cocteau actor when Smith, performing in the role of public relations person, secured for Moss an interview with *Showbill* magazine, the director was self-aggrandizing and mentioned his experience with the Cocteau in a brief, off-handed way. Smith thought that the director made the Cocteau seem like a sophomoric group, "a Mickey Mouse institution, a place where Mickey and Judy get together to put on a play." When Smith booked Moss with Caspar Citron's radio show, the director once again--according to Smith--briefly "happened to mention in passing" that he was doing a play at the Cocteau. Smith granted that he did wonderful things and off-off Broadway would not be where it was; but insisted that "there's no love lost."

50. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

51. Harris Berlinsky, interview with the author, New York City, 21 March 1990.

52. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

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53. These comments are by, respectively, Rev. T. Ploch of Saesian Jr. Seminary, D. Baecher of Bishop Kearney High School, and B. Eidelberg of William Cullen Bryant High School.

54. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

55. Berlinsky interview, 21 March 1990.

56. Robert Massa, "Bits," *The Village Voice*, 26 April 1983, 107.

57. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

58. Berlinsky interview, 21 March 1990.

59. Craig Smith interview, 18 June 1990. Smith recalled Laird as "a bit flaky but loving," a man who was diagnosed in 1988 with AIDS who shortly thereafter bequeathed his stereo system to the Cocteau.

60. Ibid.

61. Joseph Moses, "Sophoclean Tragedy," *Other Stages*, 19 May 1983, 5.

62. Craig Smith, press notice to schools, February 1983.

63. "U.S. Legit Group Visits Russia, Urges More play Swapping," *Variety*, 7 March 1983, 408.

64. Samuel G. Freedman, "As Off Broadway Thrives, Its Problems Mount," *New York Times*, 9 October 1983, II,1.

65. Richard Gilman, "Stage View," *The New York Times*, 4 September 1983, II,3.

66. Walter Kerr, "This Season Needs a Play with Teeth," *New York Times*, 22 January 1984, II,6.

67. Bruce Bossard, "Critics Meet to Discuss Their Influence on Broadway Theatre," *Backstage*, 2 March 1984, 38. Italics mine.

68. Fuld interview, 21 March 1990.

69. Fuld interview, 21 March 1990.

70. Peter Weller, press release for Tapper productions, 1 December 1983.

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71. Robert Patrick, permission to Tapper productions to stage *Judas*, letter of 3 November 1983.

72. Tish Dace, "Patrick Play Explores Judas' Betrayal (and Then Some)," *The Villager*, 6 October 1983, 17.

73. Clive Barnes, *"Judas:* Forceful and Fascinating," *New York Post*, 25 October 1983, 38.

74. Don Nelsen, "Modern-Day *Judas* Offers Interesting Insights," *New York Daily News*, 26 October 1983, 43.

75. Oleg Kerensky, "*Judas*," *Backstate*, 1 December 1984, 25.

76. William A. Raidy, "*Judas Is Powerful,*" The Jersey Journal, 24 October 1983, 54.

77. Sy Syna, "*Judas* Betrays Good Theatre," *New York Tribune*, 13 January 1984, 5B.

78. Carolyn Albert, "Aisle Say," *Greenpoint Gazette*, 1 November 1983, 16.

79. G. Teller Martin, "*Judas*," *Show Business*, October 1983, 28.

80. Peter Wynne, "Off-Beat Off-Broadway," *The Record*, 26 September 1984, 27.

81. "Cocteau's *The Beaux' Strategem," The Shakespeare Bulletin* 2, no. 5 (1983), 36.

82. Jean Brody, "Capsule Reviews," *Backstage*, 20 January 1984, 6A.

83. Debbi Wasserman, "Theatre," *Westchester and Fairfield Country Life*, 30 November 1983, C1.

84. Nichols owns a company that produces videotape, a business called Nicholodeon, which he started before the children's cable network of a similar name came into existence. He occasionally uses his talents with a camcorder to tape Cocteau presentations, and has a number of taped plays in his home library in New York's Greenwich Village.

85. Berlinsky interview, 21 March 1990.

86. Robert Massa, "Scepter'd Ills: *King John, Village Voice*, 7 February 1984, 90.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

The Better-Known Plays Dominate: 1985-88

With the close of the 1984-85 season, this review of the history of the first nineteen years in the history of the Cocteau Theatre has passed the three-quarters mark. In pursuing the final quarter, the reader will note a skewing of weight to that segment. Theater files have more abundant information for the seasons 1985-1990 than they do for any given five-year period before August 1985. Interviewees were able to recall events of the last five years more readily than they could the fourteen years preceding, and more important, there are only three people now available on the staff that have been associated with the theatre for more than twelve years and thus privy to such early information.

Moreover, during the last five years, a sophisticated marketing study was undertaken to examine the needs of Cocteau subscribers; this report requires examination in part of the study that is to follow. Also, more budgetary data are matters of record during the past five years than in the preceding fourteen.

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Having arrived in New York after his flight from Moscow in August 1985, playwright Edvard Radzinsky was not prepared for the attention he received from the media. The many interviews which he was to grant to the media would give the Cocteau considerable publicity. Buoyed by the prospects of attaining a surge in subscriptions, Eve Adamson announced the season's plays, the opening one scheduled to coincide with the author's visit. The plays were as follows:

1985-1986

09/85-11/85	*Lunin: Theatre of Death*	Edvard Radzinsky
10/85-02/86	*Six Characters in Search of an Author*	Luigi Pirandello
11/85-05/86	*King Lear*	W. Shakespeare
01/86-05/86	*The Miser*	Molière
03/86-05/86	*Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*	Tom Stoppard
04/86-05/86	*Under Milkwood*	Dylan Thomas

An examination of the plays selected by the artistic director since 1971 does not indicate an uninterrupted trend toward an emphasis on the better known dramas. During some seasons, the Cocteau staged primarily neglected classics; during others, the company performed predominately well-known dramas. During the 1985-86 season, five of the six dramas selected by Adamson could be placed in the category of standard works of the classical repertoire. Only *Lunin: Theatre of Death* was offered as a New York premiere, a fact which some students of theatre might consider a foreshadowing of seasons to come; i.e., a movement in the direction of producing a greater percentage of commercial works.

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As described in the previous chapter, eighteen months after Eve Adamson's visit in December 1983 to Moscow, Leningrad, and some smaller Soviet communities, Soviet authorities issued a visa to playwright Edvard Radzinsky to visit New York to complete the exchange.

Radzinsky was to have come to New York the season before 1985-86, but his trip was canceled for reasons never explained. For the current season, the Soviet Copyright Agency paid his fare, and the International Theater Institute of New York provided a grant to Adamson's company for expenses during his two-week visit.

Following the writer's arrival, Enid Nemy of the *New York Times* interviewed the 48-year-old guest and noted that Radzinsky's English was suffused with the poetry he had read in the Soviet Union. For example, when he wanted to say, "I am going out," he would actually recite, "I will vanish into thin air." He was preparing to visit the Cocteau during its presentation of *Lunin: Theater of Death*, the second part of a trilogy which saw its American premiere at the Cocteau the previous year. (The final play, *Conversations with Socrates*, would be performed in September 1987 at the Cocteau.) Radzinsky termed theatre in New York different from that in Moscow. According to the playwright, Moscow theaters are all large; yet securing tickets was a problem. The Communist Party rewarded some of its most powerful members with positions as managing directors of theater. He

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explained that six of his plays were being staged in the Soviet Union during the time that the playwright was visiting New York.[1]

Another reporter, Thor Eckert of the *Christian Science Monitor,* called Radzinsky the Soviet Union's most popular playwright, one of the few Russian artists to be allowed to visit the U.S. since the time when cultural ties had been severed between the U.S. and the USSR over the Afghanistan conflict. Eckert quoted the playwright's commentary on the nature of theatre in the United States, in which the playwright said the following:

> The theatre is not just an art, it is one of the most mysterious and important of the arts. It is part of culture, of education. Why does it have to survive with such difficulty in such a rich country? Why do great actors have to work as waiters? I don't understand. I marvel that theater people maintain this wonderful fanaticism. From the point of view of normal people, they must be a little crazy. But only the mad can make art. I would wish that normal people would help these crazy people a little. Because if they suddenly stopped being mad, something very important would die in this world.[2]

Radzinsky had heard that an American woman, Alma Law, was interested in translating his plays into English. This surprised him, as he was sure that there was no one in the United States who would risk producing them, given their non-commercial nature. He had met Eve Adamson through the director's visit to the Soviet Union in the winter of 1983, and together they planned a program in which the Cocteau would offer a platform for the Russian's works.

Radzinsky was impressed by the accessibility of the

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Bouwerie Lane to patrons, citing the Moscow situation in which, despite the great size of theatres, it is impossible to get into a theater when there is an opening. The writer and the director of a given play are powerful people, he explained, because they award many tickets to people of their choosing. He noted with excitement the theatre's proxmity to Greenwich Village, the literary center of the city, with stores selling books by writers he had always admired: Jack Kerouac, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Tennessee Williams.[3]

Radzinsky explained his play, *Lunin: Theater of Death,* which is based on an incident in the life of Mikhail Sergeevich Lunin, an idealistic soldier of the czar who took part in the Decembrist uprising of 1825, and after many years in and out of confinement, died mysteriously in Akatui prison 20 years later. Akatui was considered the worst prison in all of the Russian Empire; now the prison is gone but in a town nearby Radzinsky saw a production of his play about Lunin. *Lunin*, according to the dramatist, is about the Decembrists, a group of Russian intelligentsia and their first encounter with freedom.[4]

The *New York Times* critic, D.J.R. Bruckner, explained that the real Lunin was a decorated army officer during the Napoleonic wars and a friend of the Grand Duke Constantine, the brother of Czar Alexander I. In 1816 he lived in Paris where he became a Roman Catholic and absorbed much of the

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thinking of French and American revolutionaries of the previous century. That year, he proposed killing the Czar, and when an actual attempt was made to overthrow a new czar nine years later, a confederate turned Lunin in and he was sent to Siberia. Released 10 years later, he became a prolific writer of letters about political reform. When the manuscript describing a history of Russian secret political societies was found by police, he was arrested again in 1841 and died of unexplained causes in prison. In the play, Lunin is strangled on imperial orders after he and the ghosts of old friends and adversaries he summons up in imagination have gone through the turbulent politics of the era. There is also a memory of Lunin's only love affair.[5]

The play covers the final hours of Lunin's life. He is visited by several people, real and imagined, who give him an opportunity to recall some of the major events of his life. It ends with his death at the hands of two fellow prisoners recruited for the task by a lieutenant running the prison.[6]

Radzinsky insisted that he does not spend time analyzing his plays. "The playwright writes one play, the director directs a different play, and the audience sees a third one," he explained.[7]

Masks are used by the characters in *Lunin,* behind which the writer probes into his own subconscious. Historical personages are called forth to play certain universal roles.

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He explained that while he wrote *Lunin* he was in a kind of trance about which he remembered little. Radzinsky believes the opportunity to see these works on the American stage is to experience what few Americans experience--the monumental, but cruel and inexorable history that informs the Russian character and fills it with a profound sense of fate.[8]

In a feature article by a reporter for the *Christian Science Monitor,* Thor Eckert, interpreted *Lunin* to be a work with many themes, including the banality of power, the paranoia of political bureaucracy, one man's refusal to compromise in a system that dictates compromise, courage and vision, and the personal cost for radical, idealistic stances.[9]

The play was performed at the Cocteau without intermission during the months of September through November 1985. Adamson felt that she had done a strong job of directing the play, trying to make sure that the audience--which was unfamiliar with the work--would catch every nuance. She was proud of casting Craig Smith in the title role (Smith had quickly become the actor most counted upon for playing leads), and of assigning Elise Stone to the role of She. Adamson's appraisal of her own direction of the script was confirmed by several reviewers, who also found the acting of the principals to be appropriately strong. Adamson admitted that during almost every production, a number of people in the audience left, despite the lack of

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an intermission to supply the theatregoers with an excuse. Nonetheless, she refused to blame herself, ascribing the defections to an inability of some people to play close attention to the spoken word.[10] Other members of the cast were Harris Berlinsky as Lieutenant Grigoryev and John T. Bower as the Scribe. Smaller roles were taken by Gretchen Krich, Joe Bolduc, John Schmerling and Coral S. Potter.

The use of masks was considered a highlight of the production by some critics as was the director's appropriately rapid pacing.

In the review for the *New York Times,* D.J.R. Bruckner commended the performances of Craig Cook, William Dante, Joe Menino, and gave a special note of recognition to Eve Adamson, whose direction he found "clear and unswerving as was the line of argument." Bruckner also appreciated the use of masks by which "the characters are given the faces of menace, deception and corruption--not anonymity."[11]

Another reviewer, Michael Feingold of the *Village Voice*, declared that for him, the three czars blurred into one; the conspirators were reduced to two former friends and end up as judge and fellow prisoner; and the women in Lunin's life are embodied by one Eternal Feminine. Feingold held that for refusing to name names after his arrest--unlike his fellow liberals--Lunin was to be commended. A Soviet audience, though, would see an allusion to the present government (i.e. of the early 1980s), although there is no

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mention of contemporary Russia in the play. Feingold found that watching the play was not an aesthetic pleasure but rather an act of bravery. He congratulated Eve Adamson for all of the Cocteau's efforts on behalf of the Soviet writer and for what he called her "visually striking, whipcrack-fast production."[12]

While Feingold praised Craig Smith in particular for his interpretation of the title figure, another reviewer, Tish Dace of *The Villager*, added that Smith was "an actor gifted with both discipline and imagination, both craft and the daring to unleash the emotion which carries him beyond mere consummate calculation." Dace called attention to attrition in the audience, which she assumed had been occurring during each performance. She reported that American audiences are unaccustomed to listening carefully during extended dialogue or monologues in which ostensibly nothing is happening. Since the audience are confronted with philosophical drama in which some characters become depersonalized with masks, people will leave rather than tax their attention spans or tolerate either ambiguity or downright confusion, she explained.[13] There were no additional reviews of the production.

The company's second presentation beginning in October 1985 was Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, which was chosen by Adamson to underscore her belief that classics need not be a century old or more. "The

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attribute of universality can propel a twentieth century drama into the category of classic," she explained.

In the production, Craig Smith assumed the catalytic role of the director, while Elise Stone enacted the role of the mother. Dan Irvine, who guest-directed the play and who had been associated with the Circle Repertory Company's laboratory for new plays, cast Gretchen Krich as the stepdaughter. The actress, in her first year with the Cocteau, gave an extraordinary performance, according to Smith. Craig Smith regretted that only one critic reviewed the presentation, which he called a striking one, and one which Adamson strove to make accessible by converting parts of Arthur Livingston's translation into informal English.[14]

In reviewing *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Victor Gluck of the *Times* called the presentation the best production Jean Cocteau Rep had ever staged, adding that it was "riveting, engrossing and stylish with extraordinary performances by Craig Cook, Deborah Singer, and with a new actor, Gretchen Krich." He objected to the new translation, one that put Pirandello's dialogue into modern, colloquial English, prompting people in the audience to wonder whether Pirandello really said what the actors were stating.[15]

For school matinees as well as for the regular subscribers and ticket-buyers, Adamson chose *King Lear* as the season's third presentation, with matinees beginning in November 1985. Adamson once again chose one of

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Shakespeare's crowd-pleasing dramas rather than one of his obscure works, as she felt that high-school teachers and instructors of undergraduates would fill the auditorium for each presentation of a well-known classic. Craig Smith recalled that the house was indeed filled to capacity, but he had only vague memories of the production, the principal one being that the minimal scenery could not do justice to a work of such scope. No reviewers attended.

Molière's *The Miser* was the Cocteau's presentation for the months of January through May of 1986, the fourth choice of the 1985-86 season. Adamson said she could have chosen any of a number of other comedies of the French neoclassical writer, but arbitrarily selected *The Miser.*[16] The Cocteau family had few memories of the presentation, which Smith called mediocre.[17] In Smith's opinion, the absence of critics was a fortunate occurrence.

Adamson's choice for the company's fifth presentation was Tom Stoppard's contemporary *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead,* performed from March to May of 1986. Adamson again wanted to reinforce the Cocteau mission as one that gives full consideration to modern works that have not yet met the test of time, but which have universal scope. In this case, a comedy which embraces a pondering of man's mortality, and which derived its humor largely from word-play, was considered suitable by the artistic director.

Harris Berlinsky recalled the presentation of Stoppard's

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Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, which he called one of his favorite plays: He was particularly affected by Coral Potter's interpretation of Guildenstern. Yet he felt that Stoppard was done an injustice because of inadequate time allowed for rehearsals. The word-play is the main attribute, according to Berlinsky. He added that "if the timing is not precise, if you are not on the money with the line and with the returning of the line--you do it an injustice." He was pleasantly surprised that the audience liked the play, although some theatergoers told the artistic director after performances that they simply could not understand the work.[18] Again no reviewers were present.

Few Cocteau productions are of plays written after 1950; one exception was Dylan Thomas's *Under Milkwood,* written by the poet in 1956 for radio with the subtitle, "A Play for Voices," and given a stage presentation as the "extra " work in May 1986. Adamson, a devotee of Wilder's *Our Town,* decided to present a play with a comparable mood. *Milkwood* is a loosely woven work, really an extended series of vignettes, linked by a narrator and giving the viewer a poetic glimpse into the life of a Welsh town from dawn to dark of a single day. Requiring a large cast, the play could not be performed by the Cocteau without much doubling, even tripling of roles. *Milkwood* did not require a realistic set, so the Cocteau was able to represent the locale by a modest cyclorama, lighting the areas of the town

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that applied in each case. Thomas's play suffered on the small stage since, according to Smith, the company was unable to evoke the visual spectacle the work requires.[19]

Thomas's work for the stage was directed by company member Anthony Taylor who was to write his own play to be shown during the following season, "*Taylor's Tickler.*"

One of the trends that bear attention is Adamson's increasing tendency to perform the better-known classics as opposed to the staging of rarely-performed works. During the 1985-86 season, only one play could be called obscure to New York audiences--Edvard Radzinsky's *Lunin: Theatre of Death*, which was given America's first staging by the Cocteau theatre. The remainder--particularly *Six Characters, King Lear,* and *The Miser*--are works well-known to New York theatregoers because of the many presentations they have received. Perhaps the desire of the trustees to have the theatre group perform more popular classics is the principal reason for the shift. The actors, too, have generally preferred to work on crowd-pleasers, since many--particularly Craig Smith as noted above--consider the rarer texts flawed.

At a trustees' meeting in mid-season, the financial condition of the Cocteau was found healthy, with box office receipts exceeding those of the 1984-85 season. The theatre during the 1985-86 season was averaging 65% of capacity

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(versus 45% in 1984-85) yielding a total earned income of $11,000 over budget. But unearned income was found wanting. The expected foundation income was $213,000, but expenses would exceed total income by $4,000. As is common at trustees' conferences, each board member was assigned a number of corporations to contact for possible funding.[20]

At a subsequent gathering of the trustees, ticket prices for the 1986-87 season were raised to seven dollars apiece for groups and to eight dollars for students and senior citizens. The top single ticket price would be $15 and subscriptions would become $39.[21]

At the May 1986 conference of trustees, Eve Adamson reported that Honey Waldman, the landlord of the Bouwerie Lane Theatre, would not negotiate a new lease. The theatre would be required to remain on a month to month basis beginning September 1986 with monthly rent increased to $2,500. This event led to the forming of a new-space committee, whose object would be to locate a new home for the Cocteau. At the same time, Robert Hupp, managing director, was made a voting member of the board, following the precedent with past managing directors.[22]

During the season, the salary of the artistic director was $13,000, a jump of one-third beyond what she received for the 1981-82 season. Robert Hupp, the administrative director, was paid $13,000 as well. Andrea Tienan, the development assistant, received $10,978, while John Arndt as

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technical director earned $5,918.[23]

Budgetary figures for the 1985-86 season indicated the general financial parameters into which the Cocteau falls, and may be used for comparison purposes when contrasted with figures from future seasons. Box office revenue was $123,000--more than double the $60,000 yielded from ticket sales during the 1980-81 season, this despite the paucity of media reviews. Subscriptions brought in $49,755 of that total. The school matinee series, five productions during the year on Thursdays at 1:30 p.m., yielded $4,351, and with miscellaneous sources of income, total earned revenue was $123,999 as stated above. The NEA (National Endowment for the Arts) did not contribute. The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs donated $2,000 while NYSCA, always the largest single donor, gave $30,800. Corporate contributors gave $16,060, foundations another 4,142, and individuals gave 20,140. A benefit (this is often a Broadway theater party) yielded $27,628 for a total of $100,770.

Actors with a defined seniority shared $28,680, not a great increase over what they received as far back as 1982, and small grants were given to the stage manager, the costumers, the box office manager and others. The largest single item was rent, which was $29,825 for the 1985-86 season. Other expenses that took their toll on the theater's meager resources were for liability insurance, telephone, postage, printing, service contracts, and study manuals.

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Adamson boasted that during its existence the company had received an Obie award, two Drama Desk nominations, an Outer Critics Circle nomination and five Villager awards to attest to the quality of her productions and to "a continuing commitment to a permanent company and the repertory format."[24] The term "forgotten classics" or "neglected classics" still had not appeared in the mission statement, and thereby remained a *de facto* calling for the company.

During the 1985-86 season Broadway was in a slump, and the non-commercial houses were not spared either. Theatre Communications Groups, a national alliance of about 200 noncommercial theatres, reported that during the five-year period from 1980 to 1985, a sample group of 37 prominent noncommercial theatres had slid from a $415,000 surplus to a $1.7 million deficit. Those 37 theatres accounted for almost half of the financial activity in the noncommercial theatre nationwide, and they included institutions like the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts; Circle in the Square and the Circle Repertory in New York; the Goodman Theatre in Chicago; the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis; the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles; and the Long Wharf Theatre and Yale Repertory Theatre, both in New Haven. These noncommercial theatres had served an important role in developing new writers and new plays, producing virtually every Pulitzer Prize-winning drama in the previous

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fifteen years.[25]

If anyone had doubts that off-Broadway was becoming increasingly commercialized, he could note what was called a major gamble. During the 1987-88 season in New York, *The Chosen* was to open at the Second Avenue Theater with a $2.5 million capitalization. This was more than the combined cost of all off-Broadway productions the previous season, according to Paul Libin, head of the League of Off-Broadway Theaters and Producers, a trade group. Alan J. Schuster, a producer of *The Chosen*, was committed to moving the show quickly to Broadway pending favorable notices. The play would require a hall with more than the allowed 499 seats in order to break even, and would have to play to 85 to 90 percent of capacity.[26]

The fact that so much money could be raised outside the Broadway mainstream was considered indicative of the changing climate of off-Broadway production. Dan Goggin's play *Nunsense*, for example, opened in December 1985, and was still in performance (at the Douglas Fairbanks Theatre) at the beginning of February 1991. New York's smaller theaters were proving increasingly attractive to investors in legitimate plays and musicals, with some producers even complaining about a shortage of theaters.[27]

Then, too, off-Broadway had become a lucrative second step for some off-off-Broadway companies dating from the success of *Little Shop of Horrors*. That show was developed

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by the WPA Theater and later earned several million dollars during its five-and-a-half-year run at the Orpheum. WPA also produced *Steel Magnolias*, one of the big hits of the 1986-87 season.

Some members of the Cocteau company believed that the financial troubles on Broadway could yield greater income for the Cocteau, which offered the financially battered theatergoers the option of seeing a play for one-fifth the price of a typical Broadway ticket. Others considered the problems of theatre to be generic: Perhaps audiences were showing a preference for the comforts of home entertainment over the travails of visits to theatres like the Bouwerie Lane. With this financial picture in mind, the Cocteau season was launched in September 1986 with the following plays announced:

1986-1987

09/11/86-11/12/87	*Conversations with Socrates*	Edvard Radzinsky
10/09/86-02/13/87	*The Duchess of Malfi*	John Webster
05/21/87-01/29/87	*Of Mice and Men*	John Steinbeck
02/04/87/05/24/87	*The Rivals*	R.B. Sheridan
03/15/87-05/22/87	*The Shoemakers*	S.I. Witkiewicz
04/29/87-05/14/87	*Taylor's Tickler*	Anthony Naylor

At the beginning of the 1986-87 season Robert Hupp, newly-appointed managing director (later to become associate artistic director and then artistic director), introduced himself to the audiences, describing briefly for them the background of the author of the first production. He reminded the audience that the author, Edvard Radzinsky, had

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arrived in New York four days before the opening to begin a two weeks' stay--his second visit to New York following his first in September 1984--but that after the writer's departure, the play would continue to run in repertory until mid-November. Instead of sending the Russian guest to a hotel, the trustees arranged for a sub-lease on an apartment for $500, while Craig Smith worked on press coverages and wrote media releases. For the 19 September performance, a symposium was arranged; this was followed by a party in honor of the visiting playwright. For the celebration, each trustee was assessed $40. Hupp reported to the trustees that the theatre had a large advance sale for the Soviet play, perhaps more than for any other opening in memory. New lights were installed by Giles Hogya, and some expenditures were made to bring old equipment up to code. Completing preparations for production elements were William Layton, costumes, and Eric Richards, audio. Radzinsky would see the last of his trilogy performed in September of the new season. The trilogy represented a break from the author's genre as represented by his works of the 1960s and 1970s. At least one theater journal considered his trilogy the opening of a new trend in modern Soviet playwriting, one which could be called philosophic, while the writer had started with the writing of modern plays which brought him nationwide popularity. Parting with ultramodern characters, he changed his theme. He described his reasons for the

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variation.

> I started to write a play that was completely unlike my preceding ones. I made an attempt to talk with a man who is the symbol of philosophy and I even called the play *Conversations with Socrates*. While writing, though, I resorted to banalities. At the time I was rereading Tolstoy's "Selecting Reading," saw Socrates's speech at his trial, and was struck by the noble spirit of the great man. I felt ashamed of what I had written and began to rewrite the play.
>
> . . . . it was the first time I had no plan, but trusted my characters to develop the action as I went along. Love of humankind is the basis of Socrates's thinking. He devoted his life to the preaching of love and the denial of everything that stood in its way, i.e. war and violence.
>
> I was very happy that the Cocteau Theatre, which I have grown to love, is staging the play. I must say that in my own country I have always been lucky with directors and actors. Working on a play always brought us close together.[28]

Notwithstanding the author's professed love for the Cocteau, the actors were unable to meet the standards that his text required, according to the evidence of the critics and of one trustee. Trustee Thomas Fuld considered only Craig Smith's work in the role of Socrates to be natural, while he felt the other performers seemed overly awed by Radzinsky's presence and delivered their lines as though they were in discomfort.[29]

Julius Novick of the *Village Voice*, having delivered rebukes to the repertory company in two preceding reviews, did not moderate his general feelings in analyzing the production of the Russian author's work. Novick's fond wish was for a theatre that is good, not just high-minded, courageous and dedicated. He praised the Cocteau for *what*

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it was doing, particularly in its commitment to produce the entire Radzinsky trilogy. "How many theatres would dare to mount anything described by its author as a historical-philosophical trilogy?" he queried. Yet seated in the audience, he found the evening dispiriting. While Novick of the *Voice* was hoping that the Soviet *Socrates* could have been vivified for an American audience by urgent, precise, and brilliant acting, he found the Cocteau players unable to provide this. Instead he lamented that the actors were "like anxious hosts, trying manfully to make the party go . . . their joint performance never relaxes into true freedom and ease." Even if the reviewer were able to see the play he really wanted to see--one about how the author of a trilogy in praise of dissidence became the most popular playwright in the Soviet Union--he doubted that the Cocteau would be able to stage it.[30]

The reviewer was favorably impressed, though, by the text, enjoying those aspects which dealt with intrigues, reversals, cross-purposes, a few stabbings, and good, well-made play plotting. But all this hard work produced little excitement, since, in his judgment, the characters and events remained lifeless. Novick clearly blamed the players, not the writer--for he believed the incidents are a mirror of recent history on the Bowery made murky and pointless.[31]

From her review, one might think that Tish Dace of *Plays*

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International had seen a different play from Julius Novick. She concluded that the production successfully identified the humor in Alma Law's translation, and that Adamson had rapidly and flawlessly paced the proceedings. She wrote favorably of Craig Smith whom she called "a splendid actor in his best role yet [who has] found a fertile field in which to sow whimsy, wry wit and rueful wisdom, mirth and the occasional passion which the text permits him." She appreciated Smith's natural acting in which he portrayed a 70-year-old "without phony mannerisms, but with a mastery of understatement, economy, and control. Adamson's supporting company likewise shines. Adamson shows that a low-budget American ensemble can rival the craft of the British rep companies."[32]

Still another critic found that the third play in Radzinsky's trilogy expanded beyond the public life of men, raising issues that can be applied to any society where advantage is more valued than honor, and civil order is held in higher regard than is the nurturing of a civilized society. Seconding Tish Dace's view which named Craig Smith at his best in the title role of *Socrates*, Steven Hart of *Villager Downtown* considered him stronger in the role of Socrates than in his roles in the previous works of the trilogy. Hart found that Smith created a man of 70 who feels the deterioration of his aging body "with an admirable combination of distaste and equanimity. . . his performance

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allows Smith moments of real, dense passion while otherwise remaining thoughtfully calm." Hart praised Adamson's directing for allowing the cast to perform on a human scale.[33]

The critic for the *New York Times,* D.J.R. Bruckner, appreciated Radzinsky's version of Socrates's death, a vision that conflicted with Plato's. Here, the title figure dies not comforted by friends, but aware that he has been betrayed by the closest of them, and that his teachings will be falsified for posterity. As Radzinsky's revisionist mind imagined, Anytus, the prosecutor of Socrates, and Thrasybulus, the restorer of democracy to Athens, are so sinister that they would seem more at home in the courts of Catherine de' Medici or Peter the Great than in the porticoes of the Acropolis. Bruckner found virtues in Coral Potter's performance as Thrasybulus, John Schmerling's representation of Anytus, Craig Smith's interpretation of Socrates, and Eve Adamson's swift pace in directing the work. In fact he found no fault with the company, but rather with the text, which he considered unclear and lacking in cohesion.[34]

Stephanie Coen, critic for the *Columbia Daily Spectator,* called Adamson's direction static rather than fast-paced, with the actors ordered to remain for the most part motionless, often in positions that made them look uncomfortable. Whereas Bruckner said there was some good

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humor on the part of the chorus, the undergraduate did not like Adamson's use of the chorus, which to her only occasionally offered a comment on the action. Whereas Bruckner praised each actor for a faithful rendition of the author's vision, the newspaper of Columbia College said the acting was almost uniformly awful. "Joseph Menino as the main accuser of Socrates, yells a great deal and expresses very little. Others . . . seem stiff and bland . . . . Speeches are delivered with vapidity." But she did enjoy the acting of William Dante as an enthusiastic disciple of Socrates and Harris Berlinsky as the jailkeeper, the latter because he did not yell or flail his arms.[35]

Rosette Lamont of *Stages* stated incisively that the reason Radzinsky, not a dissident, gave much importance to Socrates's wife, Xantippe, is that in the Soviet Union homosexuality is criminal, and that thus little is made of Socrates's relationship to his young disciples. She praised Eve Adamson's direction for its uncluttered ambiance.[36]

Following the abundance of press attention given to the concluding work of the Russian trilogy--the interviews with the author, the reviews from several newspapers, and the talk of another trip to Moscow by Eve Adamson--the artistic director opened the second piece of the 1986-87 season. According to Craig Smith, the Jacobeans were among Adamson's favorite writers: Her forte was the presentation of the violence-ridden world depicted in most English plays written

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during the reign of James I (1603-1625).[37] The artistic director therefore felt comfortable with her choice of *The Duchess of Malfi* by John Webster, which was to run from October 1986 to February 1987 in repertory. Adamson had not directed a Jacobean play in several years and recalled with fondness the Cocteau production of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* of the 1977-78 season. She had never directed *The Duchess of Malfi* and wanted to stage that tragedy of greed and revenge to follow the Russian play. According to Adamson, Jacobean theatre provided a window to the audience by making some people likable; that is what the audience saw in her production of *Malfi*. As stated previously, with a play like *'Tis Pity*, she believed it vitally important that the audience like the two leading characters, the brother and sister who consummated their incestuous love, and that one can cheer for them instead of thinking of them as horrible people.[38]

Adamson kept the characters in black tights and shirts and draped in long black panels serving as cloaks. The people on stage were moving in and out of a shaft of light at the center of the totally black stage. When they were not speaking they disappeared into the dark. Whitened faces were supposed to indicate that the walls had ears and eyes. Craig Smith would rather forget his troupe's performance of *Malfi*. He felt that the group was bold to stage the work, but that the production was not successful. He opposed, in

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particular, the black robes and the use of just a single light--all too severe for the theatre. In his opinion, the whole thing was too austere and did not gel, but nonetheless Smith was happy that the players staged the classic since he believes it is commendable to make a bold choice even if failure results.[39]

D.J.R. Bruckner reviewed *The Duchess of Malfi* for the *New York Times*. To paraphrase the critic, "How can one shock children or, for the matter, adults today, when the goriest movies are seen in the local cinema and the bloodiest tales are told by the daily newspapers?" In fact, Bruckner answered this question in his first paragraph, holding that Jacobean works make any movie seem bloodless, and the machinations of the most desperate soap opera villains look innocent. He warned that the play is a nightmare for actors since it can so easily become ludicrous. Calling the readers' attention to audience reactions--a practice occasionally used by reviewers--Bruckner noticed titters rippling through the audience during the final scene, when murder sweeps the stage clean of all but some minor characters. Aside from the flaw--which may have originated with the production or perhaps was inherent in Jacobean tragedies seen today--Bruckner enjoyed the stylized staging.[40]

But Bruckner deplored the clumsiness of the actors who, he found, stepped on one another's cloaks, and disapproved

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of what he considered superfluous stage effects, such as the vaguely ominous still-life scenes and portentous gongs. Acting was found uneven, some performers having difficulty with the poetry, one (Harris Berlinsky) whispering too quietly in a closing scene, another (Jeanne Demers) tripping over some simple lines. The critic warned that enough is in the plot to disorient and trouble an audience without imposing the added burden of having to puzzle out what is being said, and he at the same commended Coral Potter's Duke Ferdinand and Craig Smith's Bosola.[41]

Having directed a four months' run of *Malfi* in rotating repertory, Adamson turned to naturalism by staging Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. There could hardly have been a better choice for the company's third offering (in November 1986) from the standpoint of school matinees, since the story--whether the form of a play or, more commonly, in the construct of a paperback narrative--is required reading in many high schools. Adamson recognized that the Steinbeck theme of Depression poverty is omnipresent, but believed that the story was particularly fitting for a young audience insofar as the writer never gives the general socio-political background priority over the sentimental, human story.

The consensus of critics was that the set design was the strongest aspect of the production and the actors proficient. Craig Smith was pleased with the production,

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though the theatre company had been relatively untested with works from the naturalist genre. He recalled the effectively designed set consisting of run-down shacks and mounds of hay, all contributing to the Depression look so important in plays by Steinbeck which depict rural poverty. Smith recalled particularly John Schmerling's role as the Boss, a violence-prone man with one leather glove, who is insanely envious of any man at whom his coquettish wife looks. He felt the production conveyed the author's mood of disillusionment and condemnation of a political structure that would not aid these people to attain their dreams.[42]

Liz Lourenco, a student of a two-year college in Brooklyn, New York, reviewed the play for her undergraduate newspaper, the *Kingsboro Press*. Her students were among those who were taken to the Cocteau for the Steinbeck work. Lourenco called John Schmerling's performance as Lennie very convincing and practically flawless, and was moved by the compassion showed to Lennie by George, played by Harris Berlinsky. The other actors--Coral Potter, Craig Cook, Craig Smith, Fawn (the dog) *et al*. "brought the wonderful story to life," in her opinion.[43]

John Greco, reviewing for *The* [Baruch College] *Ticker*, praised particularly the scenes showing George and Lenny alone on the stage, and stated that the Cocteau was able effectively to portray the dilemma of Lenny who, trying to love and express himself brings only hurt.[44] Agreeing that

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scenes depicting the troubles of Lenny and George worked best, the writer for a community weekly applauded Harris Berlinsky and John Schmerling, but thought that expecting uniformly good performances by all Cocteau players was too much to ask.[45]

For the first time, a student-run newspaper of a New York City intermediate school reviewed a Cocteau presentation. A young writer, Jeannie Radulovitz, found *Of Mice and Men* "so real it felt as if you were taken back to the 1930s and were watching it all happen." Her classmate, Kevin Joy, considered *Of Mice and Men* "the best show the youngsters saw that year, with enough action to keep eyes glued to the stage." [46]

The next production, *The Rivals*, the fourth presentation of the season, began in May. Adamson considered it representative of eighteenth-century British conventions, and wished to introduce those artistic practices to her audiences. She chose Giles Hogya to direct the comedy.

The critics and trustees who attended the staging generally agreed that the acting was uneven. According to Thomas Fuld, the senior members of the company--Berlinsky, Smith, and Potter--conveyed the comic spirit of the eighteenth-century British work, but he noted that director Giles Hogya's direction of their delivery was often too slow, taking some of the punch away from the frequent puns and malapropisms.[47]

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Steve Hart, critic for *Villager Downtown,* found the production genuinely funny because of Giles Hogya's affectation in favor of bringing the psychological peculiarities of each character into high relief. The critic favored the performance of William Dante as Captain Absolute, the recalcitrant son of Sir Anthony. "This Jack Absolute," he reported, "must emerge from the stage as a born schemer able to deal with a truculent father and still have his own way." But in his view, the acting was uneven with several of the women belaboring the text.[48]

The Village Voice was represented this time by Robert Massa, whose brief review recapitulated the story, then compared the Cocteau version with that of the Pearl Theatre, which was staging the work at the same time. He found the Pearl interpretation more vivacious and more improvisatory, with actors that seldom strayed from the most obvious line reading, yet remained salty and unsentimental. Massa noted that Giles Hogya had cast one performer as both Julia Melville, Lydia's confidante with her own set of romantic complications, and also as Lucy, the scheming maid. "The evening is as frightful as the allegories Mrs. Malaprop sees on the banks of the Nile," he concluded.[49]

While the English comedy continued in repertory with the Russian play (Edvard Radzinsky's *Conversations with Socrates*), the company was arranging for funding to bring Wlodmierz Herman to New York in October to become oriented

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for his anticipated directing of Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz's *The Shoemakers*--the first production ever in New York City.[50] For that event, the trustees had been approaching Polish foundations for financial help.

Eve Adamson and Herman had met in Copenhagen in 1985 and spent two days discussing the possibility of his directing at the Cocteau. In July 1986 Adamson returned to Copenhagen and worked out more specific plans for Herman's collaboration with the Cocteau finalizing the choice of production and coordinating a timetable for rehearsal. In October 1986, Herman would make an initial visit to the Cocteau to familiarize himself with the ensemble and to meet with designers and assistants. Herman was a graduate of Warsaw's Theatre Institute, was chief artistic director of the Experimental Student Theatre in Wroclaw, and was one of a group of Polish-Jewish artists offered asylum by the Scandanavian governments. He relocated in Copenhagen in 1976, where he directed the Royal Theatre of Denmark and several of the city's cafe theatres. The production at the Cocteau would be his first in America.[51]

To help sell tickets for the forthcoming production of *The Shoemakers*, 25,000 brochures and 23,000 calendars were mailed. Marie Jean Lederman, one of the trustees, mailed 6,000 brochures to members of the City University community in New York City. Financially, the theatre was in as good a shape as it had ever been, particularly since Radzinsky's

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14-day visit contributed to its increasing prestige and solvency.

The subsequent production, the Cocteau's fifth of the 1986-87 season, was Stanislaw Witkiewicz's political and metaphysical comedy, *The Shoemakers* presented from March through May 1987. Adamson said she felt "on a roll" and wanted to continue basking in the pleasures of producing plays from Soviet and Eastern-European cultures. In publicizing the presentation, which ran from March to May of 1987, the Cocteau press department stressed some bonuses. One was that the production would be directed by Wlodmierz Herman, who came to New York from his native Poland for the purpose. Another was that Daniel C. Gerould, who translated the work, would lead a symposium after selected performances. Gerould, Distinguished Professor of Theatre at the City University Graduate Center, is considered by *cognoscenti* such as Eve Adamson and Craig Smith to be a man who affords prestige to theatres during post-performance symposia, particularly those relating to works from Eastern Europe. Smith remembers Gerould as a "wonderful man--he translated the play and was over here quite a bit during the run of *Shoemakers*."[52]

The director's visit was made possible for a special grant from NYSCA (The New York State Council for the Arts) of funds sufficient to cover travel expenses.[53]

Craig Smith recalled the visit by the Polish director,

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Herman in these words:

> Herman was a real trip--a big boisterous man who enjoyed his drink and adored to go to Polish restaurants for blintzes and pirogi. We had starch coming out of our ears. He was an expatriate in Denmark and did not get good Polish food until he got to this neighborhood.
>
> Herman had done *Shoemakers* in Poland in 1965, a student production, which was the only way it could be allowed without being censored. He got in trouble partly because he is Jewish and left. He was directing a Radzinsky play in Denmark when the connection happened. Radzinsky knew Eve and Herman knew Radzinsky. *Shoemakers* was a big success, an excellent production. Herman was a big, embracing boisterous and loving man, but he knew exactly what he wanted you to do. If he wanted you to pick up the salt shaker like this, you picked it up like this. His English is not bad.
>
> Jan Kott was at the theatre while we did the play; Herman introduced us to him. We had a Polish designer, and a whole subculture. The Polish papers did interviews and printed our program without charge. All the people came in speaking fast Polish and there was a carnival atmosphere here. You'd go out at intermission and thought you were in a different country. Many Poles here in New York know the play because Witkacy [Witkiewicz] is regarded as *the* modern-day playwright of Poland.[54]

Fuld and Smith recalled this production as perhaps the zaniest ever attempted by the company. There was a great deal of movement, as this Polish play was anything but talky. While the author intended to write a parody of Marxism, the emphasis in the production should be (as Smith had written in a press release) "on Groucho, Harpo, and Chico rather than on Karl."[55]

Despite the comic concepts in the play, the author, who committed suicide in 1939 at the start of World War II, posited an apocalyptic vision of Man who, in his view, was

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becoming increasingly dehumanized by a highly technological world.

The critics generally felt that the production of *The Shoemakers* was confusing, inadequately directed, and suffering from an unevenness of acting.

Robert Massa of the *Voice*, who returned to the Cocteau shortly after his visit for the presentation of Sheridan's play, echoed the traditional comment about the theatre group: that they should be encouraged for taking on such an ambitious, unfamiliar script (and a few performers have some focused moments), but the acting fell short of the momentous subject. Nevertheless Massa found this production "with more imagination and splash than the usual Cocteau stagings."[56] D.J.R. Bruckner, who covered the two preceding plays for the *New York Times*, returned for the staging of *The Shoemakers*, for which he found the costumes "gorgeous," the new music "bursting forth," and the direction "sweeping back and forth with the kind of energy this passionate and thoughtful work needs." Contrary to Massa's view, Bruckner found the entire performance fast-moving, and noted the enjoyment with which the Cocteau players perform. The latter observation may emanate from the family-like ambiance in which the Cocteau operates.[57]

Clive Barnes of the *New York Post* offered his praise for a company that made valuable connections with Eastern Europe, first with the Soviet playwright Edvard Radzinsky,

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and then with a leading Polish director residing in Denmark. "This development has resulted in the American première of a Polish modern classic of Expressionist symbolism presented in repertory with *The Rivals* and *Of Mice and Men*," he stated. Barnes considers Witkiewicz a precursor of Absurd Theater, as he had previously written *The Crazy Locomotive* and *The Water Hen;* he noted that many of the Polish writer's works were written under the influence of drugs and alcohol. He found the play difficult to follow, though "oddly worth chasing with its tone of nihilistic absurdity, its bitterness and its all-but-cynical hope for man's survival."[58]

Dan Isaac, writing for a community newspaper (*Chelsea-Clinton News*), enjoyed what he termed an event of cultural and historical significance: the first American production of the last play by Poland's most cherished modern writer. Isaac's insights include not only the conventional one, i.e. that the play is filled with revulsion for the competing ideologies of the day; but also that Witkiewicz hated not only "isms" but sex, women and sentiment as well. Isaac's view was that, as performed by the Cocteau, there is little in terms of plot but rather that the play is more like a Happening. The way to judge the direction and production of an impossible play, according to Isaac, would be to see the degree to which the particular moments and speeches are isolated and become palpable to the audience. As such,

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"John Schmerling, Craig Smith, Elise Stone, Harris Berlinsky and William Dante deserve compliments for their acting style in the midst of stentorian madness." Isaac also appreciated Jan Sawka for a set with suggestions of dark surrealism, and Wlodmierz Herman for coming to New York to direct the play.[59] Steven Hart of *The Villager Downtown* saw the play as an indictment not only of the political systems of the USSR but as a broader warning to people to look closely at the social, ideological, cultural, economic, spiritual and literal apparatuses that we have imposed on ourselves since the turn of the century. Craig Smith received particular praise for his depiction of depravity in playing suit to the duchess Irina, and Jan Sawka for a set that had created a universe that realized the author's vision.[60]

The final presentation of the Cocteau during the 1986-87 season was a slight work, *Taylor's Tickler*, written just a few years earlier by Anthony Naylor and staged in May 1987. (Naylor was the Cocteau's guest-director for *The Duchess of Malfi* during the previous season.) Essentially a grab-bag of magical tricks, the production closed the season on a light note. Craig Smith recalled Naylor as a man with a particular style in rehearsals--an academic, book-oriented approach, which made actors do much research on scripts. Smith assumed that this bent is consistent with Taylor's being English and the British are often text-oriented. In rehearsals, Naylor was improvisational in

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technique.

When the season ended, Naylor conducted a summer institute for just $35 tuition per student, in which he taught dance, swordfighting and speech. Smith attributes the dearth of summer institutes to the fatigue felt by all and the need of actors and director for a break. The conservatory idea had been discussed over the years, since many institutional theatres have conservatories attached to them. After Naylor's institute during the summer of 1987, the theatre did not continue with a teaching program. Teaching is a special profession to Smith, who feels that if the time is ripe, the Cocteau might return to teaching if the people want to do that.[61]

When Eve Adamson opened her theatre on Bond Street in New York City in June 1971, she did not envision that the Bouwerie Lane would survive for more than a few years. Because the theatre started with little funding and no board of trustees to organize a campaign to raise money, Adamson directed plays during that 1971-72 season on a month-to-month basis. While she could not have rented a building to house her theatre in a more desirable neighborhood than the Bowery because she lacked the needed funds, Adamson did not have a long-term plan to acquire another space in a different part of New York. By 1985, she began to think seriously about acquiring a more accessible and safer

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location for her subscribers, perhaps in the central or western part of Greenwich Village.[62]

During the production of *The Shoemakers*, the Cocteau had begun to inform its subscribers of a plan to move from the Bouwerie Lane, which the company had occupied for the last fourteen years, into what might generally be considered a better and more secure location, with the added advantage of a larger stage. While it was true that the Bouwerie Lane was a landmark structure, the administration had assumed it could get more subscribers with a more accessible and safer location, perhaps in the central or western part of Greenwich Village. Further, the company had been on a month-to-month lease which could be called in at any time by the landlord. A more solid arrangement was desired.

Some locations had been looked at by members of the trustees and the Cocteau staff. The Battery Maritime Building at 17 Battery Street on the southern tip of Manhattan was to be restored by the city with its 30,000 square feet, but a consortium would be required to work out a proposal. At the same time an arrangement was being scrutinized to have the Cocteau share space with the Living Theatre and pay just $600 per month at a location in Greenwich Village on East Fourth Street. Another of the favored locations was the Jane West Hotel at 507 West Street, formerly a union hall then a hotel, followed by the Theatre for the New City and a rock club. Because of space

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considerations, the Jane West would require a theater-in-the-round, but this was not a major objection. The space was considered attractive for a younger audience and would need a minimum amount of work, such as the installation of bathrooms, a box office, a grid and some seats. The rent would be $3,200 monthly, and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs might be persuaded to make an additional grant for architectural expenses. The hotel was willing to pay part of the cost for a sprinkler system and fire alarm. The manager, Don Gilboa, was considered in favor of the take-over, and was trying to persuade the owner to allow the Cocteau to move in. One drawback was the distance of the theatre from subway stations; another difficulty was the lack of room for a shop. The Roundabout Theatre was willing to negotiate for a space on West 26th Street with a rental of $6,000 per month, but would consider a contract only on a weekly basis.

As of December 1986, fourteen spaces were under consideration, according to the minutes of a trustees' meeting that was held that month. These locations including Manhattan buildings like hotels, theatres, schools, churches, and colleges.[63]

During this time of active search, the Cocteau requested further information on space possibilities from Sara Weisman of the Association of Resident Theatres, who found nine additional spaces available as of December 1986. The spaces

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included movie theatres, garages, and theatres.[64]

With the need for space now a serious proposition, the trustees and staff held various meetings with development corporations and others to examine the various properties. Albert Podell, now president of the board of trustees, hired a professional real estate investor to go to the Roundabout Theatre to determine its value. Informally, there was a consensus that the four upper floors could be sold as condominiums for $500,000 per floor. The Roundabout Theatre, which moved to E. 17 Street, had kept its lease on the old 26th Street location, paying $10,000 annually in rent. The theatre said it would consider renting the building to the Cocteau. Discussions were held meanwhile with Honey Waldman, the landlord of the Bouwerie Lane, to determine whether she would be willing to sell the theatre to the Cocteau.[65]

Despite the many months of appointments, visits, and conferences, no space had been found at the close of the 1985-86 season.

Since the Cocteau felt an urgency for new space, the trustees paid particular attention to financial figures during mid-season. The staff reported to the trustees that as of February 1987 only 1,020 subscribers had been signed and $40,000 was received in subscription receipts, $18,000 below the preceding year. Even with a sale of 1,200

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subscriptions, the Cocteau would fall short of its goal by 300. (Usually 90-95% of subscription income is received by the end of October.) Since the staff had done exactly what it did the year before, the members were not aware of any reason for the shortfall. One possibility was that competitors had flooded subscribers with their own third-class mail, but in any case, only 60% of subscribers from the year before renewed, compared to 70% one year previous. The Alliance of Resident Theatres reported that this drop in subscriptions was citywide among off-off-Broadway theatres. Robert Hupp, then managing director, announced that he would make sales announcements before each show offering reduced prices for subscriptions.[66]

Meanwhile the search continued for a new space. During October of 1986, before the varied menu of options was issued, Eve Adamson and Robert Hupp examined a 1925 building which was once known as the Cabana Club, which is on 14th Street between 2nd Avenue and 3rd Avenue. The club had a 20-foot frontage on 14th Street, 3,500 square feet, with low ceilings. There were public restrooms, a bar, a kitchen, and another large room. The entire area was in disrepair. Other parts of the space were formerly dance studios. In addition there was a shower room with showers suitable for 20 actors. The space could seat up to 200 people and was similar to that used by the CSC. The price was $120,000 per year, a ten-year lease would be required, but three months'

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free rent was offered. The work to be done would include the installation of an air-conditioner system, with total renovation plus one-half of the first year's rent to cost $400,000.[67]

The plan was to move out of the Bouwerie Lane Theatre between December 1986 and June 1987. Two million dollars would have to be raised in order to purchase a theatre, the location of which would be secondary to the amount of space available. As a minumum the theatre would need 2,500 square feet of space, with a minumum width of 25 feet, length 100 feet, ceiling 16 feet and seating capacity of 150. The theatre would have to be wired with at least three phases of 100 amps for the lighting board and have two public fire exits. The office and dressing rooms had to be 800 square feet each, the office featuring windows, the dressing rooms with toilets and running water. The lobby would need rest rooms and enough space for a concession and ticket booth with two fire exits. As of 1986 the theatre was paying $2500 per month in rent, or $30,000 per year, the utility bill was $3,000 and $5,000 was needed for municipal charges. That was the most that the Cocteau could afford. Although purchase would be the goal, a long-term lease would be acceptable, one of at least 10 years with a one- or two-year transitional lease adequate. Considerations would include the condition of the roof, heating and air conditioning systems, the history and future of the

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neighborhood, and the presence of good neighbors.[68]

During this period of exhaustive searches for space, letters were written by the staff, and Craig Smith as press relations director combined administrative work with his acting. Smith, for example, sent letters to the chairpeople of several community boards, as this note 4 December 1986 to Charles B. Persell, chair of Community Board No. 2 indicated.

> I am writing to you to request an opportunity to meet with you to discuss our current space situation. The Jean Cocteau Rep has been at the Bouwerie Lane Theatre for the last twelve years. During this time we have enjoyed an excellent relationship with our landlord. However, the landlord is now in process of selling the building and we find ourselves looking for a new home. We are presently on a month-to-month lease with a verbal agreement to vacate the building by June 1, 1987.
>
> We are currently engaged in an active and exhaustive search for this new home. Of course, we would prefer to stay in this neighborhood. Bob Hupp, the managing director, and I would welcome an opportunity to mee with you and see if your office might be of assistance in this search process.[69]

At the time what appeared most likely was an agreement with the manager of the Jane West Hotel for space. Robert Hupp, the managing director of the Cocteau, had been negotiating a lease with Dan S. Gilboa, manager of the Jane West Hotel, in which Hupp indicated pleasure with the potential of the space, and announced his work plans. Hupp said that some renovations would be needed--a few temporary walls, a box office, a lighting grid and bathrooms. A sign would be needed outside the theatre; otherwise the company

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could use a banner perpendicular to the street. The desired lease would be for a five-year term, which would enable the theatre to do the necessary fundraising. What would be most important was the capability to open the theatre to the public by 1 September 1987, and Hupp was making plans to sign.[70]

By March 1987, final preparation was being made to announce a new location to the public. The Jane West requested rent to begin 1 April, $3,500 per month and offered free heat with the landlord paying for utilities. The trustees agreed that a fall-back plan to stay in business in the event that no new theatre contract were signed would be impossible, because of the potential loss of subscriber income and grants.[71]

Ultimately the plan to move to the Jane West Hotel, together with strategies designed to get the ensemble out of the Bouwerie Lane Theatre, collapsed because of inadequate funding. Robert Hupp explained the reasons for the breakdown of the real estate transaction.

> This was a disaster brought on by people at the SRO Jane Street Hotel. We put down a payment a few years ago and paid an architect $10,000 to renovate. The landlord had wanted us to leave as she wished to sell the building empty. In recent years, with the softening of the market, her attitude toward us changed, and we did not feel the same pressure to move.
>
> In any case, I would like to have a bigger space to have more flexibility performance-wise. I would covet LaMama Annex or CSC, the best spaces around. The exterior of the Bouwerie Lane is better, but I couldn't care less about that. I am looking for a

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> place to mount plays. The CSC is unbeatable. There would be larger performance space; that is what is needed most. We are here since 1974 and it is not an interesting performance space.
>
> The Jane Street deal: What happened is that it was our first attempt to look for a space, and when I was managing director I needed an education in real estate fast. I threw out everything I was doing to take a crash course in real estate. The Jane had been a theater, the original Theatre for a New City space when The Theatre for the New City was founded. We approached the owners about turning the space into a theater, they were open, we had long negotiations, and when it came to signing the owner wanted a clause that we had to evacuate with three months' notice. We made it clear that was not acceptable. At the time there was legislation about what was to be done with SROs. Anyway we still have a space committee on the board.[72]

Other explanations were forthcoming on the failure of the theatre group to find space despite fears that the Cocteau would be without a home. Thomas Fuld, a trustee, noted that there was a real fear that the theatre group would have to move, that they would lose their space. There was a possibility of eviction before the theatre had a space to replace the Bouwerie Lane. Fuld believes that many theatres who have been forced out of their spaces have become nomads. The Theatre for the New City, for example, wandered for a while before it found a home. Originally, Fuld explained, TNC was in the Jane Street hotel and then took a permanent structure on First Avenue in Manhattan. "Everything is a struggle to find and keep space," Fuld concluded. "Ultimately the Cocteau will have to move." He added that the original TNC space was in the Westbeth Center from where it moved a year later to the Jane West Hotel, a welfare

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establishment. (Chaunce Skilling, another trustee, had held that if the theatre moved to Jane Street, some audience would be lost, but a whole new audience would be found.) The Cocteau did not get a serious response from the landlord of that building assuring it that the landlord would do the promised renovation to make the space a workable theater.

The theater came to believe the proposed renovation of the Jane Street Hotel would never be done; then the Cocteau looked into a good deal on 55 Mercer Street, an opportunity provided by a subscriber to get a space not used as a theatre that would have to be converted. The trustees raised what they could, and employed an architect, who laid out plans. When the inspectors checked the theatre building, the company discovered that it lacked two fire exits. Looking at the general cost, the Cocteau abandoned also the 55 Mercer program. There was no way to raise that kind of money. The theatre needed $100,000 and despite the help of trustees ready to do the work at cost, the amount was prohibitive.[73]

There was still another issue. The Mercer theatre had only 99 seats, and the Cocteau could not get a permit for more. There was a belief that a year or two later, the company could add the hundred seats, but for the present, the company had a place, and the pressure to find a new location was relaxed.[74]

Honey Waldman, the landlord of the Bouwerie Lane, is

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considered supportive of the theatre group, though as she purportedly told Eve Adamson almost annually, she considers it a drain on her life, her money, and her energy. She had given much help since the Bouwerie Lane was started in 1974, including contributions of her own, but she was hoping to lease the building at a profit. That is why she has been limiting the theatre to a month-by-month lease.[75]

Thomas Fuld, a trustee, urged an all-out search for space, as he saw an increasing danger from the crack epidemic in New York, which he believes makes the present space less safe. There is a need for gates, and "you feel you are going through an armed camp." Yet he considered the location relatively safe, even though one may be embarrassed to take foundation people to the theatre. "They would rather go to Lincoln Center and be in comfort," the trustee agreed. "The current theatre could use more leg room, more comfort throughout, more room to change sets, green-rooms for actors, dressing rooms and office space," he added. Despite conveniences, Fuld did not believe the alternative of 55 Mercer Street was feasibile, for, as he explained, "it had no more right to be converted to a theatre than did a shoebox. This is a brownstone that would make a rotten theatre."[76]

There was a possibility of getting space at the YMCA McBurney center, but at the last minute, the McBurney Center administration changed its mind. The YMCA wanted more money

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and decided to go with a bidding system, despite the theater's belief that a commitment was made.

James B. Nichols, another member of the board of trustees and one who had helped with technical matters of set design, believes that many people are put off by the ambiance of the theatre and by the shoddy quality of the sets. He praised Hupp for working to have costumes and sets more elaborate, so that production values had not been more important than they were in the past. He believes that the commitment to minimalism could be modified. Having designed sets and built three equity theatres, Nichols considers himself a person with expertise on production values.[77]

In assessing the boldness of Cocteau's artistic directors toward getting new space, Nichols compared Eve Adamson with Robert Hupp, stating that the former artistic director had usually placed conservative limits on proposed changes of theatre policy, while Hupp placed similar restrictions on modifications of theatre policy but then "went ahead and broke through them."[78] Notwithstanding Robert Hupp's aggressive stance on securing new real estate, the company continued on a month-to-month basis at the Bouwerie Lane.

As of 30 December 1986, the box office revenue for the year reached $22,000, which was on target. But the subscription campaign reached only 75% of its goal, with

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passholders--not part of the loyal audience but people receiving vouchers from sponsoring organizations--generally refusing to subscribe. Because the Cocteau audience was considered, on the average, an aging one, the trustees declared as a major aim the need to bring younger people to the theatre. A series of special meetings was called to figure out ways to market the theatre for people in their twenties and thirties.[79]

To help meet expenses, the Cocteau had started a Monday night actors' workshop at the theatre, to be taught beginning in September 1986 by Eve Adamson and Anthony Naylor for 22 weeks, for which Naylor would be paid $300 per class. This class ultimately grossed a profit for the theatre of $10,000, with a net of $4,000. The students received a guarantee that they could present something to the public at the theatre in the spring. An advertisement was placed in *Back Stage* magazine. Fourteen students had enrolled, paying $35 per class.

The financial statement for the 1986-87 season indicated assets and liabilities with these principal items:

Box office revenue was $45,130, almost all of it from subscriptions which brought receipts of $43,894. The concession--selling cakes, coffee, cider and wine, added $3,784 to the treasury while the matinee series added $8,205--that money earmarked for the wages of the participating actors. Total earned income for 1986-87 was

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$115,312, a drop of $7688 from the previous season. Matinee bookings were not as healthy as they were during the 1985-86 season, but had been standing at 75% of seating capacity. Nonetheless the company was expecting NYSCA funding of $40,000 (which it received), an increase in corporate donations, and a modest increase in foundation grants. Individuals were expected to contribute as much as $20,000 by the end of the season in May, but that figure was $8,000 less than the amount anticipated in the budget.[80] Therefore, adding to the woes of the Cocteau in its current location was a cash shortfall. A bank was owed $18,000 from a $20,000 credit line at a time that a regular donor, the Birch Foundation, had gone out of business. For the year, then, an income shortfall of $15,000 to $18,000 was expected.[81] Contributions from government agencies, principally NYSCA, equalled $39,650. Corporations added $14,957, foundations another $6,125, and individuals $37,100. A benefit event involving the sale of 200 to 300 tickets to a Broadway show (which during that season was *Les Misérables*) yielded $26,615. Total support income was $126,447 yielding a total of $241,759. During that season, the artistic director received $15,875 while the actors shared $28,023. The managing director was paid $16,494--over $3,000 higher than the previous year--while the business manager received $13,000. Other sums went to staff people like the marketing director, the educational program

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director, the box office manager and the technical director. The Cocteau paid a total of $130,214 to all personnel. The largest single expense was rent, which was $33,975, up over $4,000 from the previous season. The total expenses for the theatre were $254,873, $40,000 higher than the previous season.

The number of subscribers now attending plays in the Bouwerie Lane was 1,400, up from the 19 pioneers of the first season. Hupp claimed a seventy percent renewal rate of subscribers from the previous season. Money was sought to subsidize the tickets for public-school pupils and for senior citizens from the local area on fixed incomes. Corporations and foundations were thanked for their donated printing and participation in fundraising efforts.[82]

At the first trustees' meeting of the 1987-88 season, Adamson reported that four new actors had been brought into the company. This was not an unusually high number and, in fact, reflected the typical turnover, as actors sought better financial arrangements elsewhere. NYSCA refused to fund the student matinees separately from their general contributions, and the Spunk Fund had shaved its own funding for the school matinees by $3,000. There is no evidence that such cuts were made because of a perceived deficiency of the program.

Despite the steel doors and gates, the theatre had been

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broken into four times during the month of July when all personnel were away, and $14,000 in materials were stolen. Federal crime insurance reimbursed some of the funds, and insurance covered part of the loss. (The location of the theatre is perhaps not the primary reason for this record of break-ins, as a great many homes in some of the most fashionable neighborhoods of the city suffer from a crime problem.)[83]

With much of the time of the theatre company taken up with negotiations for a new space, one could lose sight of the theatre's *raison d'être*: to mount plays. In May of 1987, in the midst of uncertainty about physical space, Eve Adamson announced the season's presentations for 1987-88, which were:

1987-1988

09/06/87-01/22/88	*No Exit*	Jean Paul Sartre
10/11/87-02/17/88	*The Trial*	Franz Kafka
11/22/87-05/22/88	*Antigone*	Jean Anouilh
01/31/88-05/22/88	*The Cocktail Party*	T.S. Eliot
04/14/88-05/22/88	*The Winter's Tale*	W. Shakespeare

As with the season of 1985-86, the 1987-88 season was to consist of primarily well-known plays, all five of which had been produced frequently in New York City before the Cocteau staged them. While the trend may be coincidental, one might conclude that the Cocteau was enjoying more financial success when staging familiar works than when attempting to mount productions of obscure classics.

No Exit was presented for the second time by the Cocteau

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under Adamson's plan to given the performers one play a season that they could enact with relative ease. Sartre's work, then, was the first presentation of the 1987-88 season, and was staged in repertory from September 1987 through January 1988. Berlinsky held that actors can often recall lines automatically if told from the beginning that a given work would be staged once again in another season. Berlinsky recalled the revival as lackluster; it did not receive reviews.[84]

Sy Simondson, who had not been to the theatre since his initial assignment to *The Record* of Northwest New Jersey, visited the Bouwerie Lane for the first time in September 1987, but instead of reviewing *No Exit,* he published a feature article in the New Jersey newspaper about the company. Without giving prominence to the particular play that he saw, he recalled statements of enthusiasm from several people on the staff of his newspaper about the Cocteau's many performances. Having attended an entire season of plays in the Bouwerie Lane, he declared that the mission of the company was admirable--particularly the mandate that everyone be a star-in-turn in a resident company--and that seeing the company perform was enormously rewarding. He admired the audacity and skill of the performers and called the director's vision resolute despite what he imagined were the theatre's budgetary problems.[85]

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The Cocteau offered Kafka's *The Trial* to school matinees as well as to its subscriber and single-ticket buyers. The drama of menace was the company's second presentation, staged from October 1987-February 1988, and was chosen by Adamson because she enjoyed the challenge of staging works that had been known primarily as novels.

The public relations department of the threatre described the play as a drama based on "one of the most influential novels of this century . . . with production design by the noted Polish graphic artist, Jan Sawka." The theatre was particularly interested in the reactions of the youngsters who had come to see this difficult work on the stage.[86]

According to Eve Adamson, the presentation did not work because the props had been coming on stage late, and that the sets had been uncoordinated because of the lack of a stage manager. In fact, because *The Trial* used no stage manager, technical problems existed in sets, costumes, lighting and sound.[87]

The *New York Times* assigned Walter Goodman to review *The Trial*. This was to be Goodman's first time at the theatre. Much of his review was a summary of the plot; he wrote that he considered Adamson's direction "adroit," and that Craig Smith's portrayal of the avuncular had "flavor." The remainder of his commentary related to the production values, which he found spare.[88]

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In the midst of the series of presentations of *The Trial*, the theatre company received a citation from David Dinkins, then Borough President of Manhattan, naming the Cocteau "a finalist in the second Annual Manhattan Borough President's Awards for Excellence in the Arts . . . in Recognition of Devoted Public Service; and, in Honor of Excellence in the Field of Theatre."[89]

For the additional performances of school matinees, Adamson selected Jean Anouilh's version of *Antigone* as the third presentation, a tragedy she considered of universal value to school-aged people as well as to adults. The story of the conflict between two worthy values--family loyalty and the survival of the state--could be translated into a number of specific situations in the lives of audience members. The school matinees were given on Wednesdays during the months of April and May, 1987, each followed with a question-and-answer period with members of the cast.

In one concession to the special needs of young audiences, Adamson edited Anouilh's version of the Greek tragedy so that the running time would be only one hour and twenty minutes, alloting an additional twenty minutes for discussion with the audience. The tickets were given to student groups for $7 each, with one ticket free for the teacher with at least 20 students. (Another service of the Cocteau was to visit classrooms of members of the acting

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company to conduct workshops on site; each participating school was charged $100 for this added feature.)[90]

Elise Stone's performance in the title role of Anouilh's adaptation drew divided opinions. Craig Smith (to whom Ms. Stone would be married in December 1989) considered her performance to be a perfect balance between that of a rebellious teenager and that of a self-confident woman exercising her free choice. According to Smith, some people in the audience felt that Ms. Stone's interpretation of the role of Antigone was too invulnerable, too tough, so that the audience would not necessarily weep at the news of her death.[91]

Three reviews were filed and, in addition, letters from teachers and students were noted. The consensus of reviews and letters received was that the staging of *Antigone* could have been more subtle, and that the author's points could have been communicated more effectively by suggestion than by "telegraphed messages." Some reviewers called attention to the ease with which the richness of Anouilh's language was conveyed to the audience.

Sam H. Shirakawa, writing for *Theatre Week*, stated that when Anouilh wrote his version of the Sophocles tragedy, both the Germans and the French considered it as a justification of their own attitudes. The actors are to be dressed in modern clothes, as the author would have it, and the Cocteau Theatre used a translation by Alex Szogi from

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the Hunter College faculty. Shirakawa's feature was not judgmental, however.[92] Another critic found the Cocteau Rep. generally up to the standards of the play, albeit sparse, but Elise Stone was "too knowing in her interpretation," and the critic called for a young woman to represent one who is sure of her decision to die, yet must make the audience weep for the evanescence of youth. Stone was found wanting in tenderness, so that "when she hangs herself the audience feels relief that her torment is over," according to Shirakawa. Kevin Grubb, reviewing for the predominantly gay *New York Native*, suggested that the play be further adaptated to deal with "lives lost to AIDS without benefit of proper burial by refusal of family to acknowledge the source of death."[93]

Ruis Woertendyke, writing for *The Villager*, praised the Cocteau for restoring his faith in non-commercial theatre, since, in his view, "so much new work has been heavily influenced by television and plays like episodic melodrama on the stage . . . a continuous diet of it leads to a deadening of thought and an expectation of continuous excitement. . . . The Cocteau presents plays in a well-reasoned and competent manner [and] opens minds to new worlds." He found *Antigone* to be Cocteau at its best--simple, provocative, clean, and finely performed. The critic noted that the production is without props or furniture or colored lights. But he held that Bill

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Reichblum, who directed and designed the set, had somehow dissolved the barrier to the past, and made the audience distinctly aware of our unbreakable connection to the centuries. Elise Stone was *not* found too knowing, as Kevin Grubb had cited, but was "rich and deep [and] in this part beautiful," according to Woertendyke. Craig Smith was commended for what the critic called an intelligent sensitive performance as Creon, and for being, in the reviewer's opinion, the perfect foil for Stone's Antigone.[94]

For its fourth production, staged from January through May 1988, Adamson chose *The Cocktail Party*, written by T.S. Eliot and first performed in 1949.

Adamson considered this to be a difficult play to produce, as it is written in verse that should be spoken by the actors as though it were not verse at all. The Cocteau players had been accustomed to emphasizing the pronounced rhythm of verse plays, as the company did when staging Shakespeare's plays.

Adamson admitted that the one role which may have been miscast in the production was that of Elise Stone as Julia. Stone was only a fraction of Julia's age, a factor that led to a credibility problem with audiences. Adamson noted that with an ensemble like the Cocteau, with an acting membership that hovers around 10 or 12 performers, finding actors of appropriate ages is not always possible. Adamson trusted audiences to suspend their disbelief, accepting such

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a flaw as part of the system of resident repertory companies.[95]

The production brought the *New York Times'* D.J.R. Bruckner to the Cocteau. Bruckner found some faults with the acting. For example, in his opinion, Craig Cook as Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly, was too arch, and Elise Stone was only a third of Julia's age. Nor did he find an effort by the cast to sound British while the company, in speaking "American," often stumbled over the poetry. Generally Bruckner was positive about the production, which he called refreshing, and complimented Adamson for varying the tempo of the play, making the "verbal and logical tricks more surprising and entertaining."[96] In the only other review, David Kaufman of *Downtown* thanked the Cocteau "for selecting neglected masterpieces and reminding our generation that there were some ahcievements before the '60s." Like some others critics Kaufman believes that one should judge a presentation by the degree to which the actors and director keep the play functioning on a number of levels simultaneously--from the straightforward one of banal concerns, to more profound philosophical concerns. "What we know of people is only a memory of the moments during which we knew them as they have changed since then," Eliot had said. Devoting only one sentence of his 800-word review to the quality of the production, Kaufman found that though the repertory company gave an otherwise elegant production, the

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ineffability of Eliot's play was not captured.[97]

The Winter's Tale, which had been staged by the Cocteau during its first season, was the end-of-season "extra," and was performed in repertory with *The Cocktail Party* in April and May 1988. Shakespeare's five-act comedy, though, was not performed during the high-school matinees despite what many consider its accessibility to the young, a fantasy that is not unlike *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but is a solid vehicle for companies that can deal with the fantasy aspects comfortably. There were no vivid memories of the production and, as had become traditional, there were no reviews of the final production.

In its annual application for a NYSCA grant, the Cocteau staff justified its role in the community, particularly its school matinee program which, it asserted, it initiated in 1976 to introduce area high school students to classic stage productions. Since 1976, more than 27,000 students had participated in the program, according to the application. Institutions, administrators and teachers have shown great confidence in the Cocteau's artistic product and its ability to administer the program by returning year after year. In addition, said the funding committee, the Cocteau's relationship with the Student Affairs office of New York City public high school began in April 1985, now more than merely an exposure program but a comprehensive one that addresses the specific needs of teachers and students.[98]

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The Cocteau reported that since 1985, key staff members had been meeting with Carmine DeBetta of the Student Affairs office of the New York City Board of Education to focus on the series and on the specific needs of the students. Pre-performance study guides were sent out as a result of these discussions, so that students and teachers alike would be prepared for what they were to see a week or two later. All this is part of a twelve-years' commitment to the school by a staff that know the field of education--Robert Hupp, then associate director, had a certificate to teach in secondary schools, while Eve Adamson, who often led post-performance symposia, had eight years' teaching experience. Craig Smith, the program coordinator, had been a drama instructor at Bard College while two trustees, Dr. Marie Jean Lederman and Dr. Richard Donovan, are professors at LaGuardia Community College and Bronx Community College respectively. Both were familiar with the New York City education structure.[99]

Early signs of a rift between the trustees and the artistic director appeared in September 1986. The trustees had discussed the need to find a new theatre and to stimulate funding for that large project. These directors, according to their president, Albert Podell, felt frustrated. In their view, the trustees were not effective in raising sufficient funds to carry out the projects of the

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Cocteau theatre. Podell believed that the majority of funding must come from the trustees and their friends. Having observed the trustees' *modus operandi* during his tenure on the Board, Podell concluded that Cocteau subscribers and outside foundations could not be relied on to do very much. "There are only one or two of us whose jobs put them in a position where they dispense work to outside suppliers, and thus can approach those suppliers for contributions." In a memo to Eve Adamson dated 28 September 1987, he wrote as follows:

> The rest of us can ask friends, but if we persuade our friends to contribute to Cocteau, we do incur a debt, and will have to make similar contributions to our friends' charities, so the net effect is that it eventually comes out of our own pockets. We might as well do it directly.
>
> . . . . I feel so depressed about the present situation that I am hereby conditionally tendering my resignation from the board; I don't want to waste my time and efforts on something that isn't going to happen.
>
> I will remain on the board and I will contribute $10,000 to the Cocteau if, by October 30th, the other members of the Board, from their own funds, make a cumulative contribution of fifty thousand dollars to the Cocteau's annual operating budget equal to the average of their direct contributions for the past two years. If this challenge is met you've got $60,000 you can put in the bank; if it isn't you'll have a quick reading on the board's unwillingness to help directly, and you may want to rethink your plans.
>
> . . . if they [board members] are serious about the survival of the Cocteau, here's the opportunity for them to show it. I am enclosing a check for the $10,000 dated November 1st, which you are to deposit only if and after you have received funds for $50,000 from the other board members by October 30th. If the board doesn't come through, then you are to tear up

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my check and accept my resignation with regrets.[100]

Podell had stated many times that he would be an active president and not a "rubber stamp." He felt that the fiscal health of the organization needed to be stressed over other considerations, for without money the theatre could not exist. The board, according to Podell, should be entitled to review the plays selected, generally an artistic privilege, and make suggestions on the advisability of the choices from an economic point of view. He resented the lack of communication with regard to the scheduling of plays in which the board was told only that *Travesties* was to be performed and that three other plays were dropped without the artistic director's informing the board. "We are now producing a totally different group of plays," he complained. "Our judgments . . . might have been quite different if we had the facts." Podell insisted that the board be informed of the theatre's plans before the budget would be approved.[101]

Podell left an implication that Eve Adamson herself should do more to raise money. This activity would not be restricted to soliciting contribution from suppliers; other approaches had to be considered by Adamson as artistic director and, as such, the head of the organization from which all activities--artistic *and* business--should flow. Craig Smith called Podell's gesture in proffering his resignation "game-playing--a ploy to raise additional

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funds." According to Smith, Podell's check was returned. As he explained, "Al [Podell] is hard to work with and he will force the situation to get some action." In any case, Smith insisted, he (Smith) has gotten away from involvement with the trustees.[102] Podell did not resign.

At midseason the Cocteau staff published a financial report. Generally, financial statements of off-off-Broadway houses are optimistic while reporting shortfalls, and this statement was no exception. A budgetary gap of $13,000 was expected by year's end, i.e. by May 1988. The cause, principally a faulty projection of box office revenue--which was short by $17,000--could be broken down into a) a bad theatre season, b) election year entertainment, c) Olympics year entertainment, d) a false start at the beginning of the year. To solve the problem, the theatre needed to cut expenses and increase revenue, the latter to be done by pushing group sales, by booking outside groups to direct or act, and by increasing the subscriber base.[103]

Budget cuts were not recommended, since the approved budget had little fat. New cuts would place the efficiency and professionalism of the theatre in jeopardy, and a proposed elimination of the artistic director's salary would be perhaps illegal. At the time, the full-time staff consisted of only three people, working with a paid group of ushers, concessionaires, subscription managers, day-time box office worker, or janitorial staff. Frequent errors were

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occuring in subscriptions and reservations.[104]

The recommendations included a push for more donated goods, particularly office supplies and concessionaire articles.

Also, those trustees with access to college groups would try to identify potential targets for mailings, particularly those groups like Pace University which have a budget to book theatre companies. A professional telemarketer was hired to increase the subscriber base.

Recommendations included a) further cuts in personnel and promotion staff, b) formulation and implementation of a plan to stimulate new group sales and outside bookings, c) implementation of an individual contribution campaign with a specific goal for each trustee, and d) encouragement of donations of goods and services.[105]

The perennial shortfalls did not discouarge the Cocteau staff from giving complimentary tickets to senior citizens' groups, whose members often went to the theatre for Sunday matinees. One such group, the United Jewish Council of the East Side Adult Luncheon Club (a neighborhood organization located at 75 Columbia Street), sent the theatre a letter thanking the staff for complimentary tickets. As the director of the center, Rabbi Joel Price, indicated, "I cannot express in words the pleasure that your generosity is affording to our members. For many of our members, attending your theatrical productions is the first

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introduction to the theatre, since they cannot afford the box office prices." The center enclosed a contribution for $15, also indicative of the very low spending power of various groups in the vicinity of the Bouwerie Lane Theatre. This program of disseminating complimentary tickets has been an ongoing process since the founding of the company in 1971.

Based on his many years of experience as audience development director, Craig Smith believes that non-theater people cannot be persuaded to attend shows. He favors working with the regular New York theatre-going audience. "Those are the people you can rely on and they spread the word. They might say, 'I saw *Life is a Dream* and it was wonderful.' There are three kinds of audience members: off-off Broadway 'junkies' who see three plays a week, those who go only to the Cocteau, and those who occasionally go to other theaters selectively, seeing perhaps ten shows a year. We pull from the second group, a highly educated audience. As for the seniors who receive complimentary tickets, some of them know little about theatre, so that while we perform a service, the number of comps the past season was minimal."[106]

During the 1987-88 season, Eve Adamson as artistic director received a salary of $16,500 (a modest increase of $600 over the previous year's salary) as did Robert Hupp in

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his capacity as managing director. Andrea Tienan, business manager received $13,000, the same amount that Ms. Tienan was paid during the previous season. Bronwyn Albrecht as marketing director got $3,600, while Peter Riesenberg, the technical director, received $8,500. Subscriptions cost $39.00 each for four plays, which entitled subscribers also to post-performance symposia, free admission to play-readings, discount tickets to non-subscription productions, and unlimited ticket exchange privileges. During the season there were 1,287 subscribers, a drop of 113 from the previous year.

During the 1987-88 season, box office revenue was $58,000 (a one-year increase of $12,870), subscription revenue was $49,331, and the matinee series brought in $11,488. With some minor receipts, total revenue was $125,131, up $10,000 from the previous season. 1987-88 was also the last season in which the theatre received no support from the NEA (which would in later seasons contribute $7,500 per year). The largest grant was from NYSCA, $35,000, while corporations added $14,374 and foundations another $6,580. Donations by individuals equaled $29,160. Total income for the year was $240,245, down slightly from the year before. Rent for the Bouwerie Lane theatre, paid to Honey Waldman, landlord, was $35,000, about $1,000 more than the year before.[107]

The Cocteau is not a "business as usual" sort of theatre.

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There were crises and cruxes through the history of this organization devoted to the classics and to a permanent, resident, rotating repertory--a commitment perhaps unique in this country. During the seasons from 1985 through 1988, twenty-five separate productions were mounted, an incredible number considering the commitment of the Cocteau to use its entire acting staff in each production. When one realizes that Cocteau actors are not rich--that according to James B. Nichols, trustee, nobody has ever come into the company with anything resembling an independent source of income--the achievements of this band of actors are commendatory. The plays, largely neglected classics, are not easy to learn. Some are in verse form with unfamiliar structures, while others require the use of conventions not normally employed in the typical play. The twenty-five plays included the avant-garde, adaptations of Greek classics, works from the Jacobeans, plays from an American naturalist writer, a French comedic artist, Shakespeare, and a trilogy from a contemporary Soviet dramatist. Most are from a repertoire of Western theatre that the actors may never have studied during their schooling.

The company worked under the hardship of budgetary deficits, of the tense anticipation of uprooting to a different location, a turnover of part of the membership each year, and, as regular visitors to the the auditorium might attest, a few people who could not be called either

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theater lovers or even knowledgeable of the basic nature of the drama, but who might be simply spending some time out of the cold.

Despite the achievements, warnings were posted not only over real-estate dilemmas, but over conflicts between the board of trustees and the artistic director as well. This friction would lead, during the next season, to a schism and to the replacement of the Cocteau's founder and artistic director.

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CHAPTER SEVEN: Notes

1. Enid Nemy, "Broadway," *New York Times*, 20 September 1985, C2.

2. Thor Eckert Jr., "Visit with a Soviet Playwright," *The Christian Science monitor*, 25 September 1985, 17.

3. Ibid.

4. Enid Nemy, "Broadway," *New York Times*, 20 September 1985, C2.

5. D. J. R. Bruckner, "The Stage: *Lunin: Theatre of Death*," *New York Times*, 24 September 1985, C7.

6. Joseph C. Koenenn, "A Soviet Playwright Off Broadway," *Newsday*, 13 September 1985, II,1.

7. Ibid.

8. "*Lunin*," *American Theatre*, January 1986, 37.

9. Ibid.

10. Adamson interview, 28 February 1990.

11. Bruckner review, C7.

12. Michael Feingold, "Theatre," *Village Voice*, 4 November 1985, 58.

13. Tish Dace, "Political Madness," *New York Native*, 4-10 November 1985, 10.

14. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

15. Victor Gluck, "Theatre Review," *Back Stage*, 25 October 1985, 14.

16. Adamson interview, 28 February 1990.

17. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

18. Harris Berlinsky, interview with the author, New York City, 21 March 1990.

19. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

20. Minutes of the Board of Trustees, New York City, 10 February 1986.

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21. Meeting of the Board of Trustees, New York City, 7 April 1986.

22. Meeting of the board of trustees, New York City, 16 May 1986.

23. The trustees' president was Edmund Schwesinger, vice presidents were Chaunce Skilling and James Nichols, the secretary was Alvin Deutsch, and the treasurer, Paul Lanier. Other trustees were Lois Deutchman, Richard Donovan, Thomas Fuld, Sibyl Jacobson, Marie Jean Lederman, Marsha Porcell, Karen Skilling and Eve Adamson.

24. Ibid.

25. Samuel G. Freedman, "The Nonprofit Stage Is Thriving but in Debt," *New York Times,* 8 April 1986, C13

26. Jeremy Gerard, "Off Broadway's Biggest Gamble," *New York Times*, 5 January 1988, C13.

27. Ibid.

28. Maria Dementieva, "Interview with Author of Soviet Play at Cocteau Repertory," *Back Stage*, 19 September 1986, 17.

29. Fuld interview, 22 March 1990.

30. Julius Novick, "*Socrates: Theatre of Life," The Village Voice*, 16 September 1986, 99.

31. Julius Novick, "Theatre, " *Village Voice*, 6 February 1987, 37.

32. Tish Dace, "North America," *Plays International*, February 1987, 50.

33. Steven Hart, "Trilogy At Cocteau Rep Expresses Tragic Frustrations with Search for Past, Present," *The Villager Downtown*, 2 November 1986, 28.

34. D.J.R. Bruckner, "Stage: *Socrates: Theater of Life* from Soviet Trilogy," *New York Times*, 24 September 1986, C24.

35. Stephanie Coen, "*Socrates: Theatre of Life* Provokes Difficult Questions," *Columbia Daily Spectator*, 22 September 1986, 7.

36. Rosette C. Lamont, "*Socrates: Theatre of Life," Stages*, October 1986, 11.

37. Smith interview, New York City, 27 February 1990.

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38. Eve Adamson, interview with the author, 14 March 1990. Webster's tragedy studies themes common in the Jacobean genre, such as virtue, suffering, avarice, and revenge, and is not an easy work for actors. According to Harris Berlinsky, it is a story of lust and greed, motives which, he believes, young people in the audience could understand from their experiences with television and movies. Even if they do not get every word, according to an encouraged Berlinsky, absorbing the gist would be enough. This might get a youngster thinking: "Let's see what else this guy has written. That's what we like to see; someone starting to think, not depending on someone else to tell him." Berlinsky alluded to a group of retarded children in the audience during one of the school matinees of *Malfi*. "I got the biggest kick out of them because they sat there and I wondered whether they understood--and I think they did. They were silent and listening and I thought they really got something out of what we were doing. Visually that's all you need." (Berlinsky, particularly involved with the plight of the mentally challenged, pointed out that he has a child who is retarded but who responds with smiles to classical music in the same manner that the retarded persons in the audience might respond to the visual stimuli in *Malfi*.)

39. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

40. D.J.R. Bruckner, "Stage: *Duchess of Malfi*," *New York Times*, 12 November 1986, C9.

41. Ibid.

42. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

43. Liz Lourenso, "Off-Broadway Production Making Mice of Men," *Kingsborough (College) Press*, 22 November 1987, 5.

44. John Greco, "*Of Mice and Men*," *The (Baruch College) Ticker*, 17 February 1987, 23.

45. "*Of Mice and Men* at the Cocteau," *Downtown*, 25 February 1987, 13-A.

46. Jeannie Radulovitz and Kevin Joy, "Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* at the Cocteau," *44 Forum* (Intermediate School 44, District 3), 30 November 1987, 64.

47. Fuld interview, 22 March 1990.

48. Steve Hart, "Cocteau Rep's *The Rivals* is a Pleasant Day in the Theatre," *Villager Downtown*, 14 November 1986, 17.

49. Robert Mass, "Bits," *The Village Voice*, 12 May 1987, 83.

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50. Billy Rose Division.

51. Cocteau Rep., project description to commissions, 3 September 1986.

52. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

53. Cocteau Rep., press release, 7 September 1986.

54. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

55. Fuld interview 22 March 1990, Smith interview 27 February 1990, and press release of Cocteau January 1987.

56. Robert Massa, "Bits," *The Village Voice*, 14 April 1987, 98.

57. D.J.R. Bruckner, "Theater: *Shoemakers," New York Times,* 24 March 1987, C5.

58. Clive Barnes, "Not All the Heels Are on the Shoes," *New York Post*, 24 March 1987, 20.

59. Dan Isaac, "Theater," *Chelsea Clinton News*, 4 April 1987, 11.

60. Steven Hart, "Theater: *The Shoemakers* is Portrait of a Class Struggle," *Villager Downtown*, 16 April 1987, 9.

61. Smith interview, 18 June 1990. While acting at the Cocteau throughout the 1986-87 season, Craig Smith had been teaching an acting course at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. While he now believes that a Cocteau actor would be unwise to accept a position requiring after-hours pressures, at that time he felt he could not refuse an offer by the chair of the theatre department, Bill Diger. "Someone was retiring and you would do a nice job," was Diger's proposal. But Smith had no teaching experience, and to this day is not sure that acting can be taught. The day after he received the call from Diger, he decided that he was taking the coward's way out, considered that the position would lead to further growth, and after looking at the campus, he accepted the job. He described his anxiety upon meeting his first class in February 1987. While the friendliness and earnestness of students in his two freshman classes made him feel part of the family, he found that he was always tired. In December 1988 the administration wanted a full-time professor; Diger offered an appointment to Smith, who declined. But the actor is grateful for the experience, which consisted of traveling to Annandale-on-Hudson on Monday mornings by Amtrak and coming back Tuesday afternoons in time for rehearsals at the Cocteau.

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62. Adamson interview, 28 February 1990.

63. Specifically, these buildings and locations were visited.

A. Jane West Hotel, $3250 per month for the theatre with loft space, $2500 per month for a gallery, three-year lease.

B. New Theatre, which has a second floor theatre, needs work, wants to give a 7 month rental.

C. Westbeth, asking $12,000 per month for both floors, $7,000 for third floor which has a big room and 90-seat theatre and lobby.

D. U.N. School, a swimming pool building on 23rd Street was currently vacant.

E. Greek Orthodox Church, a 90-seat "poor theatre" on 91 St. and West End Avenue for $150 a night. Not a favorable choice.

F. Marymount College, considered beautiful and expensive. An exploration with Mary Fleisher, administrative assistant, was planned. (Fleischer, currently a doctoral student in the CUNY Theatre Program, would offer the hall on a rental basis, $355 per 5-hour performance, $25 per hour for rehearsals, with extra fees for security, insurance, piano tuning and for a supervisor.)

G. Grand Street, a location asking $6500 per month with an option to buy in five years.

H. Triplex, a beautiful and expensive theatre, whose current manager was an intern at CSC.

I. Club 82 was not seen, has 4500 square feet, low ceiling.

J. 14 St 2 Av. with a $10,000 per month rental was offered by theatre.

K. Trinity School, with 200-seat theatre.

L. The Public Development Corporation with a possibility for which the Cocteau must wait to hear from the DCA.

M. No Smoking Playhouse (now called Primary Stages) wanted $3500 per month for 99 seats.

N. Cooper Square on 64 E. 4 St. with an abandoned building.

64. Specifically, these areas were visited:

A. A movie theatre in West Village with 199 seats and 12 foot ceiling lobby, 2 dressing rooms, 2 other offices on basement level, 4,000 square feet, $65,000 per year.

B. Two theatres in the area of Times Square, 99 and 135 seats, office, rehearsal, dressing room, lobby space, asking $190,000 per year but will negotiate for substantially less for the first five years since work is needed. Long-term lease available for 15 or more years.

C. A garage on West 27 Street between 10 and 11 Avenue, free of columns, 18-foot ceiling, 5,000 square feet on ground floor, 1,000 square feet of office space on the second floor.

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Asking $15 per square foot with an 8% increase, 5 years, option to renew for 5 years. Additional garage across the street.

D. Garage on West 47 Street, between 10 and 11 Avenue. Free of columns, fifteen-foot ceilings. 5,000 square feet on the ground floor, 2,500 square feet of office and apartment on the second floor (available in stages over the next year). Asking $16 per square feet ground floor, no lease term set yet.

E. Three-story firehouse, 173 Franklin St. City auction 24 May 1989. Minimum upset price $275,000.

F. Garage on West 37 Street between 9 and 10 Avenue, 7,500 square feet column free. High domed ceiling, bottom of truss fourteen feet, one story. Asking $2.6 million.

G. Garage on Washington Street, 2 stories, 5,700 square feet. Asking $1.6 million.

H. 300-seat movie theatre on East 13 St. Asking $1.65 million.

I. Space on 2nd Avenue near Eighth Street. Architect owns building and wants to add a theatre. Asking $750,000 for ground floor and $500,000 in construction costs to build theatre.

65. Board of Trustees, minutes of meeting 6 October 1986.

66. Trustees' meeting 6 October 1986.

67. Trustees' meeting 6 October 1986.

68. "Space Requirements," issued by the trustees, 6 August 1986.

69. Craig Smith, letter to the chairperson, Community Board No. 2, New York City, 4 December 1986.

70. Robert Hupp, letter to Dan S. Gilboa, manager, Jane West Hotel, 29 December 1986.

71. Board of Trustees, minutes of meeting 2 March 1987.

72. Robert Hupp, artistic director, interview with the author, New York City 16 March 1990.

73. Thomas Fuld, interview with the author, New York City, 21 March 1990. Added comment by Chaunce Skilling, trustee, interview with the author New York City 14 March 1990.

74. Fuld interview, 22 March 1990.

75. Fuld interview, 22 March 1990.

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76. Fuld interview, 21 March 1990.

77. James B. Nichols, trustee, interview with the author, New York City, 31 May 1990.

78. Nichols interview, 31 May 1990.

79. Board of trustees, meeting 5 January 1987, New York City.

80. Trustees' meeting 5 January 1987.

81. Trustees' meeting 5 January 1987.

82. Robert Hupp, letter to audience, October 1985.

83. Board of Trustees, meeting, New York City, 17 August 1987.

84. Berlinsky interview, 21 March 1990.

85. Simon Saltzman, "Rotating Format of Cocteau Theater Delights Viewers," *The Record*, 20 May 1988, B2.

86. In at least one case, a number of students wrote essays giving their reactions to the performance. Edwardo Gonzalez, a bilingual native of New York and a student of an anonymous teacher of freshman composition at Baruch College in New York City, wrote: "The fundamental concept around which the entire novel rotates is an arrest. . . . The presentation is limited to center stage, thus restricting movement somewhat. . . . The setting does much to project the general feeling of restraint and restriction." Linda Mak, from the People's Republic of China, concentrated on describing the nightmarish qualities of the production, such as the masks on the faces of the actors. One student acknowledged the relevance of the play to his life, stating: "How many times have you been accused of something you didn't have any knowledge of? . . Sometimes I feel that I'm surrounded by four walls closing in on me with no way out."

87. Eve Adamson, message to the board of trustees, 5 October 1987.

88. Walter Goodman, "Stage: Kafka'a *The Trial* by Cocteau Repertory", *The New York Times*, 17 October 1987, C-17.

89. Citation by Borough President Dinkins, November 1987.

90. Press release, Cocteau Rep., New York City, March 1987.

91. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

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92. Sam H. Shirakawa, "The Greeks Had a Word for It," *Theater Week*, 8-14 February 1988, 16.

93. Kevin Grubb, "Tragedies En Pointe," *New York Native*, 8 February 1988, 37.

94. Ruis Woertendyke, "Revival of *Antigone* is Provocative, Finely Performed," *The Villager*, 12 May 1988, 11.

95. Adamson interview, 28 February 1990.

96. D.J.R. Bruckner, "Stage: *Cocktail Party* by the Cocteau Troupe," *New York Times*, 2 March 1988, C15.

97. David Kaufman, "A Classic Gin on the Rocks," *Downtown*, 23 March 1988, 18-A.

98. NYSCA grant application June 1988.

99. Ibid.

100. Albert Podell, trustee, letter to Eve Adamson, 28 September 1987.

101. Albert Podell, president, Board of Trustees, interview with the author, New York City, 23 June 1980.

102. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

103. Financial statement issued by Albert Podell, president, board of trustees. 8 January 1988.

104. Ibid.

105. Ibid.

106. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

107. Five-year budget, 1985-90.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

Mission Accomplished - 1988-90

As marketing techniques became increasingly sophisticated, the Cocteau staff felt that a survey of its audience would enable the theatre to tailor its approach for maximum good will and revenue. Toward the end of the 1987-88 season and throughout the summer of 1988, the Alliance of Resident Theatres conducted a survey of the tastes and backgrounds of subscribers to twelve theatres, a group that included the Circle Repertory Company and the CSC.[1] Questions of concern to the Cocteau management were addressed. Subscribers returned their comments by phone and by mail. The principal results, based on questions answered by Cocteau subscribers and patrons, are cited below.

Those who attended the Cocteau offerings frequently were users of TDF vouchers who used their documents principally for plays embodying fine poetry and language. The theatre was advised that a move too far uptown could result in the

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loss of up to one-half of its regular subscribers. Further, the company was counseled to build connections with the outer boroughs, to make the newsletter more accessible to all members of its audience, and to stage both classics and new works to appeal to its older and more youthful audiences respectively. Some other data gathered by the survey indicated the age and marital status of principal subscribers, geographic aspects of its patrons, names of other theatres most frequently attended by Cocteau subscribers, and customer preferences in both seating and days favored for attending productions.[2]

The information above led the Cocteau to take steps to strengthen the audience base. Frequent newsletters are sent, perhaps once monthly during the season. Almost immediately after receiving the marketing report, the business staff of the Cocteau designed a newsletter with a more sophisticated format than the preceding ones. Before 1988, the typical newsletter tended to be a page or two, with the appearance of an inter-office memo. Beginning in 1988, however, the theatre company adopted the more professional look of a standard periodical, and took steps to mail the documents to subscribers and to display others in the theatre lounge on a more regular basis than it did in the past--once every two months was the goal. The artistic director has tried to emphasize the types of plays enjoyed by frequent visitors, especially subscribers, i.e. plays

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rich in language, which are poetic, and challenging. The staff, including the artistic director, have increased their use of telemarketing to gain and hold subscribers.

Even if the Cocteau adhered to all the principles divulged by the marketing survey and found, to its delight, that the auditorium was filled to capacity each night, the company would not thereby be guaranteed a long life. The one expense that could conceivably drive out the Cocteau, increased rent, affected every theater throughout the period studied in this dissertation, particularly if in the noncommercial sector. In New York, according to people knowledgeable about real estate, rising rents have led to more businesses failures than any other cause. As the season approached the mid-point, reports were issued that warned theater groups of the devastation that this phenomenon could bring.

In September 1988, a study, "Space to Create: The Theater Community in Crisis," was prepared by the Alliance of Resident Theaters/New York, the group that had issued the marketing survey described above. One hundred and thirty theaters are members of this organization. The report called for a concerted effort by state and city governments as well as private sources. The report found that members of the association are paying an average of 75 percent more for rent than they did five years previously, while income had grown only 56 percent. An average of 16 percent of

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their budgets goes for rent. Also, leases of one-half of the survey's respondents were to expire in the next three years, and many would face either huge rent increases or possible eviction because of developers' plans. The lack of affordable available space was considered by the Alliance to be the greatest problem of nonprofit theaters.[3]

Off-off Broadway theatres are a 60 million dollar industry, according to Sari Weisman, head of the Alliance of Resident Theatres, who described the functions of her group in a telephone interview with the author of this dissertation on 13 November 1990.[4] The members present 700 plays annually to an audience of more than 3 million people. Like the Cocteau, many member theaters had gone to marginal neighborhoods where the rent was low, and by their very presence had gentrified the neighborhoods by providing entertainment and nighttime activity. Restaurants have gathered in the area. As property became more desirable, it became worth more in the market. The arts had then begun pricing themselves out of their own environment, which they had created. Theaters that had to relocate during the 1980s have been the Manhattan Theater Club, the WPA Theater, Open Eye, New Stagings, Musical Theatre Works, the Roundabout, the SoHo Rep and the Open Space Theater Experiment. Dr. Mary Schmidt Campbell, the city's cultural affairs commissioner, reported in January 1989 that the need for space is the most critical issue facing cultural groups.[5]

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To illustrate the struggle for affordable space, the WPA Theater, according to its artistic director, Kyle Renick, was paying $775 a month rent in 1977, and less than $1,000 a month when it left, but in 1989 WPA was paying $5,500 a month. Without the success of *Little Shop of Horrors*--which was produced by the WPA--the theater would have gone out of business, according to Renick. Further, audience have not been known to follow theatres very far when they move. Nor is raising ticket prices substantially or adding seats a viable solution. The report recommended the creation of a financial mechanism that would include capital grants; creation of a nonprofit multi-arts center; acqusition of publicly owned land and buildings; enactment of tax abatements and incentives to encourage developers to include nonprofit performing spaces in new buildings; amendment of zoning regulations to reflect the economic reality of nonprofit theater; and the offering of benefits to landlords who provide low-cost, long term rentals.[6]

While keeping abreast of the tastes of subscribers and remaining concerned about the future of their space on the Bowery, the Cocteau mounted these plays during the 1988-89 season:

1988-1989

09/17/88-12/09/88	*Break of Noon*	Paul Claudel
10/06/88-03/03/89	*Venice Preserv'd*	Thomas Otway
11/17/88-05/21/89	*The Three Sisters*	Anton Chekhov
01/26/89-05/21/89	*Good*	C.P. Taylor

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03/09/89-05/21/89	*Macbeth*	W. Shakespeare
05/04/89-05/21/89	*On the Verge*	Eric Overmeyer

As a writer, Paul Claudel combined musical poetry and symbolism to try to create operas with purely verbal music. In many of his works, the author expresses the conventional conflict between human and divine love through a dialogue featuring the flow of an internal rhythm between the characters.[7]

Claudel's *Break of Noon*, which ran in repertory at the Cocteau from September through Deceuber 1988, is the type of drama that would appeal to the Cocteau audience as reflected in the A.R.T. survey--college educated and eager for challenging works. Adamson chose the Claudel play in response to the survey, and her theatre became the first to stage *Break of Noon* in New York City.[8] Claudel emphasizes abstract issues with characters whose humanity may appear secondary to their allegorical definitions. *Break of Noon* displays a struggle between the Creator and the creature, and is concerned with the meaning and experience of love between man and woman, with the idea that physical passion may lead to spiritual passion. The plot involves Ysé and her husband, De Ciz, together with Amalric (a former lover of Ysé) and Mesa (who has not yet experienced passion). Mesa becomes the lover of Ysé, a situation which is accepted by De Ciz. The two last acts take place in China during a Chinese revolt against missionaries.

For this staging, Adamson cast four senior actors--Craig

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Smith, Elise Stone, Joseph Menino and Harris Berlinsky--because she believed they would be best able to evoke the symbolism of Claudel's parable, which appears also to have attributes of oratorio because of its lyricism.

With large letter omega as the central symbol in the graveyard scene, the set design was praised by some for its creativity and criticized by those who considered the set design ugly. Her direction emphasized the natural speech patterns of the *dramatis personae*, a change from her usual method of promoting a self-conscious display of the poetic lines. Adamson was satisfied that her production realized the intentions of the playwright.[9]

But from the evidence of the critics, the performers were not really talented enough to handle a philosophic work of this nature; several reviewers, using most of their allotted space to analyze the text of the play, cited the lack of energy of the actors as the basic reason that the performance did not work. The reviewer for the *New York Native*, John Bowen, paid homage to Eve Adamson, calling her one of our most intelligent directors and one of the most venturesome, praising her for selecting a rarely produced script and mounting a compelling production. The critic used semiotic analysis to interpret the lead character: Mesa signifies half, i.e. half-man. Mesa is the male virgin who had been rejected in his efforts to become a priest and is now struggling against his desire--not merely for the joys

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of the flesh, but for the charms of a married woman.[10]

The *New York Times* assigned Wilborn Hampton to review the Claudel work. (Hampton would come to be the regularly-designated reviewer by the *Times* for Cocteau productions.) Hampton reiterated the findings of the reviewers from the *Washington Square News* and the *New York Native*: that Claudel's body of plays dealt with the theme of life's emptiness when devoid of spiritual nutrition. Hampton, moreover, indicated the biographic nature of Mesa's rejection for the priesthood: the author had also been rebuffed when he attempted to gain entry to that church position. While Hampton took issue with the formal aspects of the play--calling the symbolic presentation of conflicting desires tedious--he found that the Cocteau had put some dramatic life into a metaphysical discourse. Hampton was favorably impressed by Wallace Fowlie's translation.[11]

Victor Gluck for *Back Stage* reported that the Cocteau "must be doing something right." In his judgment, the play is extremely difficult to stage, "a web of mystery and poetry." Adamson paced the play at a rate that made the poetry meaningful, according to Gluck, emulating the rhythms of natural speech.[12] Howard Kissel of the *New York Daily News* found the set design ingenious for incorporating the Greek letter omega as a Christian symbol in a graveyard scene, and for following the traditions of the French

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theater, in which little actually happens on stage.[13] A somewhat different view was reported by *The Record*, whose critic was more in the mood for carnality than spirituality by the conclusion of the staging. Simon Saltzman called the dialogue "pretentious, high falutin' metaphysical drivel" and in general not valid for drama.[14]

The reviewer for a community newspaper, Eugene Paul of *Town and Villager*, was concerned like some of the others that the play did not move, yet he praised the author's language and similarly the Cocteau for "tackling with its limited resources a play which calls upon everything theatre can muster." He added that the play demanded the utmost from actors, designers and the director and that the Cocteau fulfilled Claudel's theme.[15] But the *Village Voice*, not known for kindness to the Cocteau, called the presentation "a snooze when it's not profoundly irritating" and the set "minimal and rather ugly." The actors were found wanting in "subtlety, verve, erotic energy, and fine voices." Erika Munk found the Cocteau's performers "physically unprepossessing, stiff, crude--just not up to it," though she conceded her admiration for the Cocteau for staging the work.[16]

The Bouwerie Lane theater is almost always dark on Monday nights, but on November 28, 1988, a benefit performance of *Break of Noon* was given, with proceeds to benefit the family of the sister of one of its actresses, Elise Stone,

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according to Craig Smith.[17] Sheree Stone, the actress's sister, had been burned on 12 August 1988 when a butane cigarette lighter exploded, causing great injury--second- and third-degree burns over 75 percent of her body. Stone, facing years of surgery and rehabilitation, had no insurance and needed to litigate the matter for several years. The proceeds from the Cocteau benefit--appoximately $1500--were sent to the Stone family.

The season was to prove one of taking risks with productions of neglected classics: only two familiar works, as opposed to five that are more obscure. Few could say that Otway's *Venice Preserv'd* was overly-familiar in New York's theatre community, and when the Cocteau presented that bloody work as its second offering in October 1988, one audience member told a reporter after seeing the production that the excitement is frequently not in the major houses but in the small spaces--"which can never quite be dimmed by the glow of Broadway."[18] Adamson's risks--taken by her in response to the marketing survey--included the presentation of the tragedy in modern-dress, utilizing an original rock score by Scott Davenport and the talents of guest director William Reichblum. Jaffeir is played as as a "wimpy" husband who follows his wife's advice to betray his compatriots in order to save his own neck. The tragedy featured Harris Berlinsky as the lusty senator, and Craig Cook as the betrayed Pierre, with Craig Smith as lighting

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designer. Berlinsky appreciated the chance to perform the role of the "nicky-nacky" senator whose sexual proclivities gave the gory tale its moments of comic relief.[19] Smith reported that he appreciated the opportunity to "take things easy once in a while" on the lights rather than on the stage.[20]

The focus of the play had been altered somewhat by Adamson, who highlighted a homosexual attachment between Pierre (played by Christopher Oden) and his friend, Jaffeir (played by Mark Schulte). From the evidence given by the critics, this production was a fine, restrained one, without the campiness that some might have expected with the "nicky-nacky" scene.

Simon Saltzman of *The Record* found the presentation of this play "stimulating and insinuating 20th century sensibility," and looked with favor on the spider-webbed set designs of Andrea Beeman. Like the *Drama-Logue* reviewer, he was amused by Harris Berlinsky's interpretation of the senator in the "nicky-nacky" scenes, and noted that while the Cocteau is presenting the work as a neglected classic, Otway's play was one of the most frequently acted works of the 18th and 19th centuries.[21]

Eugene Paul, representing *Town & Village*, a community newspaper, agreed that performances were intelligent, but erroneously labeled the Cocteau as "one of the most avant-garde theatres in New York." He felt positive about the

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director's changing the focus of the play by having Christopher Oden's Pierre under the tensions of a sexual attraction to his friend, Jaffier (played by Mark Schulte).[22]

Wilborn Hampton of the *New York Times* called the Cocteau a theatre that has also rowed against the tide throughout its eighteen-year tenure. As for the production, while he felt that the costumes were outlandish--jeans, sweatshirt, headbands, leather jackets, sneakers, motorcycle boots, and studded gloves, and the music nothing less than a rock rendition of "God Save the Queen"--he was pleasantly surprised to find the entire cast giving a performance that he called intelligent, studied and heartfelt, with a fine ear for poetry.[23]

In repertory with the *Venice Preserv'd*, the Cocteau performed a work that could hardly be considered neglected: Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*, a play of palpable longings and deeply felt frustrations, which was the third play selected by the the artistic director to open in November 1988. Frequently, Adamson was frustrated about the shortage of good female roles in the classics, and felt justified in choosing this work of Chekhov if only because the focus was on three women. Because of the familiarity of a large number of subscribers with the work, Adamson risked staging what many more prosperous groups had performed in the past, and a play that many highly-educated subscribers in her audiences had seen elsewhere.

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Adamson felt that her company's production was a worthy revival despite some actors' performances, which, she felt, gave only hints at the fullness of the characters. But she admitted that despite her understanding of the psychology of the characters, her production did not adequately create the appropriate melancholy ambience.[24] Craig Smith once again took a "break" and settled for one of the minor roles, while the play was carried by the acting of Coral Potter as the much-older doctor and Elise Stone as the muddled Olga. Both were considered miscast by some, the first because of youth, the second because of level-headed poise. In addition, the small stage seemed to some audience members to be oppressive, with no place for the characters to sit, according to Adamson.

According to Wilborn Hampton of the *Times*, the acting was *not* uneven but featured good performances from all, especially from Carol Dearman's Natasha, Harris Berlinsky's Kuligan, and Craig Smith's in the small role of Ferapont, the aged porter. Hampton expressed a hope that he would once see Craig Smith as Chebutykin, Vershinin, or just about any other Chekhov character.[25]

In his review, Gerard Raymond of *Theatre Week* called the Cocteau, along with the Pan Asian Repertory Theater, "one of New York's oldest and best-respected resident off-Broadway companies." Explaining to his reading audience the values of the author, Raymond stated that Chekhov wrote *The Three*

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Sisters for a company, and he believed that if you take a group of disparate elements and put them together, they will not mix that easily.[26] Jerry Tallmer, writing for the *New York Post*, found fault with the stage, which he called too severely raked without the relief of furniture on which the characters could sit, and considered some actors miscast--Coral Potter as too young to be the cynical old doctor, and Elise Stone as too levelheaded, too stolid to be Olga.[27] This negative portrayal is in stark contrast to Hampton's image of uniformly good performances.

For its fourth production of the 1988-89 season, the Cocteau presented C.P. Taylor's *Good*--with some trepidation--beginning in January 1989: The company feared an outburst from the audience similar to the scene faced by the theatre company during its presentation of *Pericles*. That Shakespearean work was updated and set in Berlin of the 1930s, a decadent city of Marlene Dietrich types, all pursuing base pleasures in the seedy cafés of the pre-World War II town. Believing that the Cocteau was looking with favor on this ambiance, a man in the audience had leapt up at the start of intermission telling people, "Go home; this is Berlin of the 1930s and it's not good. You don't understand. It is wrong to see this work." Although a sophisticated theatergoer could have seen almost at once that there was no *endorsement* of that way of life, this visitor did not remain for the second act, which might have

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clarified the focus of the company. Since *Good* appears at first to justify Nazi ideology--at least in the opening scene--a similar outburst from the audience was a possibility.[28]

In *Good*, a professor of literature is sucked into the vortex of the Nazi ideology, seduced by the renown given him by members of the party. The work was directed by Robert Hupp just weeks before he assumed the top post of artistic director of the theatre.

More specifically, *Good* focuses on a teacher who had written a book that recommended euthaniasia for his blind and senile mother. Halder, a lecturer in German literature, becomes caught up in the Nazi juggernaut, in that he is praised by Hitler himself for his position. The book is considered a general justification of mass killing of the old and diseased. Halder, a decent man, is corrupted by the prestige he is accorded, and although his best friend is a Jewish psychoanalyst, Halder finds himself unmoved by the extermination facilities at Auschwitz. C. P. Taylor, the playwright, stated in a stage direction that music should be an important part of the background of the play. (Although jazz was forbidden by the Nazis, many people in authority had private collections.)

For budgetary reasons, the Cocteau used a tape recording of music as the background for the scenes. (The RSC, in its presentation, used live musicians.) Craig Smith recalled

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that some audiences include Holocaust survivors. People would start to talk during the symposia and cry when they discussed the play. Smith was moved, but some of the audience members saw the play principally as an apology for the German society and became angry. "The play was aimed at academics, at people who should know better than embrace the Nazi party ideology," Smith felt. Using an analogy, Smith thought that it is easy for a middle-income New Yorker to dismiss the drug epidemic as one that affects someone else. Yet in the case of the play, middle-class people in Germany--even a professor--got sucked into the vortex of Nazism.[29]

Critics were almost unanimous in finding the work realized by the Cocteau production, a mounting blessed by fine ensemble acting and powerful display of thematic density. Because of the theme, a critic from the Jewish press made one of her infrequent visits. Elenore Lester, a reviewer for *The Jewish Week*, found the production "spirited, amusing and powerful" in showing the collapse of a man who should have known better as he is wooed and flattered into joining the party. Craig Smith received one of his many accolades, as the reviewer called his performance one that "hits precisely the right note in his interpretation of the professor."[30]

A newspaper of Long Beach, New York, whose theatre section was represented by Joseph S. King, had particular praise for Craig Smith as a professor who undergoes a

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piecemeal transformation in personality.[31] Smith received a citation from Richard Laermer of the *New York Press* who enjoyed Smith's "juicy" performances in farce, Jacobean tragedies, and old-world finds.[32] Wilborn Hampton of the *Times* called the presentation "mesmerizing and frightening," adding his applause for Craig Smith whom he named as "one of the more consistently fine actors around town."[33] To complete a wave of positive notices, Eugene Paul wrote that the play was "strikingly and amusingly told . . . almost heartlessly clever. . . . Craig Smith gives a commanding performance, chilling in its implications."[34]

When the Cocteau produces a well-known work like *Macbeth*, which it repeated in its 1988-89 season as its fifth production, few people of the press are likely to visit. These popular Shakespearean dramas are targeted to the school crowd at the matinees, but are given for the regular evening audiences as well. In the production during the 1988-89 season, *Macbeth* was presented to both school audiences on selected Thursday afternoons, and to regular subscribers and ticket-buyers during evenings and Sunday matinees. *Macbeth* ran from March through May of 1988.

Craig Smith, who does not believe Shakespearean works are the best choices for high-school youngsters, felt that the performances were not really up to the demands of the production, and that the Cocteau performers acted their roles in a one-dimensional manner.

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David Fishelson, managing director of the Cocteau, devotes considerable effort to advertising these matinees, not only because he believes that they can affect youngsters positively, but also because they are the most profitable ventures of the theatre, which usually has a sold-out house for each such performance. A letter from David Fishelson to various schools in the greater metropolitan area indicated one of the ways the theater attempts to draw from the student community. This excerpt is from a promotional letter for *Macbeth* and was sent in the beginning of the 1988-89 season.

> For seventeen years educators from over 300 tri-state schools have been bringing their students to the Bouwerie Lane Theatre to see the works of Shakespeare, Molière, and other great classics of world theater, as performed by one of New York's most acclaimed resident companies.
>
> Clive Barnes has called the Cocteau Repertory "the unsung heroes of New York classical theatre," while John Simon of *New York* magazine says, "The Cocteau Repertory has been offering the most interesting repertoire of classics, old and new, to be found anywhere in these parts."[35]
>
> The Cocteau's production of *Macbeth* is timeless, straightforward, and easily accessible to students. Running time is approximately two hours and 15 minutes, with the play's director and actors conducting a symposium after each show. In addition, a student guide will be provided to you before the performance.
>
> Student matinee series tickets are only $8 per student with passes available for chaperones. As you can see from the enclosed schedule, many performances of *Macbeth* are sold out.[36]

There is little consensus on the merits of this production of *Macbeth*, as only one critic attended. The

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single reviewer, Eugene Paul of *Town and Village*, cited a bit of history. He elucidated as follows: "In the early days of Europe (in Scotland for example), gangs or clans developed as a way of coping. Leaders of gangs and the lords of the clan chose an overlord, a king. In time, kingship became royalty, decked with panoply." Paul found fault with the acting, which he considered hobbled by singleness of dimension of character and the anonymity of the costumes.[37]

On the Verge by Eric Overmeyer was the end-of-season "free" offering. The play was staged just once before in New York City--at the Houseman Theatre opening 2 March 1987.[38] The Cocteau staging was performed during the month of May 1989, a play about an archaeological lecturer named Gerald who rents a remote country cottage for the week-end, ostensibly to work on the local site, in reality hoping for some philandering with his attractive college librarian, Ruth. Complications develop, which form the sometimes riotous nature of the comedy. There were no vivid memories by the Cocteau staff of this production and, as has generally been the case with the May offerings, there were no reviews.

The most dramatic event of the 1988-89 season did not take place on stage. Eve Adamson, founder of the Cocteau and artistic director from its inception, resigned on 8 March 1989. Her departure from her theatre after such a

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long tenure was not a sudden blow, but the result of a schism that had been developing between the artistic director and some members of the board of trustees, a gulf that had been widening considerably since September 1987.

In the official newspaper of the Alliance of Resident Theatres, Mindy Levine reported the resignation, and informed readers, in addition, that the average age of an off-Broadway theatre is fourteen years. Levine called the changing of the artistic guard a complex and delicate process, particularly since most off-off-Broadway theatres spring from the dreams of a single artist with a particular vision. She quoted Adamson's response to an interview: "On the one hand you want the organization you created to be healthy and thrive. On the other hand there is some part of your being that wants to know, they can't do it without me." Levine asked Adamson why she resigned. Disregarding the pressures she felt from some of the trustees, Adamson replied only that she wanted to do different things with her life. Adamson had told the interviewer for *Theatre Times* that she began thinking about leaving the Cocteau two years prior to her resignation. She had taken on the administrative functions of theatre--those not directly associated with the artistic side--because she had no guideposts to the running of off-off-Broadway enterprises in 1971. Her real love was art; she assumed the business duties by default.[39]

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James Nichols, president of Nicholodeon Productions, a trustee and erstwhile set designer for the Cocteau, had strong opinions on the roots of the issue and was one of two trustees willing to express strong feelings about the departure of Adamson. (Other members of the board reported only that Adamson had resigned to pursue other interests.) He granted Adamson's argument that the board had been constantly pressuring her to mount more commercial plays, and to raise the ticket prices--in short, to encroach on the artistic role which was, by right, hers. Adamson, according to Nichols, wanted a ceiling placed on the prices of tickets and rejected a suggestion to increase subscription rates substantially.[40]

Nichols at first seemed hesitant about giving concrete reasons for the resignation. "She was not trying enough," or "She did not go along with the board," were typical comments from this unusually strong-minded trustee. Nichols made the issue seem like a simple one in which a confrontation occurred between Adamson and the trustees, the trustees demanding that she try harder to raise money and to stage more commercial productions, and work more closely with the board. To each of these demands by the trustees, she allegedly replied, "If that's the way you feel, do you want my resignation?" According to Nichols, Adamson was surprised by the trustees' reply to her warning that she would resign: They agreed to accept her resignation.

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According to Nichols, then, Adamson, feeling relatively secure in her position as founder and director for the past seventeen years, expected a conciliatory response, and was surprised when the board considered her less than indispensable. Pressed to recount concrete details, Nichols responded:

> Eve had a habit of not making up her season until two weeks before the season was on, so that all publicity was impossible. You couldn't mail a notice of the subscription season in sufficient time to book full audiences. She would say, "If we do not do this, we will do that. If we do not get those rights, we will do this, this, and this." So Eve dealt by keeping everyone as off balance as she could.
>
> She was at loggerheads with the board about how the theatre should be run and she would not make rational changes. It was not that she avoided more commercial plays--Hupp [Adamson's replacement as artistic director] does the same. It is how you advertise and promote. She said we did not have the money to promote the theatre. The board said you have to promote. She said there was no money for advertising in the budget, Nichols said there was.
>
> I explained: "You have to adjust your thinking. If your thinking is closed on a subject you are stuck unless you can find other ways to open up to rethink."
>
> There were fights in the boardroom. We would say: "What plays are you doing?" She replied: "I can't tell you." We would say, "Who is in the cast?" She would answer, "I don't know" (even if she did). We would say, "How many people will you bring in from outside." Reply: "I don't know." She was treating the audience in the wrong way by not creating the proper ambiance.
>
> The board looked at problems, picked up dollars to do public relations without sacrificing in other areas. Look at the budget and you will see the difference. It's like night and day. Four years ago top salary went to Eve. She was making $12,000 and now the artistic director makes $25,000 (for the 1989-1990 season). She was not enticing the

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> audience. She should have approached the audience by mouth, by telephone, the way you approach the board. The artistic director in all theatres is the inspiration. She should have done telemarketing, yes, but she should have done fifty things--taken a different attitude. Eve was at loggerheads with the board, and when she made a power play, the board was overjoyed and accepted the resignation. She never expected everyone to accept a resignation from the founder.[41]

Nichols complained, too, that he could not videotape the set of some shows until the final dress rehearsals were over. Adamson had insisted on making last-minute changes not only in set design but in the script, according to Nichols, so that actors were off balance on the opening nights. Yet, Nichols admitted, the differences between Adamson and the board are not so great that they would prevent Adamson from returning to guest-direct.[42]

Nichols had a high regard for Eve Adamson's dedication to the theater, a commitment which has led to the Cocteau's survival and uninterrupted performance since she founded the company. When asked to pinpoint the disagreements between her and the board, he became specific. According to Nichols, a long-term trustee,

1. She was tired of handling "a bunch of stupid businessman-geekoes (i.e. the trustees);"

2. She was possessive--the theater was her baby and she wanted to do things her way, period;

3. She was likely to engage in late scheduling, delaying to the last minute the publishing of brochures, changing minds in mid-season, adjusting schedules, not being able

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truly to take over as the administrative head of the theater;

4. She worked in her peculiar style, so that the first opening of any play was never considered the opening by Eve; she did not believe the opening was real until four to six performances later. I would say, "We are not Broadway but a rep. company with a run of sometimes only five shows. Why wait for one-third of the run to be over to bring in critics?" Also, with Hupp, the critics are in during the second week;

5. She insisted on the repertory format with a barrage of new shows (Hupp changed this procedure by cutting the number of productions and extending rehearsals so that during opening night, people are 95% ready);

6. She would sometimes have everyone learn the lines, then would edit and drop the lines, confusing the actors. This created an uncomfortable cast.[39]

Nichols reiterated that Adamson is a great artist and pointed to Harris Berlinsky, who came to Adamson with no acting lessons whatever, and was transformed by her into a truly fine performer.

Loi Leabo, a sponsor of the theatre (i.e. one who has contributed at least $2,500 in a given year), maintained that "burnout" was a cause of Adamson's departure, but advised that to attribute everything to that cliché would be to suffer a misapprehension. Leabo called Adamson the most

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forceful personality of the original triumvirate of the group--Craig Smith, Coral Potter, and Eve Adamson.[40]

In contrast to his views on Adamson as an administrator, Nichols had only good things to say about her successor, Robert Hupp. He found that Hupp had been getting in direct touch with the audiences: "This is what good theater managers do. He makes speeches, sends thank-you notes, makes phone calls to subscribers." Nichols believes that the regular advertisement in the *Village Voice* brings in practically nobody--that aside from reviews in the *New York Times*, the most important determinant of a theater's box office success is the role of the artistic director. According to Nichols, Hupp has earned the esteem of the trustees through various activities, which he cites to contrast the present artistic director with Adamson:

> He would call someone on the mailing list and say, "You probably saw our review in the *Times*. We are doing very good theatre at an affordable price and we think you are the type of person who should be subscribing." He has also used a telemarketing agency to assist in this, and his managing director, David Fishelson, is on the phone all the time. This makes all the difference.
>
> This is a polite business, so few people will come out and say, "So-and-so messed up." But I can't believe you cannot see that there is a night-and-day change in this theatre. I attribute the growth to the approach of the artistic director and the managing director and the cooperation from the trustees. We're now getting a better level of production and more people to take care of the audience--the amenities--the ushers, the concessionaries, etc.[41]

Another trustee, Chaunce Skilling, called Robert Hupp's

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ascendancy one of the more startling changes to have occurred in the last two years. But he attributed most of the positive changes to an attitude by the trustees, who had seen a theater in which cast members had to do the cleaning up, the taking care of the box office, and other attendant things. Through funds contributed by the trustees and the friends whom the trustees contacted, staff people were hired; these would be people who were not going on the stage. As to what he considers the role of the trustees: "Once a month we see what we can do to help. We decided on the budget--so much for rent, utilities and insurance. There is an amount left, so you divide it up and decide what will be the salaries. We decide the salaries; that is not a decision of the creative staff."[42]

Skilling saw an analogy between the relationship of the board to the acting team, and that between a parent and her children. When you get to be a certain age, he feels, you continue to be supportive, but you are not interested in hearing about the horrible stuff that happened yesterday. As he saw events, Bob Hupp convinced the board that another hand should manage the place and we accepted his recommendation because he was the one with the inside track. "The trustees all found David Fishelson [the current managing director] excellent at what he does; he keeps the theatre functioning very nicely and is concise and direct with the board. We need to know in advance about the

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problems and what we might do about them. We do not want to hear that there is a problem and that there is a disaster right now. With Bob at the helm and with the support of David [Fishelson], there seems to be a very positive enterprise."[43]

Skilling can be as analytical as Nichols in elucidating the problems between Adamson and the board, and he was forthright in comparing the former artistic director with her successor:

> At about the time that Bob joined as a member of the operating staff, Eve was burning out--not in her artistic endeavors, but just in the day-to-day managing of the theater. I don't think she could handle it any more; there are many contributing factors to that which are personal as far as she is concerned. It was becoming a ponderous, negative operation that reflected on the board, in that we would go into a meeting and it would be a negative, dreary operation with everything seeming to go downhill. I don't think there was any significant change over the years.[44]

There was other evidence that all was not functioning smoothly between the board of trustees and the administrative staff. In one situation, Albert Podell, now president of the board, had been criticizing Stewart Russell--the managing director before Fishelson was appointed to that post--in a manner that Russell must have found insulting and demeaning. Adamson sent Podell a letter objecting to Podell's "belligerent, demeaning, and abusive tone" and warned that she "cannot allow that to go unacknowledged, and that I cannot in any way condone it. . . . the continuation and health of the Cocteau can be

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effected only through mutual respect and good will."[45]

In one case, a memorandum that Russell had drafted urging the trustees to contribute to the theatre was heavily edited by Podell, who found six major errors of fact or tone in a note of just four sentences. Critical comments covered every blank area of the letter, such as: "Too impersonal. Don't send the memo to those who contributed," and "Makes no sense. Why should they subscribe today?" Also "Why? You leave out the main reason we discussed," and "It's not a poll--it's a cash-flow analysis." Other notations chided Russell for being "a little heavy handed. Also I'm not sure every board member agreed to give this amount." There were indications that more was at stake than a routine polishing of a letter--that Podell was essentially chastising Russell in order to deliver barbs against Adamson.[46]

As a general rule, a Cocteau trustee with a complaint against a member of the theatre staff would outline his objections to the artistic director and allow the latter to take the action she considered appropriate. In this instance, however, one might speculate that Podell was using his grievances against the business manager to embarrass the artistic director--conceivably because of Podell's enmity toward Adamson. Further, Podell's philosophy is that the trustees should not be considered a "rubber stamp" for the policies of the artistic director, but rather an active participant, even in the routine management of the company.

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Podell, in charging Russell with "making a mess" of financial matters at the October 3 board meeting, concluded that the business manager "is not paying proper attention to the requirements of the Board and is not always honest with me or the board. Under the circumstances I find it impossible to have any respect or good will toward Stewart." He added that he would not "tolerate Stewart's refusal to implement [the board] decision requiring the managing director to submit his subscriber literature to the board before disseminating it."[47]

James B. Nichols had views of the business manager as well. According to the trustee, "He was a delightful and confused young man . . . always signing the wrong paper, jumping ahead without permission, getting into serious troubles. . . He neglected to pay the theater insurance premiums."[48]

Craig Smith liked Russell, whom he considered good at some things like personal relationships--at opening fundraising sources--but not so good at internal financial management. Smith believes that Russell was committed to the theater and still is, but that he is a man who would have been more successful as an adjunct to another manager like the development director. "In a small situation you have to play to people's strengths," he added. "You will not get well-rounded workers willing to work for peanuts."

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Craig Smith gave his view on salary figures:

> $25,000 is the top salary here, certainly not a large income. A beginning teacher with just a bachelor's makes $27,000. What Dave Fishelson earns as managing director is hardly a living. What the artistic director makes here is the minimum you must pay to hold him. People like Julie [Bleha, the business manager] are not making nearly enough, and that's a full-time job. She has an outside job and she should be able to make more here. But I never mistrusted the use of money at the Cocteau.[49]

Eve Adamson's letter of resignation to Albert Podell contained a series of conditions, a list of requests that Podell responded to as a lawyer familiar with the rules of corporate dealings. The resignation letter, dated 8 March 1989, had the following information:

> For personal artistic and financial reasons I believe it best if, subject to our working out suitable arrangements as described below on an agreed-to time schedule, I terminate my position as Artistic Director of the Jean Cocteau Repertory.
>
> I am personally committed to the survival and health of the Theatre. Should my successor as Artistic Director wish my assistance in some artistic and/or advisory capacity, I shall be happy to discuss that possibility with him or her.
>
> As founder and sole Artistic Director of the Theatre from its inception in 1971, I believe the following is in order:
>
> 1. I be given ongoing and reasonable access to the theatre's mailing lists, files and archival materials, with the right to make copies thereof.
>
> 2. Should the theatre cease operations within the next five years, the mailing lists, files, and archival materials will be returned to me without restriction.
>
> 3. The Theatre will cover my health insurance through June 30, 1989, and continue to carry me on its policy on a reimbursement basis after that date

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until such time as I have purchased another policy.

4. In consideration of the foregoing (a) I shall continue to allow the Board to use the name "Jean Cocteau Repertory" until such time, if ever, as it appears that the Theatre has effectively ceased to function, at which time said name shall revert to me for my use, benefit, and disposition; and (b) I shall waive any obligation to reimburse me for salary payments heretofore deferred to me.

Please incorporate the above into a mutually acceptable agreement.

With my best personal wishes and thanks to the Board individually and collectively for their concern and support over the years, Eve.[50]

In a press release shortly thereafter, the theatre reported the acceptance of Adamson's resignation and announced the selection of associate artistic director, Robert Hupp, as her replacement. The release thanked Adamson for directing over sixty productions and listed as the reason for the resignation the "constant need for new funds and the time demand associated with non-artistic duties."[51]

What Eve Adamson may not have expected was a response to her resignation from Albert Podell, the trustees' president, who is also an attorney. The board, considering her several conditions, acceded to some but challenged others. For example, the trustees voted to grant her access to the mailing list and files, provided that she agree in writing that she would not use them or make them available to anyone else to use for any purpose competitive with the Cocteau's interests. The present board could not, however, guarantee

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the return of files and archival materials and mailing lists should the Cocteau cease operation within five years; the board, according to its president, could not legally bind a future board to such a course, but recommended that any future board allow the return of the files if operation ceased within that time period. The theatre group agreed to cover the health insurance for the remainder of the season. As for Adamson's offer to allow the trustees to continue using the name "Jean Cocteau Repertory," Podell asserted board sovereignty over the name which is, in his opinion, the property of the corporation and not of any individual. If the theater ceased to function, therefore, the name would not automatically revert to its founder, but would be disposed of in the manner seen fit by the operating trustees at that time. Nonetheless, the board recommended that whichever group might be in power during a permanent closing of the theater, the founder should be given the exclusive right to use the Cocteau name. Podell did not agree that any deferral of salary was in the minutes of previous board meetings. But the board did include in the record that it appreciated Adamson's grant of a portion of her salary. Most of all, speaking for the board, Podell stated his appreciation to Adamson for an "artistic force you set and maintained in motion these many years, and for allowing us to work with you to share and support the mission you so brilliantly and unswervingly carried out for so many

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years."[52]

According to Adamson, her agreement to resign resulted from a deep internal search and the presence on her staff of Robert Hupp, someone she thought would make an ideal successor. She has insisted--in interviews with this writer on 28 February 1990 and Mindy Levine of *Theatre Times* on 11 September 1989--that she had been planning to resign for "a while" to "do something different."[53] Furthermore, the resignation of Thomas Fuld from the Board of Trustees on 3 March 1989 (see below) was not ostensibly influenced by Adamson's resignation as artistic director.

Robert Hupp, the associate artistic director, was the person who--according to Adamson--made her option to resign seem feasible.[54] He had come of age in another generation at a time when there were graduate programs in arts management, when it was possible to aspire to a career as an artistic director. When he joined as managing director he was an actor who wanted to learn more about production. "I was willing to exchange my energy and enthusiasm for low pay," he said in an interview with *Theatre Times*. Adamson made him associate artistic director even though NYSCA declined to fund the position.[55]

If NYSCA rejected the special grant for Hupp's salary, it must have nonetheless been impressed with the quality of the application. In this one-time petition for $7,500 toward the salary of an associate artistic director, Eve Adamson

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noted that she now wanted the freedom from the day-to-day artistic management of the theatre and more time to explore the international aspect of the company's work--specifically exchange of artists and productions. She maintained that the Cocteau could flourish only by an infusion (under her continued leadership) of new ideas, new impulses, new vitality. Praising Robert Hupp, she called his career goal to be the artistic director of a theatre, having become managing director of the Cocteau four years prior to the application. According to what Hupp revealed during that interview, Hupp would be assigned the tasks of 1) participating in the selection and planning of the 1988-89 repertory season, acting company, and guests artists, 2) assisting Adamson in the rehearsal process with Adamson's productions and those of guest directors, 3) coordinating production schedules, 4) selecting and directing the new Play Reading Series, and 5) directing one of the seasons' productions. Adamson would be able to let go of some responsibilities, and to refocus and intensify others. Hupp would assume different responsibilities and create with Adamson a new relationship. Adamson called this creation of the position the most important step the Cocteau had taken in many years.[56]

Hupp did not accept the job immediately. He knew what the problems were, but the possibility of running his own theatre at age 29 proved an opportunity he could not reject.

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Hupp maintained that he could not see any radical changes at the current time, but felt his stamp on the theatre would gradually become evident over time. On the one hand he believed that any small theatre needed a clearly defined identity, lest it get lost. Thus, a radical alteration was contraindicated. On the other hand, he had no intention of acting as caretaker, one who simply keeps the flame burning.[57]

Hupp plans to invite outside directors frequently and focus more on the presentation of modern classics--by Brecht, Shaw, and Stoppard, for example. As Mindy Levine pointed out, Hupp was moving into a house that someone else built. He must move around the furniture without destroying the edifice. He must remain loyal to the best parts of the founding vision, but not become curator of a museum.[58]

Bob Hupp felt that one of the biggest turning points in the Cocteau history was Adamson's resignation. According to Hupp, though he had been asked by the outgoing director to take the reigns, that request was merely the end of a process that evolved over a period of time. Hupp, in effect, restated the views he reported to Mindy Levine when that reporter interviewed him for a trade journal, indicating that while he is committed to Adamson's mission, he still had to evolve his own particular feel for the organization. According to Hupp:

> I am not here to keep the theater alive in Eve's memory. I am here to keep the theater moving and

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> growing. Making the transition and holding the company intact is the real job. We lost a few cast members when Eve left, but as I told her, she will always be here to direct as long as she wishes, and she will have reign over the kinds of plays she wants to direct. If she has a project to do, I would find a way to work my plays around it. I want to build eclectic seasons, yet seasons which are cohesive for the company and challenging for the audience. That to me is more important than producting any one particular kind of play. We will see examples of different kinds of plays.
>
> Now you see plays that are rarely done--by Brecht and Kleist and Stoppard and Calderón. The season will feature neglected classics in balance; we must keep the organization afloat. A difference between Eve and me is that I approach theater from a managerial point of view, but Eve is above all a director. That is why she was at the theater and where her interests lie.[59]

Despite the box-office success that the theatre has enjoyed with the matinee series, Robert Hupp shares Craig Smith's pessimism about the value of school productions. His statements, though made several years after the matinee production of *Hamlet*, indicated his philosophy. He said:

> Not even five percent will become real theatergoers. I think it is a huge issue and one that the Cocteau will not solve. There seems to be some lip service paid to arts education on a national level. Seemingly, some more importance is given to arts in the curriculum. When my parents were growing up the theatre played a role in your life, it was something you did. Now you go to movies, have dinner in a restaurant, and the potential audiences of tomorrow--people now high school and college kids--have substituted movies for their emotional charge. You spend entertainment or discretionary dollars doing that, and theatre doesn't occupy the same role as it did twenty years ago. What do theatres do? They go out of business or redefine their approach. We deal with the high-school matinee series to attract kids, basically minority, who have never seen plays in theatres before. Generally they are enthusiastic, and they discuss the plays. I do not think any thing here turns them into theatregoers because we are

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> ourselves like a high school. We play a lesser role than the home in the sophistication of the child.
>
> You cannot capture the energy of a stage production with an edited piece of film. The art of film is so perfect, so manipulative, whereas the charge of theatre is that it is always live and anything can happen. It's just an all-around experience.
>
> We can get more audiences by advertising in art museums and operas, because unlike mailing list notations, those people still want non-movie entertainment. There may be a resurgence of theater. Theater is a social event for most people; they don't go to be challenged. Our audience age has dropped from an average age of 60 down to 35. It is considered trendy to go to the Cocteau. But these schoolchildren are not the ones, for the most part, who remain with the theatre after graduation.[60]

Hupp enjoys directing performances, but does not consider that his primary job. The main job according to Hupp is to build the organization--to keep it strong. He is more interested than Adamson in finding a balance, in producing some plays that are not risky, because the theater had been burdened with a huge operating deficit. When the theatre is on a firmer foundation, Hupp would be willing to take more risks. As if budgetary problems were not great enough, the Cocteau might face the loss of funding from the NEA. Nineteen-ninety was the year that the National Endowment for the Arts was attacked for funding homoerotic and other art considered by some congressmen to cater to prurient interests. The NEA, then, may not be counted upon to contribute the $7,500 to the Cocteau that it had been contributing yearly since 1987. If the representatives from the NEA, upon visiting the theatre, believe that the quality

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of the work is poor, or that the Cocteau propagates homoerotic or pornographic themes, the theater could be denied funding. While no political group has yet accused the Cocteau of staging such works, the trustees have informally addressed the issue among themselves.[61]

Hupp advised, however, that there was no danger that the Cocteau would ever do plays by Neil Simon. Rather, a play like Stoppard's *Travesties*, staged during the 1989-90 season, was an ideal one to present, according to Hupp: a challenging work for the company, and at the same time a guaranteed money-maker for the theater. "That is about as commercial as I would go," said the artistic director. Hupp pointed to the wise decision of his predecessor several years ago when she brought Tennessee Williams and some of his less commercial plays to the Cocteau. This would be the kind of thing Hupp is committed to do--dramas that are challenging and yet at the same time money-making. He pointed to the works selected for the 1990-91 season, inviting any responsible person to find a motivation of crass commercialism: Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken*, Shaw's *Misalliance*, Büchner's *Woyceck* and *Leonce and Lena*, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (especially for school matinees), and Cocteau's *The Infernal Machine*. He would like to stage *Cyrano* but believes the Cocteau stage too small--the limitations of size are the biggest factor in Hupp's determination to move to another location.

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Shortly before Robert Hupp took the reigns of artistic director, Eve Adamson issued a manifesto of the mission of the Cocteau, clarifying, in writing, the identity of this unusual company. She called the artistic identity the product of four elements "which have defined the uniqueness and viability of Jean Cocteau Repertory during its history."

1. Plays. Those classic works of world theatre which by their very nature demand to live on stage, whose breath of life is sustained at one time in one place by actors and audience together;

2. House Style. Clarity, immediacy, and bold simplicity of production: all elements--actors, music, lighting, set costumes, etc.--merging into a unified whole that is stronger than any of its parts;

3. Resident Acting Company. A group of artists working together in one place the year round, committed to classic technique, dramatic risk, and mutual support;

4. Rotating Repertory Format. Two to four plays at any given time performed by the same actors on alternate nights, providing variety and vitality for artists and audience alike.[62]

Robert Hupp did, in fact, make changes in this manifesto during the following year, condensing the manifesto into one sentence (as described later).

Robert Hupp grew up in a small community in West

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Virginia, moved to Delaware, and had no exposure to theatre during his early youth. He attended a small, liberal-arts college in Pennsylvania, Dickinson, and became involved there in the managerial operations of the university theatre. He did not intend to make theater a career at that time, but he continued to major in American Studies and Education. Before leaving for New York he taught American History in a Pennsylvania high school, then decided that before he got "too old," he would work with the National Shakespeare Company Conservatory. This group performed the works of Shakespeare in 41 states. He became their core director and decided then, while still in his twenties, that he could take a chance working as an actor and as a manager. He was a technical director in some summer stock companies and did some directing before arriving to New York. He tried to become familiar with every aspect of the trade so that he could run a prestigious theatre in New York.

When he arrived in New York he had a heavy West Virginia accent, but after years of performing plays of Shakespeare and other classical texts, he had trained the accent completely out of his voice. Two years of study with a voice teacher not only removed the regionalism but gave Hupp a clear, authoritative articulation. Hupp considers the communication of ideas the most important thing he does, and since he prefers communicating verbally to conveying his will on the printed page, his priority was to develop good

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speech. Good speech, in fact, was so important to Hupp that he believes that a deficiency in the skill is the principal obstacle to people's career development.

The best form of advertising, according to Hupp, is the review in the *New York Times*. This is particularly true if the theater, as is the case of the Cocteau, cannot afford anything but the free listings that newspapers and magazines sometimes offer.

Adamson's and Hupp's directing styles are different, as they approach plays differently. According to Hupp, Adamson can work out the design in her head, while he goes into rehearsals with pages of notes--with everything worked out on paper. He considers Adamson more concerned than he with the visual aspects of the staging while she is at the same time in contact with the gut feeling of a play. According to Hupp, Adamson likes plays with great tragic dimensions such as *Macbeth, Life is a Dream,* and *The Three Sisters*, all about the heroic struggle for self-realization. The Radzinsky trilogy would then have been a departure, as those three works were different from the play Adamson was accustomed to direct. On the other hand, Hupp feels more comfortable directing a Brechtian play than Adamson would, since works like *A Man's a Man* play down emotional considerations in favor of political concepts.

He described how he became involved with the Cocteau, calling it a mix between a man with little experience and a

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woman without money. Adamson "needed someone bright enough to learn and willing to work for next to nothing." Adamson was willing to take a chance. As for the belief that there must be a schism between actors and business people, he finds this concept to be an odious prejudice. "Great actors are great and do not need to worry about other aspects of theatre. Great artists tend to be off the wall and hard to deal with, but I am talking about the 95% of us who choose theatre because we're just normal people obssessed by it." Hupp insisted on learning every aspect of theater operation so that he would do sound, light a show--in short, to know about everything.[63]

Hupp shows an understanding of the functions of the trustees and appears to have a high regard for their input. He described the end-of-season board meetings each year when plays are selected as a game. "We say what plays we are going to do, they will look at the budget and say 'We do not think these plays are known, they won't have a big draw, so we will have to cut your budget'. *Life as a Dream* was looked upon as a certain failure, but you really need a crystal ball to predict--it was a sellout show." Next to a good review in the *New York Times*, the artistic director believes in the power of word-of-mouth. People who see one play and never return are unable to gain perspective, according to Hupp. "We want people to see the process of our resident company," he suggested. He cited the 1989-90

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season during which the *Times* visited the Cocteau four times, gave three positive reviews and one highly negative. According to the artistic director, "Wilborn Hampton has liked us as that is why he came down so often: We try to do consistently solid work." He likes the separation between administrative functions and acting to "let the actors act and the administrators administer." Craig Smith used to do press relations, and now he is strictly an actor. To further his vision--a more polished company, a strict separation of administration and acting, and ultimately a decent pay scale for actors, Hupp wants to make his organization a half-million dollar ensemble. Hupp agreed with spending a bit more than in the past for costumes, as he believes more finished costumes gives the impression of a polished troupe.[64]

His artistic vision may be seen partially by his comments on recent plays.

> *Life is a Dream* has universal dimensions, but there is no need to pound the audience over the head with the message. Like Eve, I never approach a play and determine how I want it to affected the audience. By making the play ambiguous, I would want the audience to draw its own conclusions. We keep modern--we avoid museum pieces--by allowing audiences to draw their onw conclusions, to bring their own views to the theatre and draw their own conclusions.
>
> As to my own preference in genres, I enjoy plays that draw on all the devices of staging, taking down the fourth wall where advisable and confronting the audience directly. I consider *Good* a comedy, though it is a heavy play. It is the least funny of the comedies I like, but it has many comic elements in terms of traditional comic staging with specific

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> blocking and timing problems. Comedy is timing. Next year I will be directing some non-comedies, Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken*, for example. I am not so inclined to do English classics--the Shakespeare and Jonson and Congreve route. Eve prefers them.
>
> I would not take just one aspect of a play--like the comic demeanor of *Vanya*--and hammer it out at the expense of other elements. You do a disservice to a playwright by taking a work out of context and forcing something that is not there. Our production of Brecht [*A Man's a Man*] is accessible; the text can speak for itself. I try not to take advantage of the current political climate, and that opens me to criticism from the *Voice* and *Theatre Week*.[65]

Hupp believes that the *Village Voice* dislikes the Cocteau because it considers the company too safe. The *Voice*, in Hupp's estimation, puts too much emphasis on uniqueness for its own sake. But the readership of the *Voice* is aging, Hupp believes, and the paper must be more responsive to the readership by including mainstream projects. Hupp reads the reviews in the *Voice* and finds the critics interested more in turning in a biting, witty review than in looking at what they are seeing. "They want to turn a phrase, to be in the vanguard, the cutting edge; that is why they like P.S. 122 and The Kitchen [two theatres that present avant garde stagings, largely of performance works]," explained the director. Hupp thinks that the paper is not interested in a literate production of a classic that is just that and nothing else. "I would not stage my *A Man's a Man* in Panamanian camouflauge: It isn't my choice," he reported. In any case, Hupp believes that a good review in the *Voice* does not sell any tickets and a bad review

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results in no losses to the Cocteau, since to Hupp, "the *Times* is everything."

He has views on the training of actors, and his opinions are strong and expressed articulately, as in the following quotation:

> Older actors did not study acting. Craig Smith and Harris Berlinsky have been here for 15 years without specialized training. Now all is conservatory. When I came to New York, if you wanted to study theatre you went to a conservatory program. You immersed yourself in a two-year study of the classics and make you flesh out the themes with movement and speech. I look for actors with classical grounding who can move and speak and I chose Joe Menino, Jim Sterling and Angela Vitale. Joe Menino and I were classmates in the conservatory; he is one of my best friends. I respected his acting ability and he joined the Cocteau. I like people who are literate and can talk about things besides theatre. We had three openings last year and had 400 auditions. When we talk about a text we have to bring in factors that require literacy; for example, with *Travesties* you should know there was a winto a theaterorld war on, a Dada movement, all kinds of historical and literary references and milestones and markers. I do not want to sit down with a bunch of stereotypical actors to talk about something they have no clue of.
>
> In *Travesties*, Lyn Wright put together French jokes that Tristan was given in the beginning. She has a knowledge of French and that was helpful to us. And Harris Berlinsky is a history buff who brings in that; Chris Oden is a classics scholar from Yale, and Joe is a seminary students who brings in references. I like people who can bring special perspectives to the theatre. Good actors have good general education, have studied specifics and technicalities of acting. I am not interested in actors who got out of high school and studied at HB Studios for two years. They may have talent that will get them far, but they are not what we are interested in.
>
> I would say: Go to a school in L.A., then come to New York or go to a good conservatory in California or Denver or whatever, and study and find a way to get yourself into a theater--do as many plays as possible. I would discourage students from becoming

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> too academic. I've had people thirty years old who have been in school ten years, finishing an MFA in acting, who have never worked for a company before. Their perception of what a theater is about is misguided. They do not work out. They work in a university environment where there is much money. Here you have to work with little time, make choices and deal with them, take direction. Too much of an academic setting will sap the juices. There is a fine line between being open to knowledge and being too intellectual or able to act.[66]

To an extent, Hupp will need to tailor his choices of play to the actors he has. He would not now consider presenting many O'Neill works, because he feels he is missing the ideal person for this role or that. For *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, he would be "hard pressed to find a Mary Tyrone--maybe Elise [Stone], maybe in a few years, not now." Some more favorites of the artistic director are Shaw (the company performed *Misalliance* to open the 1990-91 season, but Hupp prefers *Geneva*), and believes the O'Neill's more obscure works would be easier to stage than *Long Day's Journey*. He would not produce *The Crucible*, which he considers "too mainstream--good, maybe, for the Roundabout." But he is not against all mainstream works, in fact, finds that his theatre is moving toward more recognizable classics. Otherwise, he affirms, he plans no major departure from Adamson in the sorts of plays attempted.[67]

If there were any ideological differences between Hupp and the managing director, one championing the theater as an art form and one supervising the business staff, one could not

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detect them from their stated positions. David Fishelson, who assumed the post of managing director when Hupp moved up the ladder to the post of artistic director, combined a bent for the arts with a capacity for business. Fishelson was scheduled to pursue and academic career in semiology and film studies, went into the film industry as a production assistant, was on the production management team for NBC television, and made an independent feature film which he sold to American Playhouse called "City News." He then pursued a career as a freelance screenwriter, but when he did not meet with the success for which he hoped, he answered an advertisement in the *Village Voice* for business manager for the Cocteau. He received his business expertise from his mangerial job on television and from producing films.[68]

If Fishelson sought a more commercial inclination for Cocteau selections, his convictions changed after the success of *Life is a Dream* during the 1989-90 season, a play that performed to a full audience each evening. He now believes that the quality of the production and determines its success or failure. He insisted that there is always an audience for good theatre in the metropolitan area. While Fishelson is committed to a theater which mounts plays for those who wish affordable, classical theater, his definition of classical is in accord with that held by Adamson and Hupp: It is not the chronological age of the play that makes

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it a classic, but the scope it embodies. While the term "instant classic" may be an oxymoron, it seems to encompass a work like Stoppard's *Travesties*, one which has universal breadth. Fishelson indicated that doing forgotten or neglected classics is not part of the Cocteau mission, nor does the Cocteau insist on doing rarely performed plays. The mission is simply to perform classics of the world stage, old and new, in rotating repertory. "If the mission is strong, the Cocteau will survive in good times and bad," he believes.[69]

Despite the warnings of the A.R.T. Marketing Survey that indicated possible negative effects from a change of location, the Cocteau continued its pursuit for a new space. One reason for this search is that a Damoclean sword hangs over the troupe's collective heads: the landlord, Honey Waldman, is bound only by a month-to-month lease and can sell the theatre without fanfare. Another is that trustees and staff still favor a physical plant with a larger performance area in a less menacing neighborhood.

One plant that was actively sought by the company in January 1989 was the West Side YMCA on West 63 St. in Manhattan. But Sidney P. Diamond, chair of that board of managers of that building, rejected the Cocteau application for rental space, perhaps because he perceived that the Cocteau would be unable to pay the rent regularly. In a letter to Eve Adamson, Diamond said that the managers

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"recognized the high artistic excellence and community service" of the group but that he "Jean Cocteau Theater Company was not chosen to be the resident theatre company of the West Side YMCA."[70] That note did not end the battle, as both Eve Adamson as artistic director and Robert Hupp as associate artistic director penned a stinging answer, expressing confusion and outrage at the rejection. According to the Cocteau administrators, the YMCA had already selected the Cocteau to be the resident theatre company, while the Cocteau players celebrated the award, and looked forward to bringing an eighteen year track record of classical theatre to the West Side YMCA. This belief was fostered by a note allegedly sent by Jason Schinder and Bruce Vigus, representative of the YMCA management, awarding the space to the Cocteau. Adamson and Hupp, in their letter, called that YMCA staff irresponsible.[71]

Following the abrupt reversal of the alleged offer by YMCA, the Cocteau staff began to feel a sense of urgency. Hupp considered the Bouwerie Lane Theatre undesirable because 1) the theatre was on month-to-month status, 2) imminent increases in rent could occur, 3) the landlord's operating requirements were unpredictable, 4) the patrons felt uneasy walking on the Bowery. Hupp reported that the A.R.T. was most helpful in advising the Cocteau about available space for a new theatre. In February 1988 a ten-year lease was signed with the landlords at 55 Mercer

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Street, a location in the central part of Greenwich Village, in which the Cocteau was to pay a monthly rent of $3,000 commencing January 1989. Because of the early move-in date, the theatre would be responsible for a while for paying two rent bills--an expense not covered in the budget. Also a renovation would cost between $200,000 and $300,000 to convert a two-level space into a functioning theatre. Hupp reported that considerable fundraising efforts were made. He outlined the requests: 1) a $25,000 NYSCA grant, 2) a $16,000 grant from the Department of Cultural Affairs for mechanical systems in Mercer Street, 3) $9,5000 from DCA for general construction, 4) $5,000 from individuals, 5) $3,000 from foundations and corporations, 6) in-kind contributions of chairs and construction services.[72]

Problems quickly arose with the 55 Mercer Street move. Albert Podell notified the trustees in November 1988 that the landlord has permitted the Cocteau to cancel the lease with no penalty other than forfeiture of a $3,000 security deposit. Indebtedness was increasing beyond expectations and the capital campaign showed little inclination to remedy the deficits. The additional rent for the Mercer Street building and the renovation money would not be available. Nonetheless, some trustees feared losing the Bouwerie Lane and ending up without a home. Grants might be lost if the theatre canceled the lease and the money already spent for architects, expediters and licenses would be wasted. Podell

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advised the trustees to be ready at the next meeting to deal with the issues.[73] The evidence of insufficient funds was enough to persuade the trustees at that meeting to cancel the lease.

During the 1988-1989, Adamson's last as artistic director, Adamson earned a salary of $16,500 while Robert Hupp received the same salary. These wages were the same as those paid the previous year. Stewart Russell, the business manager, received $13,000, also frozen from the previous year, while Craig Smith in his role as audience development person (part time) received $3,600, and Gary Helm, the technical director (part time) got $8,500. The NEA granted the theatre $7,500, the DCA another $3,700, while NYSCA donated $42,500. Corporate donations totalled $14,500, foundation another $7,000, and individuals $35,000. Box office revenue was $62,000, an increase of $4,000 over the previous year; subscriptions totalled another $54,620, and the school matinee series was again profitable at $10,080.[74]

Financial pressures continued to be uppermost with the Cocteau, and there is little chance that the theatre would become rich in the future. The barrage of letters to sources of funding continued throughout the 1988-89; trustees were themselves the targets of influence as one can tell from a letter by Albert Podell, president of the managing group, to all trustees. Podell reminded the

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members of the contribution levels they accepted when they accepted membership on the board.

1) Current members are responsible for either donating or causing to be donated two thousand dollars a year to the theatre in cash or in kind;

2) Donations of tangible goods like computers can count, but donation of services, like legal or accounting, do not;

3) Members who join the board after 11 September 1988 must donate two thousand dollars or cause four thousand dollars to be donated in cash or in kind;

4) Members of the same family can be trustees, but the membership and its responsibilities are individual, not familiar;

5) Trustees will be encouraged to make their financial contributions as early as possible in the theatre's fiscal year to help the theatre over the annual early autumn cash-flow drought;

6) One member of the board will be appointed each year to keep track of and solicit contributions from the other trustees;

7) The nominating committee shall be informed of the contribution record of board members and shall be asked to regard this as an important consideration in renomination.[75]

Podell declined to call the financial struggle the alpha and omega of the theatre. According to him,

> Our theatre is immensely prestigious, known throughout the world. We have received grants from

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> foreign governments, and we are respected for our choice of productions, our performance style, our company, and our repertory format. We are actually a popular theatre. We have a greater percentage of loyal returning audience than any other legitimate theatre in New York. The negative spiral into which we have settled is something we have brought on and something we can discard.
>
> Increases in the deficit are caused primarily by an overreliance on earned income. This false step is caused in turn by a desperate need for staff expansion coupled with a reluctance to increase support income goals. If we hire professional staff, and pay them a fair wage, we can reverse our current trend. We need a development director, subscription manager, a living wage for the business manager, and managing director . . . We can do this for $47,000 per year.[76]

Repercussions were felt on the board itself, as members were far from unanimous on the issue of dealing with money crises.

Thomas Fuld, a trustee since 1973, resigned, pledging to continue donating money to the theatre and soliciting contributions from others. He simply did not feel that the money would be raised by way of "endless meetings," but could be promoted through direct requests.[77] In a letter to Albert Podell, with copies to Eve Adamson, Robert Hupp and the members of the board, Fuld held that a vast gulf existed between him and many of the trustees on how best to serve the theatre. According to Fuld, there are three primary duties of each trustee: 1) provide financial guidance in the form of an active, involved and experienced treasurer; 2) raise significant amount of support income for the organization; 3) be openly supportive of "the art" and the

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staff, offering advice and counsel when asked. Fuld felt that the board for many years did not carry out these duties, and that it was too critical of the organization it was empowered to serve.[78]

Shortly thereafter Brian McMahon resigned, for different reasons. McMahon regretted that, "pressing business matters compel my undivided attention and I would not have the time or resources to properly fulfill my board responsibilities."[79] Podell asked the construction executive to reconsider, as McMahon was judged to be very important and valuable to the theatre; Podell admired McMahon's "level head, his open-mindedness, and his thought."[80]

Another trustee, Edmund A. Schwesinger, Jr., expressed his grievances in a letter to Podell, which were not related primarily to the financial condition of the theatre. He felt that the board must do several things to function properly: 1) distribute the agenda well in advance of each conference; 2) have a detailed agenda; 3) list the amount of time anticipated to be spent on each item; 4) have the staff and the executive committee deal with some of the issues before each meeting; 5) limit the time of each meeting to two or three hours. Like Fuld, he believed that too much time was being spent on realtively small items--four hours on one item of about $10,000--that could have been dealt with on a committee level.[81]

Albert Podell conducted an exchange of letters with

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Edmund Schwesinger months later, with notes making suggestions for changes in how the Cocteau did business. Podell found Schwesinger's communiqué "perceptive, sincere and thought-provoking." He expressed a willingness to encompass the suggestions and listed the actions he had taken so far, which included: 1) persuading a public relations official to join the board to affect the way the public perceives the Cocteau; 2) moving to drop "Bouwerie Lane Theatre" on the stationery and mailing pieces (particularly if the theatre were to move shortly) and to change the corporate name from "The Association for the Development of Dramatic Arts Inc." to "Jean Cocteau Repertory Theatre, Inc."; 3) space is a problem but not one as serious as Schwesinger believes. He would let a space committee do the day-to-day work in negotiating; 4) a more detailed agenda would be distributed in the future indicating the amount of time each item might take; 5) the executive committee would not take from the board the powers that in a democracy should spring from the grass roots up. 6) he would not agree that the board was unproductive.[82]

Meanwhile, efforts continued to raise money for the theatre. One representative request was sent by Stewart Russell, managing director, to Gary Smith, contributions chair of Houghton Mifflin Company in Boston. Russell requested a contribution to the Cocteau's 1989-1990 season, calling the Cocteau "one of the few true repertory theatres

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in the United States . . . [having presented] close to one hundred of the world's great plays to over 250,000 people." Russell recalled the major turning points of the organization, e.g. the visit of Williams and the guest-direction by Radzinsky. He noted that the Cocteau had received a citation from the Manhattan borough president for "excellence in the field of theatre and for devoted public service," an Obie award, two Drama Desk nominations, an Outer critics' Circle nomination, a Joseph Maraham Foundation nomination, and six Villager awards. Russell called his audience the best-educated of any New York theatre and asked for $10,000 or more.[83]

Close cooperation with the police is also related to the financial health of the theatre. There is little doubt that the Cocteau audience would be larger if people did not perceive the Bowery as a dangerous neighborhood. Thirty years ago, the district was beset by derelicts, but they were generally older people intoxicated on cheap wine. Nowadays, the less-than-desirable elements are more of a hard-core group addicted to drugs as well as to alcohol, and despite some gentrification, such as the movement of middle-class artists to neighborhood lofts and the presence of restaurants like Phebe's, the ambiance appears menacing to many. In a letter to Captain Gerald McNamara, commanding officer of the ninth precinct police, Stewart Russell thanked the officer for efforts to curb the drug trade. He

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requested the implementation of a plan to keep the corner of Bond Street and Bowery clear before and during performances for the safety and comfort of the audience. He invited the entire staff to a complimentary performance.[84] A follow-up letter was sent by Albert Podell, trustees' president, to Benjamin Ward, then New York City police commissioner. Podell commended Captain McNamara and officers in the ninth police precinct and trusted that there would be continued police pressure to keep the immediate area of the Cocteau clear of derelicts before, during, and shortly after performances.[85]

While theatre patrons do not seem overly pleased about the derelicts surrounding the theatre, few have taken the opportunity to write to the theatre. In fact only one letter is on file doing just that--from a Mr. James J. Sirmans, who did not indicate a date. Sirmans complained:

> Dear Ms. Adamson:
>
> Perhaps you will pass this on to whoever should get this. I am sorry I do not go to the theatre any more because of the bums who work the front of the theater. I go to the theater to be provoked, to be entertained, not to be annoyed and importuned. I am a member of MTC, Playwrights Horizons, and other theatres, and I am a pass holder for the Public Theatre..[86]

Craig Smith, development director, answered as follows:

> I am responding to your letter about the bums. What can I say? It is a reality to life in New York City, and an inescapable reality of life on the Bowery. It is a social problem that affects us all directly. Why pretend it does not exist? Doing classical theater on the Bowery is an incongruous as selling

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> Bibles on Minnesota strip. Sometimes I am amazed we have anyone in the house at all. Let's face it. Our audience does not live in the neighborhood. This makes them more responsive than any other audience in New York. Theatre is becoming an elitist affair in this country. Shakespeare and his groundlings are slowly turning in their graves. We are safe in our need to be provoked or entertained. A little annoyance at where we are living can make the illusion of moving a little more motivating.[87]

Letters praising the theatre outnumber the ones with cavils by about ten to one. One Kevin Connelly advised the Cocteau that "there were only twenty people in the audience enjoying your work. It must be frustrating to work before such small audiences."[88] Betty Buterl of Piscataway, New Jersey, told the staff, "Saw your production of *Nero and Seneca*, thought it was magnificent. I was moved. Bravo."[89] Gladys Brown of Manhattan donated a sound system with an estimated value $1500, and praised the theatre.[90] Richard Goldstone, a professor of English at NYU, asked the Cocteau for a list of plays so that he could escort his fifty drama students to some matinees.[91] Sandra Palazzo, a teacher who escorted youngsters to the theatre for a performance of *Macbeth*, wrote to say "the performance overall was very entertaining and very extraordinary." She wanted the address of Elise Stone, an actress in the company, to compliment her enactment of Lady Macbeth.[92]

One student from John Bowne High School in Flushing, Queens, thanked the theater "for giving me a chance to see such a great play as Shakespeare's play. I never went to see a play in the theatre. Your theatre inspired me to go

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see the plays from now on."[93] And a teacher from St. Mary's High School in Manhasset, Long Island, apologized for leaving before the symposium: "We had to make a 10.20 p.m. train at Penn Station since parents would be waiting at the home station in Manhasset."[94]

The letters on file would easily fill over one hundred pages of text. Some of these were spontaneous. Some, from the school children, may have been "motivated" by their teachers. There were expressions of gratitude from senior citizens' centers, from teachers, from organization of homeless and psychiatric clinics, from subscribers, and from would-be critics who gave rather sophisticated analyses of some works. If each letter were a ten-dollar bill, the Cocteau's financial problems would cease.

The 1989-90 season opened with eleven actors, most with a number of years' experience with the Cocteau. Coral Potter, who, tragically, was to die of lung cancer early in he season, headed the list. This was to be Potter's seventeenth season. Craig Smith had completed fifteen and Harris Berlinsky eleven. Joseph Menino was entering his fifth season, Christopher Oden and Robert Ierardi their third, and those just beginning their Cocteau tenure were Lyn Wright, Angela Vitale, James Sterling and Carol Dearman. Elise Stone, now commencing her fifth season with the Cocteau, was to marry Craig Smith in December 1989.

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The artistic and administrative staff that would oversee the Cocteau's 1989-90 season was fixed at seven members of the artistic staff, seven employees of the administative organization, three production personnel, and fourteen trustees.[95]

The staff at the Cocteau are mentioned in each showbill, which reminds the audience of the mission of the Cocteau--"the presentation of classical theatre by a resident company of actors. As stated above, "attracted by the enduring works of the past and present, the company seeks to create what Cocteau called a 'poetry of the theatre' where all elements of production fuse into a total, cohesive experience." No mention is made of a commitment to neglected classics; however, the percentage of such presentations is high, giving the public ample grounds to say that the emphasis on the neglected is *de facto* part of the mission.[96]

The following were staged during the 1989-90 season:

1989-1990

08/31/89-11/09/89	*The Importance of Being Earnest*	Oscar Wilde
10/06/89-01/21/90	*Travesties*	Tom Stoppard
11/16/89-02/02/90	*Life is a Dream*	Calderón de la Barca
01/27/90-04/06/90	*A Man's a Man*	Bertolt Brecht
03/15/90-05/04/90	*Prince of Homburg*	Heinrich von Kleist
04/28/90-05/27/90	*The Stronger*	August Strindberg
05/03/90-05/27/90	*The Night of the Tribades*	P. Olov Enquist

While some trustees did not think the time was ripe for a revival of Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the

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play is a favorite of the artistic director, Robert Hupp. Hupp had determined to present Wilde's comedy in rotating repertory format with Stoppard's *Travesties* because of the unusual tie-in of the modern British playwright's comedy with the nineteenth century classic. In the latter drama, there is a play within a play sequence which features a scene from *Earnest*. Similarly, to end the season, Hupp decided on a tie-in sequence, but in this case he would would stage a double-header or two plays in a single evening. Enquist's *Night of the Tribades* is a play about Strindberg's problems with women--and men, too--and the Enquist work is, in effect, a rehearsal of Strindberg's company for a Danish presentation of *The Stronger*. (*The Night of the Tribades* was performed by one other theatre in New York City, the Helen Hayes, opening 13 October 1977.)[97]

Hupp began imprinting his stamp on the players from that first full season. The artistic director had asked Eve Adamson to guest-direct *Life is a Dream* which, according to the founder of the company, is one of her favorite works.

Conceding the importance of good reviews from the *New York Times*, the company presented *The Importance of Being Earnest* for the first time since the 1974-75 season.

Robert Perillo guest-directed the production, and his interpretation of Wilde's comedy, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, was a heavy-handed one. He somehow coaxed a camp production since he believes that *Earnest* had been done so

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many times by so many theatres that he must change the generally-accepted ambiance for a touch of originality. Lady Bracknell was performed "in drag" by John Menino, and the role of Jack Worthing was played by Christopher Oden with a mouth full of muffins rather than in the dainty way in which he is generally considered. According to Fuld, the production did not realize the light touch demanded by Wilde for *Earnest*.[98]

While Wilborn Hampton, the reviewer for the *New York Times* now assigned to the Cocteau on what is apparently a permanent basis, was pleased with the season, he was not enraptured by this *Earnest*. Hampton found that the company presented the work as though it were a silly comedy of manners, thus "falling prey to the very earnestness Wilde ridicules."[99]

The playgoers seeing Stoppard's *Travesties* shortly after *Earnest* would gain the full benefit of the rotating repertory concept. Since Stoppard's play is woven directly onto the framework of Wilde's Tzara and Carr, for example, being direct stand-ins for Jack and Algernon, to have some knowledge of *Earnest* is helpful to the understanding of the challenging *Travesties*. The second presentation of the season, then, was Stoppard's comedy, opening in October 1989. Featured were Harris Berlinsky as Henry Carr (who delivers a fifteen-minute monologue at the opening curtain), Christopher Oden as Tristan Tzara, the founder of Dada,

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Joseph Menino as James Joyce, James Sterling as Lenin, and--repeating their roles from the Wilde play, Carol Dearman and Lyn Wright continued as Gwendolen and Cecily.

Hupp showed his creative talents early in his career in the top slot of the company by adding personal touches to the script. The most noteworthy was his use of numerous reverse walks by Harris Berlinsky (in the role of Henry Carr) each time the old man's mind went blank. Many in the audience found the play difficult to follow because of its linguistic complexities.

Hampton praised Hupp, the director, for some flourishes of his own invention. For what Stoppard calls the time slips of Carr's memory in which a scene reverses itself and starts over, Hupp inverted the lighting and had the characters waddle rapidly backward to their starting marks. Hampton called the effect "like pressing the rewind/search button on a VCR to back up the action." The critic for the *Times* concluded that the play is very clever nonsense and that the Cocteau production is worth a trip to the Bowery.[100] Eugene Paul's review for *Town & Village* was, in a way, more informative, as it warned the prospective audience not to let the mind wander for the tiniest moment for "all is lost. It takes every bit of your minding to follow Stoppard's meanderings." He appreciated particularly the performance of Christopher Oden as Tristan Tzara, the man whose "art belongs to Dada," and praised Hupp's direction, with its

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"muscular crispness and verve. He keeps his players dancing literally and figuratively. . . . The remarkable Jean Cocteau Repertory continues to ornament the New York theatre scene."[101]

Irene Backalenick reviewed the Stoppard play for the *Westport News*. She called the Cocteau one of her favorite theatres, a place that "proves that flowers can bloom among broken wine bottles, men's shelters, and piles of trash . . . an organic unit that creates first-rate productions." Her review includes the advice to theatergoers to take an easy subway ride from Grand Central Station to Astor Place, but to take a cab back after the show.[102] Still another reviewer reminded the readers of the aims of *Travesties*, which are both to lampoon *The Importance of Being Earnest* and to make a mockery of the great artistic and political revolutions of the 20th century. In fact, reported Cynthia Melia, Carr's dismissal of Joyce's poetry is a disparagement of Stoppard's own passion for wordsmithing. And while she called Cecily's costume marvelous and appropriate and Christopher Oden's acting impressive, she found the play tedious whenever Harris Berlinsky (as Carr) was on the stage alone.[103]

The very choice of *Travesties* pleased trustee Thomas Fuld greatly, who presumed that the Stoppard work was probably not the kind of play that Eve Adamson would have chosen but that Hupp, in selecting it, in no way contravened the Cocteau mission.[104]

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Hupp's apparent penchant for plays of the late nineteenth century and of our own was displayed by his next choice, Brecht's *A Man's a Man*, a political entertainment which demonstrates the power that a role plays on the person holding it. In *A Man's a Man*--which enjoyed a presentation by the Cocteau beginning in January 1990--Brecht shows Galy Gay's *volte face* when soldiers, persuading the poor man to dress in military attire and "temporarily" take someone's place in the lineup, transform the fish customer into a fighting machine.

According to Hupp, Craig Smith, as Tiger Five, showed his flexibility by filling the role of a man who became sexually excited during thunderstorms with such abandon that audience members might truly fear his stomping off the stage on the offensive. In the subtle role of Galy Gay, Joseph Menino, carried himself like the cipher he was expected to be, and showed his other, far more aggressive, side when accepted as a member of the British army. Despite the minimalism of production values, the production design made use of motion picture film taken by the Cocteau staff to punctuate the events on stage, as authorized by Brecht.

With the apparent end of the Cold War shortly before the presentation, Alisa Solomon of the *Village Voice* predicted an avalanche of Brechtian plays by all types of theater organizations who "now need not fear censure from Jesse Helms or other conservatives." Solomon, who in the past was

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not favorable to Cocteau presentations, again showed her displeasure by calling Hupp's direction academic: "Hupp puts the obligatory scene title on the video screen . . . that's hardly enough to achieve a contemporary critical edge. Worse, the actors scream, pose, stare at the audience, speak in the exaggerated tones of bad kiddy TV."[105] But as much as Solomon was dispassionate, Hampton was ardent. The critic for the *New York Times* called the revival by the Cocteau "enthusiastic . . . discourses on the dual nature in each of us." He called Craig Smith "viciously comic" and Elise Stone "solid."[106]

The Prince of Homburg, presented in repertory with *A Man's a Man* as the fifth work beginning in March 1990. Staged once before--at the Chelsea Theatre at the Brooklyn Academy of Music opening 19 December 1976--[107] *Prince* also has a political dimension, embodying a conflict between the law and individuality. Harris Berlinsky was pleased with the Cocteau presentation, noting, by way of overview, that under the direction of a guest, David Herskovitz, *The Prince* was staged in the neo-classical style with actors facing the audience at all times--the French way: "We would come out, say a line, make a left face and exit. Everyone had an exact place to move; this is difficult to do and also very rewarding, something different. The audience gets a sense of a different kind of theater."[108] Craig Smith disagrees that *Prince* was done in the neo-classical style and warned,

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with a smile, "Whenever Harris talks about blocking, don't bother listening."[109]

Hampton called the Cocteau presentation "solid . . . What is valuable for us today is the dramatic poetry ruminating about life and death. The Cocteau is faithful to the spirit of German Romanticism."[110]

Hupp explained his decision to hand *Prince* over to a guest director despite his own liking for political plays. He is opposed to directing more than two plays per season. The young man interviewed showed him that he and the subject liked the same kind of theatre. Hupp was intrigued by the man's background--he studied with Robert Brustein in Boston and was Richard Foreman's assistant for a couple of years. His policy on the number of plays the artistic director should handle each year is this: "While you direct, that's all you can do. Two is plenty."[111]

In a *New York Times* feature article, Wilborn Hampton described some of the delights of the off-off Broadway circuit, calling the Cocteau one of the two leading off-off Broadway companies--along with the Pearl Theater--that are devoted to the classics. Said Hampton:

> The Cocteau is one of the few resident companies, along with the Repertorio Español, that perform an actual repertory schedule. The Cocteau is now in its 19th season after its founder, Eve Adamson, decided to risk her savings on a very chancy whim.
>
> This year is a boom for the Cocteau. The average house has increased from about 75 percent capacity to about 95 percent. Mr. Hupp has expanded the theater's outreach program and for the first time the

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> company is taking its productions directly to the schools. Last season Mr. Hupp auditioned more than 400 actors for three openings in his 12-member company.[112]

The final presentation--which typically takes place in May and is decided upon about one month previous--was a staging of two plays in tandem, each possessing a clear relationship to the other. Hupp was eager to challenge Elise Stone by casting her in a monologue as the person who is, autobiographically, Strindberg's wife, in the Swedish playwright's *The Stronger*. At the same time, Hupp continued to the end of the season displaying the theme of plays with tie-ins by selecting Enquist's *The Night of the Tribades* (which dramatizes a rehearsal of *The Stronger* by its author). For the first play, Elise Stone handled the demanding role of Strindberg's wife, revealing her intense envy of a younger woman who had had an affair with her playwright husband. Per Olov Enquist's, *Tribades* dramatized a rehearsal directed personally by Strindberg in Denmark. The plays received no reviews from the daily press, but one paper, read by high-school drama teachers (and edited by the author of this dissertation)--*Humanities News*--reported that the twin bill was "strong theater; moving didactic, raucous, quiet, compassionate, inhumane, sardonic, ingenuous," and celebrated the performance of the Enquist play as one that "often reaches the heights of lyricism and tenderness."[113]

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The season was the Cocteau's most lucrative. Asked for reasons that the house sold out most of its performances, David Fishelson, the managing director, attributed the good fortune to a momentum created by a single solid presentation. He agreed with Hupp that the *New York Times* is the principal newspaper of audience members, and that a good review will sell no small number of tickets to those who are not subscribers. As for percentages, Fishelson determined that thirty to forty percent of the house is sold by subscription, and most of the remainder at the box office. Senior citizens' centers and institutions have blocks of tickets set aside for them regardless of the success in selling seats. "The Cocteau makes seats available to people on fixed incomes. I think they seem to be knowledgable theatergoers for the most part, though many are without a broad knowledge of the theatre in general," he maintained.[114]

For the season Robert Hupp, artistic director, was paid $24,000, a substantial increase over the artistic director's salary during the previous year of $16,500, while the managing director, David Fishelson received $20,000, an annual increase of $3,500. Julie Bleha, business manager, received the sum of $18,000 while Craig Smith, serving as part-time audience developer got $3,600.

During the 1989-90 season, the box office brought in $56,000 in receipts, down from $62,000 the year before.

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Subscribers paid $55,000, and the matinee series, profitable as usual, earned $15,680 for the Cocteau. NYSCA contributed $37,500, the NEA another $7,500 and the Department of Cultural Affairs added $5,000. Rental fees were $41,000 for the Bouwerie Lane, with various other tolls such as the services of a janitor bringing the amount to $66,100. The theatre paid $6,000 in liability insurance.

A tragic note that was struck during the 1989-90 season was the death of Coral Potter, who had been the senior actor with the company, having joined the Cocteau during its second year at the storefront location. He had not taken part in any of the productions that year because of his illness, and died of lung cancer at St. Vincent's Hospital on 25 January 1990. The biographical sketch in the *New York Times* noted that Potter had been a member of the resident acting company since its second season in 1972, with credits including *The Golem, The Duchess of Malfi, Waiting for Godot, The Cenci, Hamlet, Ghosts, Twelfth Night, A Midsummer NIght's Dream, Rhinoceros* and *Volpone*. He was also the company's business manager for five years and performed with a number of summer-stock companies. In the 1960s Potter acted Off Broadway under the stage name George Walden and was a Turkish interpreter for the Army.[115]

According to Thomas Fuld, trustee, the Cocteau received a great many letters of sympathy, some subscribers talking of their memories of his performances. Fuld said, "It's

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good to have a theatre that creates such an atmosphere of intimacy."[116]

Albert Podell, president of the board of trustees, attended the memorial services and announced the creation of a special memorial fund in Coral Potter's name to be used to lend money to cast members who are confronted with emergencies requiring immediate financial aid such as the need to fly home to visit a sick parent. Podell donated $500 to the fund and asked the trustees to make an extra contribution besides their yearly bestowals.[117]

The Cocteau's 1990-91 season was dedicated to Potter's memory.

Having completed his first full year as the Cocteau's artistic director, Hupp issued to the trustees an outline of his goals and plans. He reported strong morale in all division of the theatre, a clearing of fiscal deficit, and a constructive and effective working environment at the Bouwerie Lane Theatre. Hupp reported to the trustees at its last meeting of the season on 4 June 1990 that he would present the great plays of all time in a fresh light, particularly those that are rarely performed, but whose ideas demand attention. He would also utilize those that are suited to the structure of the company. He favors those plays that are meaningful, poetic, timely, capable of successfully casting, challenging for the company, suited to the guest directors and designers, not produced in other

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locations, new plays of classic scope, unproduced plays, and new translations of known works. Hupp alluded to Jean Cocteau's concept of the "poetry of the theatre" in which each element should blend into one force. He stated that actors who work with each other over a period of time would be capable of more depth on the stage. (Craig Smith, however, believes a yearly turnover of 25% annually would benefit the company by bringing in new blood, as he indicated in an interview on 17 June 1990.)[118]

Hupp stressed that the season is more important than any particular production, and that a potential patron should ask "What is the Cocteau doing tonight?", rather than "Where's that Stoppard play?" The artistic director is aware of the limitations of rotating repertory, which are 1) inadequate storage space for sets of dormant productions, 2) limited lighting resources, 3) an extra hour's time for each actor in mounting the sets. He would rotate two productions at the same time instead of the traditional three. Hupp did not alter the mission, but added rehearsal days to each production beginning with the 1989-90 season. Opening dates would have to be advanced thereby. He has persuaded skilled designers and technicians to work with the theatre though they would not get wages according to scale; this should improve the physical look of the stage. Hupp warned that long-time company members tend to get lazy and new members tend to be green. To correct the former he brought

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instructors to the theatre to work with the resident company. In 1989 a voice coach was added, in 1990 a movement instructor is planned. He would also seek out guest directors with perspectives different from his own. Hupp will add a play in late spring with an open run based on box office appeal. He also seeks to employ a college campus for a summer training program--perhaps his alma mater, Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.[119]

The dilemma of finding a space had relaxed, though the Cocteau still did not have more than a month-to-month lease at the Bouwerie Lane Theatre. Hupp called a move inevitable when conditions are right, and considers the Cocteau future not to be on the Bowery. Priorities include increasing compensation for the actors (though morale was high due to friendly, full houses in 1989-90 and increased press attention). Restoring hot water to the dressing rooms after ten years was deemed good for morale, too. The stage was partially rebuilt. Hupp believes first-year actors must receive more than their current $1.40 per hour and senior members should make more than $3.47 an hour. This problem might be addressed by a grant from the NEA (National Endowment for the Arts), as the low pay is also looked on with disfavor by funding sources. Minority participation must be increased; Hupp expects to accomplish this in time for the 1990-91 season. He summarizes his concerns thus:

1. Reduce the deficit;

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2. Increase actors' pay;

3. Increase minority participation on the board and at the theatre;

4. Relocate to a secure space--a long-range project;

5. Increase artistic excellence;

6. Create an endowment fund.

Hupp also plans to increase his own professional background by seeing the work of other directors, arranging for observerships at other theatres outside New York, pursuing additional training at the graduate level and seeking outside directing projects. He did not expect the arrival of his first child in July 1990 to interfere with his responsibilities.[120]

When the trustees met on 4 June 1990 in the Time-Life building, they were apprised of the roster of plays to be staged; a few weeks later, a definite timetable was distributed. These works had begun to be staged during the 1990-1991 season:

1990-1991

09/07/90-11/25/90	*Misalliance*	G.B. Shaw
10/21/90-02/01/91	*Infernal Machine*	Jean Cocteau
11/30/90-03/30/91	*When We Dead Awaken*	Henrik Ibsen
02/08/91-05/16/91	*Leonce and Lena*	Georg Büchner
	Woyzeck	
04/05/91-05/26/91	*Julius Caesar*	W. Shakespeare
05/23/91-06/02/91	*The Emigrants*	Slawomir Mrozek

Hupp would direct two of the above, Eve Adamson two others, and a guest director would be hired to do the fifth play. *Julius Caesar* was considered a particular favorite

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with drama teachers on the high-school and junior-high-school levels; the Shakespearean work would be directed by Eve Adamson along with *When We Dead Awaken*.

The 1990-91 season featured returning members Craig Smith, Harris Berlinsky, Joseph Menino, Grant Neale, Elise Stone, and Angela Vitale. New members joining the Cocteau were Mark Waterman and David Cheaney, with Jeanne Demers reporting back after an absence of two years. Pascale Roger and Keith Cobb appeared as guest actors during the first part of the season. Giles Hogya returned as resident lighting designer and Jonathan Bixby and Gregory Gale as resident costume designers.

Three major changes were made on the administrative staff. While Robert Hupp and David Fishelson continued to serve as artistic director and managing director respectively, Julie Bleha was promoted to assistant to the artistic director, while Harold A. Mulanix replaced Ms. Bleha as general manager.

The annual application for a NYSCA Grant (which is generally about $30,000) showed that the Cocteau was continuing its senior citizen complimentary ticket program in which each week 10 to 45 tickets are distributed to seven neighborhood senior citizen agencies; the school matinee series would continue, with fourteen performances to be presented at the Bouwerie Lane Theatre for high school students. Pre-performance study guides would be sent to

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participating teachers, and the inner-city touring project would be added allowing the company to take the work into neighborhoods that are traditionally neglected by New York theatres. (During the season 1988-1990 the Cocteau had taken productions to the student body of Bronx Community College.) Post-performance symposia would continue.[121]

Audience figures were averaging 95% of theatre capacity (up from 75% in 1988-89), the subscriber base had grown from 1100 to 1270, the fundraising campaign had surpassed budgeted goals, corporate and foundation contributions were up 35%. New corporate sponsors were added during 1989-90 including American Express and New York Telephone. Overall income growth during the 1989-1990 season had reduced the deficit by nearly 40%. A telemarketing associate would be added during 1990-91 to expand subscriber rolls.

The space problem did not disappear. While the artistic director believes that the pressure of unstable tenure has dissipated, the company could still be evicted with a few weeks' notice. The "crack" epidemic was making a move more pressing than ever, as indicated by a letter by the trustees' president to Philip Eisenberg, a subscriber, requesting a contribution. Podell stated that despite the accolades of critics, the theatre is in danger because it is on the corner of "reputedly the busiest crack-dealing corner in Manhattan south of 100th Street." Podell informed the potential contributor that the theatre was the victim of two

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major break-ins during the past year, in which thieves stole props, costumes, petty cash and computers, forcing the theatre to spend thousands of dollars on gates and bars. Potential subscribers have been frightened by the "constant presence of this sordid element on our corner and the disquieting sight of drug deals transacted on our doorstep and addicts shooting up and lighting up a few feet from our stage door." Podell is determined to move to a safer location or, if necessary, to remain on the Bowery with brighter lights and burglar alarms. He offered a pair of complimentary subscriptions to each contributor who gave more than $250.[122]

Robert Hupp is not unaware of the difficulties. In fact he presented to the trustees a clear, step-by-step analysis of the space problems, calling the need to relocate a pressing one, because of the lack of any lease on the Bouwerie Lane Theatre. While the landlord, Honey Waldman, recognizes that the theatre company may remain, that understanding "is not recognized by our auditors, our bank, or our funders, especially NYSCA." Hupp claims that 90% of unrenewed subscribers identified fear of the neighborhood as the primary reason for ending their subscriptions. He would have liked the move to occur during June or July of 1990, but with an understanding that the company could remain at least until December 1990, as "it would be impossible to move at other times as we are in performance 9 months of the

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year." He would like to move to a church, a loft, a restaurant, or some other location--calling the most enviable spaces in the New York theatre circuit to be La Mama Annex and CSC, on East Fourth Street and East Thirteen Street respectively. He would prefer to rake the audience seats rather than the stage, and to have seating on three sides of the performing area. The audience, in Hupp's view, would be willing to continue subscribing so long as there were convenient subway accessibility. A two hundred seat house would be ideal, according to the artistic director, since according to him, "We now play to an average 75-80% capacity of the current 140 seat limit . . . . When a show is a hit, we'll sell out for three weeks after a good *New York Times* review. The matinee series would be bolstered as we often turn away groups because of limited seating." Nor would Hupp rule out a shared location, such as participating in a consortium of theatres to move into the ATA space on 53rd Street in Manhattan. He favors a ten-year lease over owning the space, because of a lack of resources.[123]

Some trustees filed suggestions. Brian McMahon, an executive with a construction company--who withdrew his resignation from the board of trustees at the request of Podell--proposed ideas such as 1) selling seats for a high sum as some municipal stadiums now do, 2) buying the space at 9% interest, with which the theatre might be able to borrow $666,000, and 3) asking the subscribers for their

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preferences.[124] As of September 1990, there had been no resolution of the space problem. The Cocteau opened its twentieth season on 7 September 1990 at the Bouwerie Lane Theatre.

The 1989-1990 season, then, was a dramatic one both on the stage and off. Eve Adamson, the founder and artistic director from 1971-1989 resigned after repeated skirmishes with the trustees, and Robert Hupp, who had been managing director and associate artistic director was named as her successor. Hupp pledged to continue the Cocteau mission, which consists, *de jure*, of presenting works with universal values both modern and old, and *de facto* of emphasizing those works which have been neglected--perhaps because of flaws--but which contain redeeming features. There are indications that Hupp will pursue new real estate for the theatre more aggressively than his predecessor and that he will be somewhat more open to bringing in new blood, keeping the old blood alert and flowing, and inviting outside directors and designers to show their mettle. Hupp had received the steady support of Adamson in his rise to the top job and is likewise committed to his mentor, whom he has invited to direct two shows in the forthcoming season.

Artistically, the 1989-90 season was one of the company's best, as newspapers from the *New York Times* to the *Westport (Connecticut) News* praised the majority of productions. Only the *Village Voice* demurred, having bestowed its

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imprimatur on Cocteau productions perhaps but two or three times in the theater's history. Alisa Solomon proclaimed the Brecht presentation "like kiddie TV," while in the newspaper far more important from the box-office standpoint, Wilborn Hampton of the *New York Times* summarized the season as a "boom year."

The plays were chosen by the artistic director, but Hupp specifically included one of Adamson's favorite dramas, Calderón de la Barca's *Life is a Dream*, and assigned her the task of guest-directing. Hupp demonstrated his creativity of choice also by pairing, in rotating repertory, Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* with Tom Stoppard's *Travesties*, the latter reflecting on the former in a play-within-a-play format. Similarly, he paired Strindberg's *The Stronger* with Enquist's *Night of the Tribades*. Finally, Brecht's play was paired with one on a similar theme by Kleist.

The two-year collection of plays indicates balance: the symbolist mysticism of Claudel's *Break of Noon* vs. the alienation effects of *A Man's a Man;* the searing political commentary of *Good* vs. the near-farcical lightness of *Travesties;* the blood and gore of *Macbeth* and *Venice Preserv'd* countered by the elegant sophistication of *The Importance of Being Earnest;* the inward torment of the title characters of *The Three Sisters* and the hellish residents of *No Exit*, played against the courage of the title character

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in *Antigone*. Subscribers are apparently seduced year after year by the prospect of such singular fare. The New York theatre community awaited with interest and enthusiasm the twentieth consecutive season of unusual fare--works both neglected and celebrated by Ibsen, Shaw, Shakespeare, and Büchner: and one work of the twentieth-century Renaissance-man, Jean Cocteau.

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CHAPTER EIGHT: Notes

1. Association of Resident Theatres, marketing survey of Cocteau audiences, April-October, 1988.

2. A more complete summary of the data appears in this note.

A. The study confirmed that regular ticket buyers comprised only 13% of the audience. This group was too small (45) for reliable analysis, as there was no group to offer contrast. But these results were found: a) The more frequent attenders were TDF voucher users, but 68% of this group and 65% of non-subscribers received TDF mailings. Thus they can be reached via the TDF lists; b) The more frequent patrons are lovers of theatrical values (poetry, language, unusual stagings, historical insights of the play, and the presence of a star); c) All groups agreed that the Cocteau produced thought-provoking plays about important issues. But those who attended most frequently were also interested in the theatrical values mentioned above.

B. The Cocteau is heavily dependent on Brooklyn and Queens residents, so that moving too far uptown could result in a loss of much of the audience, perhaps even 36%. Half of that number can be lost by a change in venue. While Cocteau subscribers are attracted by classics, revivals, and generally, in strong dramas with rich language, an even more important reason for their loyalty is their sense of belonging to the Cocteau family.

C. The Cocteau should continue to build outer borough connections, to look for a new location that will not alienate this group, and to strengthen ties to subscribers in Manhattan.

D. The Cocteau newsletter is useful in maintaining ties to subscribers. More biographical and topical information about the staff and cast could build even stronger bonds.

E. Older people are becoming a larger than average share of the audience. They prefer to recapture their past with classics and revivals. A younger audience have more catholic tastes, but older audiences attend more frequently.

F. Donors are motivated by a sense of being close to the Cocteau family (as stated above) and by a desire for special recognition (such as preferential seating).

G. The current audience, when compared with that of the 1981 survey a) is older, with half over 60, b) is very well educated; c) is less likely to come from the outer boroughs; d) has grown in income; e) has higher adjusted incomes than the 1981 group.

H. Subscribers--when contrasted with single-ticket buyers--a) are generally married, over 40, higher incomed with better educations; b) come largely (42%) from the outer

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boroughs; c) choose Cocteau for thought-provoking plays, flexibility of dates, professional productions, interesting theater risks and seeing the same actors in different plays; d) would like newsletters with more information on the actors' outside lives.

I. Single-ticket buyers, when contrasted with subscribers--a) are younger, single, less educated (though still well educated); b) tend to live in Manhattan; c) enjoy the unique aspects of a repertory company; d) are more attracted to comedies but also like thought-provoking plays with political, moral and philosophical dimensions, and do not hold subscriptions to other theatres; e) do not read newsletters (only 15% of single-ticket buyers do); f) prefer weekend performances preferably at 7.30 p.m. but can be motivated to weekday performances with discounts.

J. Concerning donors: a) 20% of subscribers have donated, 60% when renewing subscriptions, 30% after a theater speech; b) are likely to be older, married men with higher incomes and educations, c) are likely to come from Brooklyn and New Jersey; d) are avid newsletter readers; e) want special treatment like seats in the first or first three rows; f) might like "insider" nights to talk with the cast.

K. Frequent single-ticket buyers a) attend Second Stage, Symphony Space, WPA if they are also frequent Cocteau buyers; b) attend American Place, Circle Rep., ELT, MTC, Playwrights Horizons, Public Theatre if moderate Cocteau-goers; c) tend to be older single women with lower incomes; d) are more concerned with theater values like poetry and language, avant-garde stagings, whereas moderate single-ticket buyers prefer plays about issues.

L. By age, subscribers and single-ticket buyers a) are older than in the 1981 survey; b) want to catch up on their past if in the 60-and-over group, thus favoring revivals, particularly of old-fashioned musicals by established playwrights; c) prefer the avant-garde if under 40 years of age, are more likely to be single and female, and not as likely to have higher incomes; d) go less often, if young, with those 40-59 going to the Beaumont, Playwrights Horizons, and MTC--while older groups go more to La Mama, WPA, Pan Asian and Westbeth; both patronize the Public, Roundabout and Circle Rep. with high frequency; e) are more likely, if young, to learn about plays through word of mouth or newspapers. The older group are more likely to respond to mailings.

M. Patrons of modern Eastern European plays and classics a) are generally married and female; b) are interested in seeing plays before they are popular, in discussing plays with the cast, and prefer flexible repertory scheduling; c) have a high interest in rich language and avant-garde stagings; d) prefer strong dramas, philosophical plays, and poetic plays.

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N. Specific issues: a) the newsletter--is read by older, better-educated men and makes people feel they are part of the family, b) seating preferences--the first 3 rows tend to be married females; c) patrons--willing to pay $20-plus for off-Broadway--they are higher incomed, middle-aged people from the Upper East Side, are not TDF recipients, like strong dramas, particularly the classics, and revivals of unusual plays. They prefer older to newer plays.

O. Mailings a) are received by teachers, who are 27% of the mailing list, b) should continue to focus on teachers.

P. Frequent visitors to Cocteau a) are more willing to come on weekdays and prefer to sit in rows 3 through 7; b) are not attracted as much as the frequent visitors are by theater values, and therefore newsletters should emphasize unusual stagings; c) are less attracted to comedies than less frequent visitors.

3. Mervyn Rothstein, "Rising Rents Threaten Theater Companies," *New York Times*, 12 January 1989, C19.

4. Sari Weissman, president, Alliance of Resident Theatres, telephone interview with the author, New York City, 13 November 1990.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Audrey Herbst, "Theater is Poetry at Jean Cocteau Repertory," *Washington Square News*, 10 October 1988, 8.

8. Billy Rose Division.

9. Eve Adamson, interview with the author, New York City, 28 February 1990.

10. John Bowen, "Theatre," *New York Native*, 17 October 1983, 37.

11. Wilborn Hampton, "Flesh vs. Spirit in a Play by Claudel," *New York Times*, 1 October 1988, 15.

12. Victor Gluck, "*Break of Noon*," *Back Stage*, 30 September 1988, 17.

13. Howard Kissel, "*Noon* Light Casts Elusive Shadows," *New York Daily News*, 4 October 1988, 47.

14. Simon Saltzman, "*Break of Noon*," *The Record*, 30 October 1988, 24.

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15. Eugene Paul, *Break of Noon* Revived at Bouwerie Lane Theatre," *Town and Villager*, 6 October 1988, 26.

16. Erika Munk, "Old Times," *The Village Voice*, 4 October 1988, 97.

17. Craig Smith, interview with the author, New York City, 27 February 1990.

18. T.H. McCulloh, "Autumn Theatre in New York: A Season of Various Hues," *Drama-Logue*, 10-16 November 1988, 23.

19. Berlinsky interview, 21 March 1990.

20. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

21. Simon Saltzman, "Theatre," *The Record*, 30 October 1988, 18.

22. Eugene Paul, "*Venice Preserv'd* at the Bouwerie Lane," *Town and Villager*, 1 December 1988, 19.

23. Wilborn Hampton, "A Restoration Tragedy," *New York Times*, 27 October 1988, C1.

24. Adamson interview, 28 February 1990.

25. Wilborn Hampton, "Sadness as Life Slips By in Chekhov," *New York Times*, 24 January 1989, C5.

26. Gerard Raymond, "Moscows on the Hudson, *The Three Sisters*", *Theatre Week*, 23 December 1988, 26.

27. Jerry Tallmer, "Rediscovering Chekhov," *New York Post*, 9 December 1988, 40.

28. Craig Smith, interview with the author, New York City, 18 June 1990.

29. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

30. Elenore Lester, "*Good*--Spirited, Amusing, and Powerful," *The Jewish Week*, 17 February 1989, 25.

31. Joseph S. King, "It Seems to Me," *Independent Voice* (Long Beach, New York), 13 April 1989, 8.

32. Richard Laermer, "Good Theater, Good Timing," *New York Press*, 24 February 1989, 37.

33. Wilborn Hampton, "A Rising Nazi's Fall As Bad Parades as Good," *New York Times*, 25 February 1989, C3.

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34. Eugene Paul, "Cocteau Repertory's *Good*, About a Nazi Collaborator," *Town & Village*, 9 March 1989, 19.

35. This quote from John Simon is but one more example of the hyperbole in which press agents extol their productions. In that very review, Simon declared that the Cocteaulians were hopeless incapable of realizing these plays.

36. David Fishelson, Business Manager, letter to schools and colleges, September 1988.

37. Eugene Paul, "*Macbeth* at Cocteau Repertory,". *Town & Village*, 30 March 1989, 17.

38. Billy Rose Division.

39. Mindy Levine, "The Changing of the Guard," *Theatre Times*, August-September 1989, 1-4.

40. Adamson interview, 27 February 1990.

41. James B. Nichols, trustee, interview with the author, New York City, 31 May 1990..

42. Nichols interview, 31 May 1990.

39. Nichols interview, 31 May 1990.

40. Nichols interview, 31 May 1990.

41. Leabo interview, 31 May 1990.

42. Chaunce Skilling, interview with the author, New York City, 14 March 1990.

43. Skilling interview, New York City, 14 March 1990.

44. Skilling interview, New York City, 14 March 1990.

45. Eve Adamson, letter to Albert Podell, 10 October 1988.

46. Albert Podell, edited version of a letter by Steward Russell, 19 August 1988.

47. Albert Podell, president, board of trustees, letter to Eve Adamson 12 October 1988.

48. Nichols interview, 31 May 1990.

49. Craig Smith, interview with the author, New York City, 18 June 1990.

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50. Eve Adamson, letter to Albert Podell, board of trustees, 8 March 1989.

51. Cocteau Rep., press release, April 1990.

52. Albert Podell, president, board of trustees, letter to Eve Adamson, 1 May 1989.

53. This defense of her resignation, i.e. to "do something different," was made by Adamson in her interview in New York City with me on 28 February 1990 and in her interview with Mindy Levine of *Theatre Times* in Levine's article, "The Changing of the Guard" (August-September 1989, 2).

54. Adamson interview, 28 February 1990.

55.Mindy Levine, "The Changing of the Guard," *Theatre Times*, August-September 1989, 2.

56. Eve Adamson, application for a NYSCA grant, December 1988.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.

59. Robert Hupp, interview with the author, New York City, 6 March 1990.

60. Robert Hupp, artistic director, interview with the author, New York City, 6 March 1990.

61. Minutes of Board of Trustees meeting, New York City, 4 June 1990.

62. Mission of the Cocteau Theatre, published in 1988.

63. Hupp interview, 6 March 1990.

64. Hupp interview, 6 March 1990.

65. Hupp interview, 6 March 1990.

66. Hupp interview, New York City, 6 March 1990.

67. Hupp interview, 6 March 1990.

68. David Fishelson, interview with the author, New York City, 6 March 1990.

69. Fishelson interview, 6 March 1990.

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70. Sidney P. Diamond, letter to the Cocteau, 18 October 1988.

71. Eve Adamson and Robert Hupp, letter to Sidney Diamond, 20 October 1988.

72. Report of the Space Committee, Cocteau Rep., January 1989.

73. Albert Podell, letter to the trustees, 22 November 1988.

74. Eve Adamson, NYSCA grant form, December 1988.

75. Albert Podell, letter to the trustees, 13 September 1988.

76. Additional response by Albert Podell to the trustees, 13 September 1988.

77. Thomas Fuld, trustee, interview with the author, New York City, 22 March 1990.

78. Thomas Fuld, letter to Albert Podell, 3 March 1989.

79. Brian McMahon, letter to Albert Podell, 20 June 1989.

80. Albert Podell, letter to Brian McMahon, 28 June 1989.

81. Edmund A. Schwesinger, Jr., letter to Albert Podell, 26 February 1989.

82. Albert Podell, letter to Edmund Schwesinger, Jr., 18 September 1989.

83. Stewart Russell, fundraising letter to Houghton Mifflin, 27 November 1988.

84. Stewart Russell, letter to police commander Gerald McNamara, 22 July 1988.

85. Albert Podell, letter to Commissioner Benjamin Ward, 4 August 1988.

86. James J. Sirman, letter to Eve Adamson, n.d.

87. Craig Smith, audience development, letter to James Sirman, n.d.

88. Kevin Connelly, letter to Cocteau, 12 May 1985.

89. Betty Buterl, letter to the Cocteau, 21 September 1984.

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90. Gladys Brown, letter to the Cocteau 21 September 1985.

91. Richard Goldstone, letter to Cocteau, 14 September 1984.

92. Sandra Palazzo, letter to Cocteau, 11 May 1989.

93. Alice Vei, letter to Cocteau, October 1986.

94. Edwin Peck, letter to Cocteau, 13 March 1989.

95. The artistic and administrative staff that would oversee the Cocteau's 1989-90 season consisted of the following people:

ARTISTIC

Artistic Director	Robert Hupp
Resident Lighting Designer	Giles Hogya
Resident Costume Designer	Jonathan Bixby
Resident Vocal Coach	Robert Perillo
Play Reading Series Director	Jonathan Bank
Intern	Grant Neale
Artistic Advisor	Eve Adamson

ADMINISTRATIVE

Managing Director	David Fishelson
General Manager	Julie Bleha
Press Representative	Jonathan Slaff
Box Office Manager	Nia Schooler
House Manager	John Ruddock
Marketing Associate	Dion Farquhar
Administrative Assistant	John Greeley

PRODUCTION

Resident Stage Manager	Isabel Lopez
Photography	Gerry Goodstein
Intern	Jennifer Matthews

TRUSTEES

Albert Podell, Esq., Attorney	President
Dr. Marie Jean Lederman, Educator	Vice President
Barbara Udell, Finance Executive	Treasurer
Susan Fawcett, Writer	Secretary
Robert W. Berend, Esq., Attorney	
Linda R. Blumkin, Esq., Attorney	
Dr. Richard Donovan, Educator	
Alan Goldman, Finance Executive	
Brian McMahon, Contractor	
James Nichols, Producer	

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Marsha Porcell, Compensation Manager
Edmund Schwesinger, Accounting Executive
Chaunce Skilling, Media Executive
Karen Skilling, Retired Theatre Agent

96. Showbill, Cocteau Repertory, September 1989.

97. Billy Rose Division.

98. Thomas Fuld interview, 22 March 1990.

99. Wilborn Hampton, "Cocteau Repertory in Wilde's *Earnest*," *New York Times*, 5 October 1989, C5.

100. Wilborn Hampton, Romping through Zurich in Stoppard's *Travesties*, *New York Times*, 3 November 1989, C7

101. Eugene Paul, "*Travesties* Meanders With Too Much Detail," *Town & Village*, 19 October 1989, 15.

102. Irene Backalenick, "Satire, Comedy Spark Off-Broadway," *Westport News*, 10 November 1989, 43.

103. Cynthia Melia, "New York Stage," *Voices*, 25 October 1989, 73.

104. Fuld interview, 22 March 1990.

105. Alisa Solomon, "Gay '90s," *Village Voice*, 27 February 90, 88.

106. Wilborn Hampton, "A Brechtian Salvo Against the Military Life," *New York Times*, 26 February 1990, C15.

107. Billy Rose Division.

108. Harris Berlinsky, interview with the author, New York City, 21 March 1990.

109. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

110. Wilborn Hampton, "*Prince of Homburg* at Cocteau," *New York Times*, 22 April 1990, C5.

111. Hupp interview, 6 March 1990.

112. Wilborn Hampton, "Where Classics are King, and Theaters the Court," *New York Times*, 2 February 1990, C1, C4.

113. Harvey Karten, "Battle of Sexes on Double Bill," *Humanities News*, 16 May 1990, 1.

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114. Fishelson interview, 6 March 1990.

115. "Coral Potter, 49, Dies; An Actor and Manager," *New York Times*, 31 January 1990, D27.

116. Fuld interview, 21 March 1990.

117. Albert Podell, letter to the trustees, 6 March 1990.

118. Robert Hupp, letter to the trustees, May 1990.

119. Ibid.

120. Ibid.

121. Application to NYSCA for a grant for 1990-91.

122. Ibid.

123. Robert Hupp, memorandum to the trustees, May 1990.

124. Brian McMahon, memorandum of trustees' space committee, 8 November 1989.

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CHAPTER NINE

Conclusion: Whither Cocteau?

The Jean Cocteau as a repertory theatre company has endured for the past nineteen years perhaps because it has satisfied the needs of a focused audience, a relatively small constituency that seeks performances of classics, both the well-known or the rarely-performed. Had the artistic director decided at any point to abandon the mission of performing neglected classics in rotation--by encouraging new American works, for example--the Cocteau might have been unable to compete with other companies offering similar fare.

Despite the replacement of the theatre's founder and long-term artistic director by a young man whose views on theatre are somewhat different from his predecessor's, the Cocteau continues on the track that has made it *sui generis* among approximately two hundred small groups in New York. Robert Hupp may differ with Eve Adamson on the number of productions to be staged each year, the number of guest directors to be brought in, and the number of hours to be set aside for rehearsals; but he has no inclination to alter

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the company mission. The continued health of the group will depend on the selection of plays, the artistic quality of its productions, on funding, and on its ability to capture good press--both feature articles and reviews--particularly in the *New York Times*. Also required will be a facility to hold and build a subscriber base by assertive telemarketing and similar techniques, and by the ability of the company to secure a building in a more attractive location with a more pleasant environment and greater performance area than it has attained with the Bouwerie Lane Theatre.

A policy that Hupp has implemented is the extension of rehearsal periods whereby fewer plays are mounted to allow for the extra preparation. Perhaps this strategy has already borne favorable consequences: During the 1989-90 season, the *New York Times* critic, Wilborn Hampton, wrote four positive reviews on Cocteau productions and a single one that was negative. On the whole, there is reason to believe that reviews of future productions, in general, will be mixed as they have been for the last nineteen years. Reviewers from newspapers and publications--both community papers and larger dailies--are unanimous about the significance of the mission. Without a dissenting voice, they have congratulated the company for staging plays that would not be produced anywhere else. Without a Cocteau, they have said, theatergoers in the Greater New York Area might never see a work of Massinger, or Radzinsky, or

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Shelley. Regarding the *quality* of production of these neglected plays, the critics have run the gamut, calling the company everything from "a group without the slightest aptitude for acting"[1] to "an organic unit that creates first-class productions,"[2] and "one of the best repertory troupes in the nation . . . A first-rate band of actors who work together with finesse."[3] In the case of the Cocteau, all reviewers have praised the company for its *ideology*, whereas on the issue of *competence*, the critics are notably divided.

All of the trustees, actors, and administrative staff that participated in this study agreed that the reviews in the *New York Times* are most important in determining box-office receipts, and in the longer run, the growth or diminution of subscriptions. Yet for leverage in terms of securing grants, all reviews count. Hupp believes that organizations "like to throw their money into high-visibility organizations."[4] Favorable notices in all publications can be exploited for the theater bulletin boards, the ads in community newspapers, and the edification of those who do not treat critics like Wilborn Hampton, Mel Gussow, and D.J.R. Bruckner as shapers of the ultimate word. Craig Smith has freely admitted that persuading the critics to visit the Bouwerie Lane Theatre is a difficult task, and while mainstream theatres like Circle Rep. and MTC are always attended by the critics, there have been Cocteau

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presentations which completed their runs without the judgment of a single reviewer. Smith believes that critics should hold the Cocteau to the same standards that they do the companies with more polished actors and more detailed set design. "After all, this is New York," he maintained, "*but* whenever they believe someone is not right for a particular role, they should understand the exigencies of working in a resident company where people do things they would not normally be asked to do." Smith does not want critics to be kind to the Cocteau simply because the group ideology is on the side of the angels. "Sometimes Julius Novick will condescend to us and that's worse than being negative. We are a resident company and people who walk into our theater should have different expectations," he insisted.[5]

During the years in which he performed as a press representative as well as an actor, Smith nurtured contacts with the drama desks of various newspapers, and has established a good relationship with Carole Coburn at the scheduling desk of the *New York Times*. According to Smith, "She basically runs the department and is a kind and wonderful lady in a forest of sewage in the field of criticism. . . Mel Gussow is nice; he will treat you with respect--and Tish Dace is a good writer."[6]

The Cocteau has frequently been treated by the *Village Voice* with disdain, and Thomas Fuld recalled seeing perhaps

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two good notices from that newspaper.[7] Harris Berlinsky does not know why the *Voice* visits the theatre only sporadically, since of all newspapers in New York, that one lends the most space to the off-off-Broadway circuit. He does not feel kindly toward the critical fraternity, stating: "If you pay attention to critics, you will never get on the stage again. In America a critic makes or breaks a show. In England a critic is someone who can be hostile to a production and the show will not necessarily close."[8] Chaunce Skilling believes that the theater does well in attracting critics, considering the large number of stage companies in the city. He considers the *New York Times* a friendly paper which is getting increasingly friendlier.[9] Skilling gave an overall summary of the importance of critics to the Cocteau, as follows:

> *New York* magazine has a fashionable readership but we don't get reviews from Simon. We can live without him. Simon is entertaining, but I usually do not agree with his conclusions. Years ago he showed up but I do not recall seeing a review from him. The *Times* has been coming here regularly for the last twelve to fifteen years. This year [1989-90], they did not miss a production. They did a wonderful supplement section recently and have been kind. I think we are functioning as a theater better than ever now, and the *Times* recognizes this.
>
> The papers would not take us seriously when we were at 43 Bond Street; but we gave some marvelous productions with a threadbare set and building.[10]

Occasionally a notice can change the direction of plays. If a critic points out something that the staff misses, according to Craig Smith, the company tries to incorporate

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the advice in a subtle way. The company might discard some practices and add others before the staging becomes final.[11]

Having described the impact of the critics during the nineteen-year tenure of the Cocteau, its actors and staff summarized their feelings about the choice of plays. Fuld is unhappy that there are no singers in the company, making the choice of musicals somewhat risky. "If you could do a few musicals, you could make some money. This is what the masses of New York theatergoers want."[12] So far as determining the season's choices according to the universality and significance of the nominated works, Craig Smith believes that not every play needs to have this attribute. "Sometimes, he allowed, the audience should just have a good time. A Feydeau farce should be just a farce." But he did believe that every great play has metaphoric dimensions. Smith wonders if perhaps the actors limit their boundaries by their own inability to get out to see more theater. Although few theaters are likely to mount plays of the sort that the Cocteau does, he believes that actors and directors would profit from observing more shows in theaters other than the Cocteau. "Elise [Stone] and I finish for the season and we do not want to do anything except watch TV. That's for a while. Then we really should get out and see some stuff, but it's expensive. Observation is one of the best teachers."[13]

The Cocteau will probably not be the stepping-stone for

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actors wanting to appear on Broadway. Not one of its performers has ever appeared in a major role there. A move to a larger company like the Manhattan Theatre Club in the interests of obtaining higher pay would be the more logical progression. Some Cocteau actors have left to work in regional theatre companies, also the logical next step after being with the Cocteau. There may be more opportunities for actors in a city like Dallas, but a performer who goes to the regional companies would lose the security of working with the Cocteau--where the family know they will be hired to do the next show. People have to pay their rent, and with the Cocteau, despite the low wages for actors, they know that they will have the rent money next month and the month after that. Smith acknowledged that some actors are not asked back for subsequent years, but believes that there is generally a mutuality between actor and director in that kind of decision. There is a chance, though, that an actor will be fired in mid-year.[14]

Smith warns prospective members of the company that being with a resident, repertory company is grueling work, and that this pressure is the principal reason that 25 percent to 50 percent of the company leave each year. According to Smith:

> Right now I have done this for seventeen years and with my outside job and my theatre job I work 72-80 hours per week. It takes a toll. I have no social life, I cannot do anything else. But you can grow artistically because you are always doing plays, always working. Many people do not stay because they

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> find out they think they want to do rotating rep but realize that this is not the kind of situation they want to do it in.
>
> Some should not work in such proximity to a single group. That is nothing against them or their talent. Many with talent leave our theater. It's hard to keep track of them after they leave--I know the current interests of only a handful of our former actors.
>
> Lyn Wright [a Cocteau performer during the 1989-90 season] did leave after this one year, but may be back on a jobbed-in basis. There is a role coming up that she may be perfect for. But the Cocteau does not have enough roles for women throughout the year to keep three or four women happy--only two can be happy all the time. We do not want to keep someone on a full-time basis unless she can fit into all the plays. Lyn played a male soldier in *Homburg* and Carol Dearman played a male soldier in *A Man's a Man*. There *should* be some turnover--25% a year is good--you need new blood to shake things up.[15]

Smith defended the system of rotating repertory but is happy that under Hupp's direction, the company will scale back to two plays in repertory at one time. He favors this system over one that would perform a play for two months at a time. The company holds sacrosanct the tenet of resident, rotating repertory, because the Cocteau considers this concept to be the most artistically beneficial way in which to work. "When you play two characters," Smith reported, "you can learn two things, keep fresh, offer theatergoers the opportunity to see a different configuration within one week by seeing up to three plays." The Cocteau has discussed changes and has repeatedly chosen to continue their devotion to the mission.[16]

In a statement praising the acting team of the Cocteau,

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James B. Nichols noted as follows:

> Some actors are getting fifty bucks a week, so they have to look at what their lives are all about. They have to work elsewhere to support their habit. No one is rich, not even 5 percent of our actors historically have been rich. Harris is a policeman all night. Eve would always tell her actors that they would have to devote an entire season to her for one year, be paid nothing or maybe $50 a week, some $25. For years it was literally nothing. People had to do two shows on Saturday night, one with one set, one with another, so that meant when the first show was over they would tear down the set and put up the second one. Then they would collapse, get back for the 3 p.m. Sunday matinee and sometimes another at 7:00.
>
> Some actors seemed to move on to make some money. The young ones are here to learn their craft, and the fact that a single actor stays for a second season is amazing. Seven years is phenomenal. Every other rep--they go to an audition, get a job for a few months, then they're unemployed, get another job, bounce from here to there. But here they devote nine months of their year so there is no comparison to any other theater on-or off-off Broadway in the country.
>
> Circle Rep, that's Equity; some famous actors come back to throw their bread upon the waters, to give back something to the theatre that gave them a start. There's no comparison between Circle and us. On top of that we sometimes get no reviews.[17]

Chaunce Skilling added his views to the discussion about the importance of membership in the Cocteau community to the actor. He stated some priceless rewards to be gained by staying with the group. Most important to Skilling is the training that the actor has received at the end of one year of genuine repertory performance According to Skilling,

> . . . the arts are an elusive thing. There are painters, sculptors, dancers and singers that you will never hear of in this town, but their anonymity does not stop them. Many people in this building [375 Hudson Street in Manhattan] make big money; they

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> have nothing to do with the guy in the loft on the Lower East Side. Never the twain shall meet. But when a writer starts out to write a novel he does not write it for a certain amount of money. It is a compulsion, a desire to express yourself in a certain way.
>
> Coral Potter was a fine example of someone totally dedicated to the theater who worked outrageous hours as a clerk-reporter in the court system, transcribing testimony all night. He would put in his hours at the theatre and then go downtown to the court and transcribe again all night. It is not a life of comfort. It is one of dedication. We would have no one pursue acting if they insisted in advance that someone guarantee big bucks. Movies and commercials are hard work but not the demanding work that theater is. But to get a role in the movies is like winning the lottery--there is luck involved, pure happenstance.
>
> Nobody from the Cocteau became really famous. There is some cinema out there with people who cannot act their way out of a paper bag--it's all in the cinematography. You have seen enough at the Cocteau to know that you are seeing some first-rate acting.[18]

If Cocteau actors have not starred in many commercials it is not for lack of trying. Harris Berlinsky complains that there is just no time to try out for commercials because of the busy schedule of rehearsing and working at an outside job. He recalled that during the strike of SAG (Screen Actors' Guild) six years earlier, he was invited by trustee Chaunce Skilling [a producer at Saatchi and Saatchi] to do a commercial. He acted in a demonstration tape, which was never aired. In February 1990 he was called by an agent for an interview, but did not have the time to meet with him. Berlinsky looks forward to the reduction in number of plays to five per season since for him there is never enough time to rehearse.[19]

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Nor can the Cocteau actors count on visits by agents. Smith reports that the actors are told each year that the Cocteau is not a showcase of talent, but rather a commitment to a sort of theater. "If you are looking at showcase, go to Broadway; work in another kind of theatre," is Smith's advice. He added: "There are few Broadway roles fit for a classically trained actor--*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* has maybe eight roles that such an actor can do and you know that Polly Holliday and Kathleen Turner and Charles Durning will be in three of those."[20]

As if this were not enough, the company worked under the hardship of budgetary deficits, possibilities of uprooting to different locations, a turnover of part of the membership each year, and, as regular visitors to the Bouwerie Lane could attest, a not inconsiderable number of patrons who could be called neither theater lovers nor even knowledgeable about the basic nature of the drama. They are simply spending some time to escape from the cold, whether from a chilling day in January or a lonely afternoon in a senior citizens' home.

Thus the performers are not likely to be motivated by a desire for comfort or a chance for wealth that Broadway work can afford to a fortunate few. These actors--ten, eleven, or twelve per year--are committed to the task of representing an assortment of plays, both well-known and unsung, for just token payment and little publicity.

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Smith added that a good feature of the Cocteau is the promise of rotation of roles so that where possible people in their second year might get leading parts. "No one pulls rank. New people will naturally look to the older for leadership, but there is no star turn."

Smith was especially impressed by the talent of Harris Berlinsky, who received leading roles a short time after his joining the company, a totally raw talent with no acting school background, one who was taught exclusively by Eve Adamson. "He is dangerous to act with, because he is a moment-to-moment actor. You never know exactly where he will go and break character on stage. He will find things funny on stage which should not necessarily be so funny. He has an incredible face that can go in a million directions, amazing talent, wonderful people know for his ability to ad lib and never let the words stop. We call it Berlinsky language."[21]

What the Jean Cocteau Repertory Company has accomplished during the nineteen years explored by this study is imposing. The theatre group has shown that it can stage rarely-performed dramatic works as well as those which are better-known and attract a reasonable subscriber base--an audience that will often fill the theatre as readily for a production of August Strindberg's little-known *Swanwhite* as for a mounting of a major drama like William Shakespeare's

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Julius Caesar. The company has also demonstrated an ability to attract visits by such writers as Tennessee Williams and Edvard Radzinsky, playwrights who have been sufficiently impressed by the work of the Cocteau that they have taken the time to remain in residence for several weeks to motivate and guide the stagings of their plays.

Further, the Cocteau company has shown that a theatre group can commit itself to an annual contract, with performers agreeing to remain for a full year at a time, and to work with obscure scripts as well as the more popular writings of renowned dramatists. The fifty-percent turnover of performers each year permits the company to be revitalized by "new blood" annually, while at the same time the commitment of each actor to remain with the company for at least one year provides him or her with invaluable training for life.

The pledge of the Cocteau to perform an average of five plays in rotation each year affords the subscribers the opportunity to see as many as three plays in a single week, should they so choose. Moreover, the devotion of the company to the staging of school matinees insures that young people from elementary schools, high schools, and colleges in the New York City area will be given at least an initial exposure to the theatre milieu.

The company continues to face problems that have burdened it since its founding in 1971. Perhaps the primary

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difficulty is geographic: The Bouwerie Lane Theatre is situated in a shabby community, the Bowery, which has for decades attracted a clientele of intoxicated and drug-addicted men. The blocks surrounding the theatre are perceived by many potential theatergoers as so menacing that they refuse to drive their cars or take the subway to the theatre. The interior of the theatre is inadequate for the comfort and enjoyment of its patrons, with cramped aisle space and a stage too small to allow for credible entrances and exits of the performers. (Many of the appearances and withdrawals of the actors require that they cross the entire length of the orchestra.) The board of directors and artistic director continue to have conflicts over the choices of plays, although the current artistic director, Robert Hupp, has apparently been able to maintain a truce by informing the board in advance of the selection of plays and seeking the advice of business persons.

Just as the company cannot raise sufficient funds to move to a better location, the enterprise also lacks the financial means to pay enough for complex sets and better actors. Set design has always been spare at the Cocteau; in fact, its founder, Eve Adamson, adjusted her views by declaring this minimalism to be a positive feature in that the designs should not take attention away from the performers. Nonetheless, scenic ambiance has often been hampered by sets that cannot do justice to the plays for

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which they are created. And although an average of four hundred actors attend auditions for the company, the Cocteau seems unable to attract a solid group of excellent players, and the large yearly turnover results in an unevenness of performance. And occasionally the company has been criticized for its inability--or perhaps unwillingness--to hire actors from minority populations.

Some serious attempts have been made, particularly during the last five years, to alleviate the problems. Two minority performers were hired for the 1990-91 season. Modest salary increases have been voted for the staff and, in fact, during the 1990-91 season, the artistic director received a salary increase of three thousand dollars. Efforts continue to find a location that the company can afford, one which would not alienate the current subscribers and would attract an additional audience base.

At times, board members have suggested that the number of trustees be increased to provide for additional funds both from the pockets of the trustees and from those of the people whose donations they solicit. Originally an informal group begun by Chaunce Skilling and some of his friends eighteen years ago, the board has evolved into a professional organization which helps the theatre to raise money from corporations and foundations, gives benefits to raise additional funds, and performs the overall supervision of the budget and the artistic agenda.

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The success that the theater group has had during the 1989-90 season may be a twinkling of triumph; better yet, it could be a harbinger of health. The quality of its work, the dimensions of commitment of the people involved, the reaching out of the company to senior citizens and school-aged youth--all bear testimony to the backbone and distinction of this group. Financial problems will probably always beleaguer those associated with the Cocteau: real-estate needs may often emerge as uppermost; an annual turnover of personnel is inevitable given the paucity of pay. Like most off-off-Broadway houses, the Cocteau is perpetually in debt, haunted by the prospect of homelessness without the saving grace of cherishing the home they now maintain.

One cannot help feeling optimistic, though, as the company enters its twentieth year, with newly-hired performers comprising approximately one-half of the acting crew; with an artistic director supported enthusiastically by the trustees; with a woman like Eve Adamson to honor the theatre regularly by guest-directing plays she adores; and most of all, by an audience that feel proud to enjoy and support the unique viewpoint of this stouthearted band of thespians.

Craig Smith summarized the history of the Cocteau by this pronouncement: "It has been a long haul. We are all tired, but but we're still around--still kicking."[22]

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CHAPTER NINE: Notes

1. John Simon, "Craft and Arts," *New York*, 1 September 1980, 44.

2. Irene Backalenick, "Theatre Reviews," *Westport News*, 10 November 1989, 43.

3. Emory Lewis, "Theatre Reviews," *The Record*, 19 September 1977, 15.

4. Robert Hupp, interview with the author, New York City, 18 June 1990.

5. Craig Smith, interview with the author, New York City, 18 June 1990.

6. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

7. Thomas Fuld, trustee, interview with the author, New York City, 18 June 1990.

8. Harris Berlinsky, interview with the author, New York City, 21 March 1990.

9. Chaunce Skilling, interview with the author, New York City, 14 March 1990.

10. Skilling interview, 14 March 1990. While Skilling did not recall any review by John Simon, the acerbic Serb did file a notice in *New York* on 1 September 1980. Those connected with the Cocteau should not be faulted for "forgetting" that coverage.

11. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

12. Thomas Fuld, interview with the author, New York City, 18 June 1990.

13. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

14. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

15. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

16. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

17. James Nichols, interview with the author, New York City, 31 March 1990.

18. Skilling interview, 18 June 1990.

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19. Berlinsky interview, 18 June 1990.

20. Smith interview, 18 June 1990.

21. Berlinsky interview, 18 June 1990.

22. Smith interview, 27 February 1990.

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APPENDIX A

Production History

1971-1972

Orphée	Jean Cocteau
Christopher Columbus	Michel de Ghelderode
He Who Gets Slapped	Leonid Andreyev
The Eagle with Two Heads	Jean Cocteau
No Fit Place for a Child To Play	Edna St. Vincent Millay
Salomé	Oscar Wilde
The Winter's Tale	William Shakespeare

1972-1973

Orphée	Jean Cocteau
The Human Voice	Jean Cocteau
Tom Thumb	Henry Fielding
Coriolanus	William Shakespeare
Medea	Jean Anouilh

1973-1974

Medea	Jean Anouilh
Waiting for Godot	Samuel Beckett
The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife	Anatole France
Sweeney Agonistes	T. S. Eliot
Ghosts	Henrik Ibsen
Cain	Lord Byron
Suddenly Last Summer	Tennessee Williams
No Exit	Jean Paul Sartre

1974-1975

A Midsummer Night's Dream	William Shakespeare
Waiting for Godot	Samuel Beckett
Ghosts	Henrik Ibsen
The Doctor in Spite of Himself	Molière
Romeo and Juliet	William Shakespeare
The Firebugs	Max Frisch
Winterset	Maxwell Anderson
In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel	Tennessee Williams

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1975-1976

Twelfth Night	William Shakespeare
Brecht on Brecht	Bertolt Brecht
Desire Under the Elms	Eugene O'Neill
The Importance of Being Earnest	Oscar Wilde
The Count of Monte Cristo	William Borden
Vera, or the Nihilists	Oscar Wilde
Winterset	Maxwell Anderson
The Lesson	Harold Pinter

1976-1977

The Lesson	Harold Pinter
Macbeth	William Shakespeare
Rhinoceros	Eugène Ionesco
Androcles and the Lion	George Bernard Shaw
The Caretaker	Harold Pinter
The Cenci	Percy Bysshe Shelley
She Stoops to Conquer	Oliver Goldsmith
Salomé	Oscar Wilde
The Brass Butterfly	William Golding

1977-1978

The Caretaker	Harold Pinter
The Cocktail Party	T. S. Eliot
A New Way to Pay Old Debts	Philip Massinger
Love's Comedy	Henrik Ibsen
Hamlet	William Shakespeare
No Exit	Jean Paul Sartre
Volpone	Ben Jonson
'Tis Pity She's a Whore	John Ford

1978-1979

Volpone	Ben Jonson
Hamlet	William Shakespeare
A Mad World, My Masters	Thomas Middleton
Exit the King	Eugène Ionesco
The Cid	Pierre Corneille
The Scarecrow	Percy MacKaye
As You Like It	William Shakespeare
In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel	Tennessee Williams
The Changeling	Thomas Middleton

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1979-1980

Exit the King	Eugène Ionesco
Kirche, Kutchen, and Kinder	Tennessee Williams
Hamlet	William Shakespeare
He Who Gets Slapped	Leonid Andreyev
Ruy Blas	Victor Hugo
The Tempest	William Shakespeare
In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel	Tennessee Williams

1980-1981

The Roman Actor	Philip Massinger
The Witch of Edmonton	Thomas Middleton
The Dybbuk	Shalom Ansky
Pericles	William Shakespeare
Life is a Dream	Calderón de la Barca
The Alchemist	Ben Jonson

1981-1982

The Roman Actor	Philip Massinger
Something Cloudy, Something Clear	Tennessee Williams
Two Noble Kinsmen	William Shakespeare
The Revenger's Tragedy	Cyril Tourneur
The Golem	H. Leivick
The Count of Monte Cristo	Marshall Borden

1982-1983

The Condemned of Altona	Jean-Paul Sartre
Swanwhite	August Strindberg
Saint Joan	George Bernard Shaw
The School for Scandal	John Brinsley Sheridan
Don Carlos	Friedrich von Schiller
Philoctetes of Sophocles	Karen Sunde

1983-1984

Judas	Robert Patrick
The Beaux' Strategem	George Farquhar
King John	William Shakespeare
Epicoene	Ben Jonson
The Oresteia of Aeschylus	Robert Lowell
Antiquities	John Arndt

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1984-1985

Theatre in the Time of Nero and Seneca	Edvard Radzinsky
Cymbeline	William Shakespeare
The Goat Song	Franz Werfel
The Importance of Being Earnest	Oscar Wilde
L'Aiglon	Edmond Rostand
The Maids	Jean Genet

1985-1986

Lunin: Theatre of Death	Edvard Radzinsky
Six Characters in Search of An Author	Luigi Pirandello
King Lear	William Shakespeare
The Miser	Molière
Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead	Tom Stoppard
Under Milkwood	Dylan Thomas

1986-1987

The Shoemakers	S. Ignacy Witkiewicz
Conversations with Socrates	Edvard Radzinsky
The Duchess of Malfi	John Webster
Of Mice and Men	John Steinbeck
The Rivals	John Brinsley Sheridan

1987-1988

The Trial	Franz Kafka
The Cocktail Party	T. S. Eliot
Antigone	Jean Anouilh
No Exit	John Paul Sartre
A Winter's Tale	William Shakespeare

1988-1989

Break of Noon	Paul Claudel
Venice Preserv'd	Thomas Otway
The Three Sisters	Anton Chekhov
Good	C. P. Taylor
Macbeth	William Shakespeare
On the Verge	Eric Overmeyer

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1989-1990

The Importance of Being Earnest	Oscar Wilde
Travesties	Tom Stoppard
A Man's a Man	Bertolt Brecht
The Prince of Homburg	Heinrich von Kleist
Life is a Dream	Calderón de la Barca
The Stronger	August Strindberg
The Night of the Tribades	Per Olov Enquist

1990-1991

Julius Caesar	William Shakespeare
Misalliance	George Bernard Shaw
When We Dead Awaken	Henrik Ibsen
Woyzeck	Georg Büchner
Leonce and Lena	Georg Büchner
The Infernal Machine	Jean Cocteau
The Emigrants	Slawomir Mrozek

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APPENDIX B

Organizational Analysis of the Board of Trustees

The Board: The primary purpose of the Board is to provide professional managerial assistance to the management of the acting company. To accomplish this the board must be organized to provide focus on the key activities of the organization. Key activities are those areas of the organization where absolute successful performance must be achieved or the business will fail. Once these activities have been identified, it is equally essential that Board members focus on the specific talents required to insure successful performance. The Board must consist of enthusiastic members--those that may lack a particular expertise but will serve to make things happen. Therefore, the board should be at a maximum membership at all times to insure adequate resources, perpetuation of the organization itself and the depth to deal with changing conditions that may occur. Consideration should be given to the following areas identified during the analysis as essential:

Fund Raising - Responsible to generate capital through developing and securing grant monies, individual and corporate donations, and exploitation of all other capital resources in support of the objectives set forth in the Business Plan; to provide the impetus and secure the involvement of all Board members in the fund raising effort.

Financial Planning - responsible to assess and analyze operating and capital requirements to insure budgeting controls and planning, to develop, coordinate and publish the Business Plan; to explore alternative capital generating projects and enterprises.

Marketing - Responsible to perform market research and analysis, to provide direction and approach towards increasing market share; to plan for effective public relations and community involvement through benefits and special events, to insure maximum utilization of all publicity resources to achieve recognition for individual actors, the Acting Company as a whole, and individual board members for services rendered.

Board/Volunteer Recruiting - Responsible for the recruitment and recommendation of all Board members to insure proper selection based on the Board's needs and to insure

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perpetuation (self renewal) of the Board function with an emphasis on growth, to develop and maintain a volunteer group as required to support approved Board projects and Acting Company management needs.

Repertory - This function must be performed by the Artistic Director who is responsible to select and develop the sequel of plays to be performed during the season, and to insure the integrity of the artistic purpose is not compromised nor subordinated to the business purpose.

General Management - Responsible for the administration and logistical management of the Acting Company and to provide such support as required by the Board. This function is the primary business interface between the Board and the Acting Company and should be a fixed responsibility of the General Manager of the Acting Company.

The Board should operate in a team concept comprised of committees. Each committee should have responsibility and be held accountable for the planning and performance towards objectives in their specific area. However, while a committee may have basic responsibility, other board members should be expected to perform as team members when their expertise is required by an committee. In other words, on a particular project a committee may lead while on another project they may perform as project members. Every member on the Board should be assigned to a committee. The committees should be organized to provide for member assignment to a particular activity of the committee where focus is required. As such, the focus on key activities is carried throughout the Board and accountabilities are established to insure attention to all important details.

Planning: A business plan should be developed to direct the course of the organization. This plan should be made for one year and three year periods (adjusted annually). This plan will set forth the broad objectives in narrative and quantifiable terms. It should express the what, when, and who, and tie together the objectives of each committee to a common purpose. The artistic objectives should not be overlooked and must be included in this plan. These objectives should focus on specific artistic accomplishments that will be achieved and identified as priorities of the artist growth process. This plan should be approved by the entire Board. An operating plan should then be developed by each committee. This plan will identify how and when the committee will achieve its objectives. This plan should be approved by the President and Committee Chairman.

These plans may be combined into a single document; however, the separate elements of planning should be thoroughly

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understood.

Charter: A charter should be written as a basic guide to express the mission of the association. Included should be the values and beliefs that guide the actions and provide the moral essence of the organization. Values expressed during the analysis were: 1) the repertory concept cannot be compromised; 2) the artistic product must be classical (dramatic poem); 3) the theatre must create a growth environment for the classical American actor.

Of concern are the values and beliefs with respect to the market and audience--none could readily be identified, yet this is a critical area of moral responsibility that cannot be neglected. Further in-depth evaluation should be given to properly express the soul of the organization as this will be the guiding philosophy and set the parameters of all artistic and business endeavors.

General comments: The Jean Cocteau Repertory is unique and viable, a success not to be taken lightly nor shadowed by the concerns of daily activity. There is a sincere dedication by each individual and attention should be given to focus on the individual and collective success of the acting company as well as the board. Members should consider it a prestigious position to be associated with the organization. An approach should be taken that only the best are a part of our organization--rather than apologizing for weakness, capitalize on your strengths. Investors (to use the term in a broad sense) should consider it an honor to be allowed to participate. As an expression: We are SPECIAL, We are the BEST, We are MAGIC. In essence be proud in the belief of what you are.

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APPENDIX C
PERSONNEL (as of September 1990)

Staff

Artistic

Artistic Director	Robert Hupp
Resident Lighting Designer	Giles Hogya
Resident Costume Designer	Jonathan Bixby
Associate Costume Designer	Gregory Gale
Assistant to the Artistic Director	Julie Bleha
Resident Vocal Coach	Robert Perillo
Play Reading Series Director	Jonathan Bank
Artistic Advisor	Eve Adamson

Administrative

Managing Director	David Fishelson
General Manager	Harold A. Mulanix
Press Representative	Jonathan Slaff
Development Director	Catherine Bernard
Box Office Manager	Winifred Breckenridge
House Manager	Erana Kratounis
Building Maintenance	Eduardo Pinto
Administrative Assistants	John Greeley, Nicole Mallement, Ernie Barbarash

Production

Resident Stage Manager	Julie Bleha
Production Manager	Patrick Heydenburg
Photography	Gerry Goodstein

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BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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Matthew Goldstein
Jay Kenny
James Nichols
Edmund Schwesinger
Chaunce Skilling
Karen Skilling

ACTORS

Harris Berlinsky
David Cheaney
Keith Cobb
Jeanne Demers
Joseph Menino
Grant Neale
Pascale Roger
Craig Smith
Elise Stone
Angela Vitale
Mark Waterman

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