

book review

NIGHT, by Elie Wiesel. Hill and Wang.

GATES OF THE FOREST, by Elie Wiesel. Avon.

This review deals with one of the most agonizing dilemmas of the twentieth century; the seeming absurdity of any kind of religious belief. How can we believe in any kind of transcendental being or force that affects life in any possible way when we see the great injustice that is the world, the constant brutal degradation of man by his fellow man.

The most stubborn, agonizing, impassioned protest against the Absurd is to be found in the writings of Elie Wiesel. In the two books which I am going to talk about we see Wiesel moving from revolt against this Absurd to a Dialogue with it.

"Night" . . . Revolt and despair

Wiesel's first published work was his autobiography 'Night'. He tells the story of his family's deportation from the Hungarian-Jewish village where he, his parents, and little sister were born and raised. We are told the terrifying events and experiences at Auschwitz, Buchenwald; we are made to live through the horrifying brutality of the SS:

The SS seemed more preoccupied, more dis-

turbed than usual. To hang a young boy in front of thousands of spectators was no light matter . . . three victims mounted together on the chairs.

. . . "at a sign from the head of the camp, the three chairs tipped over . . . we were weeping . . . the two adults were no longer alive. Their tongues hung swollen, blue-tinged. But the third rope was still moving; being so light, the child was still alive . . .

"For more than half an hour he stayed there, struggling between life and death, dying in slow agony under our eyes . . . I heard a man asking: 'Where is God now?' And I heard a voice within me answer him:

"Where is He? Here he is—He is hanging here on this gallows . . ."

"That night the soup tasted of corpses."

Wiesel's mother and sister were metamorphosed into the smoke above the crematories. His father died, after much suffering, just before liberation. After liberation, when he looked into a mirror a corpse gazed back at him. "The look in his eyes, as they stared into mine, has never left me."

"The gates of the forest" Dialogue with mystery

The same theme pervades his major novel up to date, 'The Gates of the Forest'. This concerns a young man's passage from childhood to maturity

through the overwhelming holocaust that was Europe in the war. The novel is also suffused with the materials of Jewish parable and folklore which boldly confronts the contemporary Absurd situation of man, and which also enters into a dialogue with it.

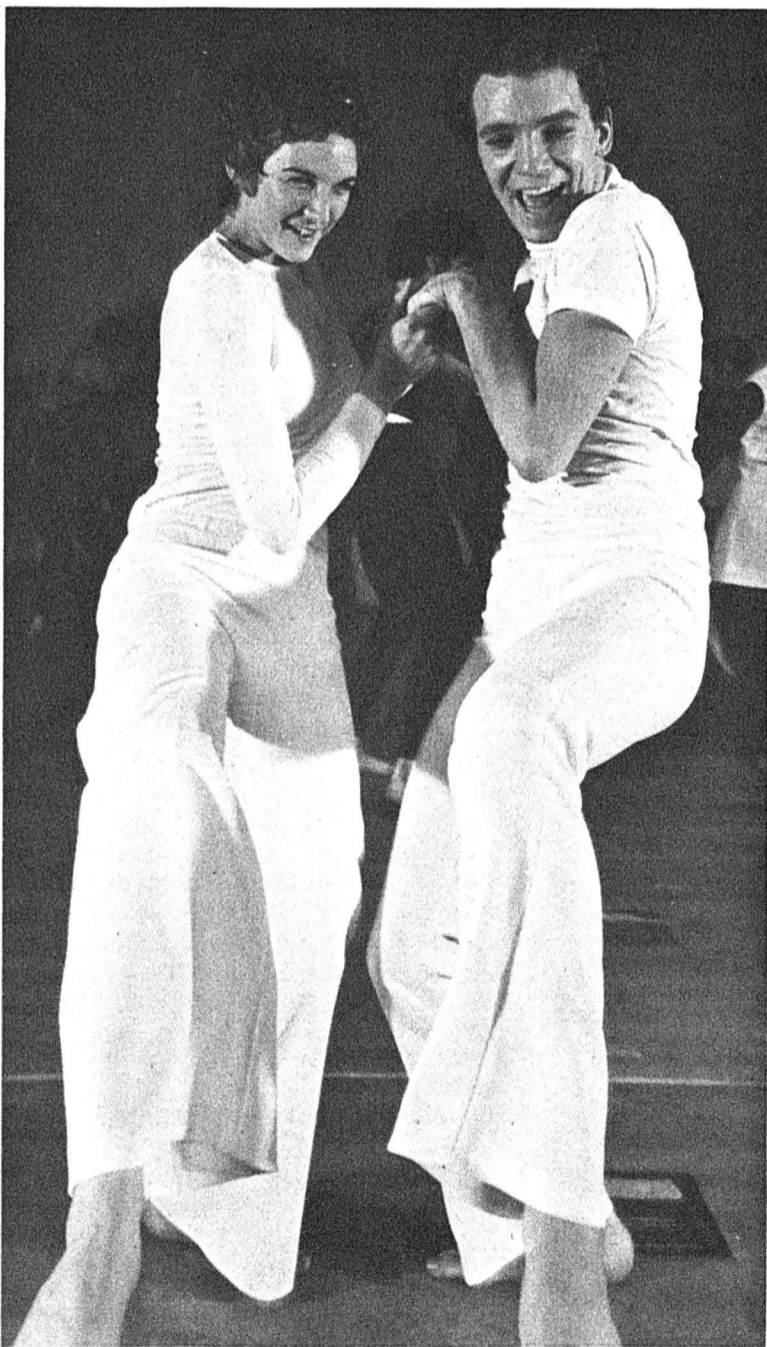
Young Gregor survives the Nazi wasteland, but despite the fact that all meaning of his existence has been taken away from him, he still must seek relationships with his fellow man and with an Absurd God, who has deserted man.

In postwar New York Gregor is confronted by a Hasidic rabbi who recognizes both his suffering and his pride. When Gregor admits that he wants the Rabbi to cease praying and instead howl at the indignity of his fate, the Rabbi says to him: "Who has told you that force comes from a cry and not from prayer, from anger and not from compassion?" The Hasid dances, sings, and experiences joy in spite of the fact that all reason for joy, singing and dancing has been taken away from him. Gregor's romantic gesture of revolt is unmasked as futile.

Wiesel confronts us with the question of whether we can shape the raw material of contemporary life into a meaningful, human existence. He teaches us to *live* with the absurdity that is human existence, with all its contradictions and blind paths, and to remain open to the mystery that is man.

—Dennis Zomerschoe

Orchesis' Motif speaks with dance, light and color



SHALL WE DANCE
. . . or tiptoe through the tulips?

The dance is once again speaking to the people as a meaningful art form, if participation in and attendance at Orchesis' Dance Motif is any indication.

The program was put together by members of the U of A Orchesis, the Drama Department, the Jazz Club and the U of C Dance Club, and if it was uneven in quality, it was generally impressive and even exciting in effect.

The first two dances on the program were rather weak and unmemorable—"Mark It Jamaica" coming across noisy and confused and "Frozen Fear", cliched and sloppy.

The "Cloud Nine" jazz piece was a little better, and if some of the dancers were not as good as others, the choreography was interesting and the effect was pleasant.

"Haute Mer" was a more ambitious attempt, making use of projections, dim lighting, floating costumes and a voice reciting poetry but nothing really happened. The dancing was technically poor, the movement undefined and a little soggy. But with "Ne . . . Rien", a comic and slightly satiric piece, a la Murray Lewis, the audience started to turn on and respond to what the dancers were doing with verve, and humor and originality.

From that point on, things began to happen. The dancers established communication with the audience and the audience perceptibly shifted its response from acceptance to excitement. And the rest of the first half kept up this sense of excitement.

A really fine study was presented in "Time Fragments" — Eliot's poetry, three dancers, films of the dancers and a rope all working together to provide a strong statement and a well-co-ordinated total effect. The dancing was good, technically and choreographically and it made sense.

"Man's Saturday" focussed on the lighter side of life, satirizing with a good deal of humor and imagination, in a number of sketches. Memorable was a take-off on the football and cheer-leading ritual and one on the dating convention. The dancers made use of objects, costumes and mime and came through very well.

"Sarabande" was a lovely duet, very well performed. Purple and pink costumes with complementary lighting enhanced the mood of the place. Indeed, throughout, Orchesis made excellent use of costumes, kept simple and functional color contrasts and lighting.

"Places of the Mind," the last dance of the set, was beautifully done with white and black costumes, levels of movement, a fine sense of form and shape, and well-controlled and meaningful interaction among the dancers.

People went out at intermission with a lot to talk about.

If the dancers had done some poor and mediocre dancing, they had also done some really good dancing, imaginative, creative and well-executed.

"Bolero" featured two couples who danced well but a chorus who did not dance well and only served to distract the audience from what was worth watching.

The Drama Department's production of E. E. Cumming's "Three Wealthy Sisters" was probably the highlight of the second half. The program deteriorated with "St. Francis" which wasn't much of anything.

The pretentious "Dice Dancers" which followed was distinguished chiefly by its tedium and emptiness.

The last item on the program, entitled "Ages and Ages and Ages" was the old standard history of the dance that is done in too many dance programs.

The pavane, galliard and volta, if poorly executed, was at least novel and delightful and stood out as the most imaginative piece in the series. But if the idea was old hat, the dancing and costumes were good.

The program ended well with the ensemble doing now dancing and even the potentially cluttered effect was relieved by a strobe light playing on the couple who looked good and danced great.

Although extremely uneven, the show was worth attending, not only for the really excellent pieces but also for the chance to see Peggy Smith, whose performance throughout the evening was absolutely outstanding.

—Weinlos