

# Whose Life witty and relevant

*Whose Life is it Anyway?*  
at the Citadel  
playing until Feb. 1

review by I. and J. Levental

People were on their feet when it was all over. It was a well-deserved standing ovation for an inspiring performance of Brian Clark's *Whose Life is it Anyway?* now playing at the Citadel Theater.

*Whose Life* raises a number of exceedingly personal questions on such issues as the right to die, freedom of choice, and the extent to which the medical profession imposes its own moral judgments on critically disabled patients. Yet, despite its maudlin subject matter, *Whose Life* never stoops to morbidity, sentimentality, or cheap emotionalism. On the contrary, the script is bright, witty, fast-paced and highly entertaining.

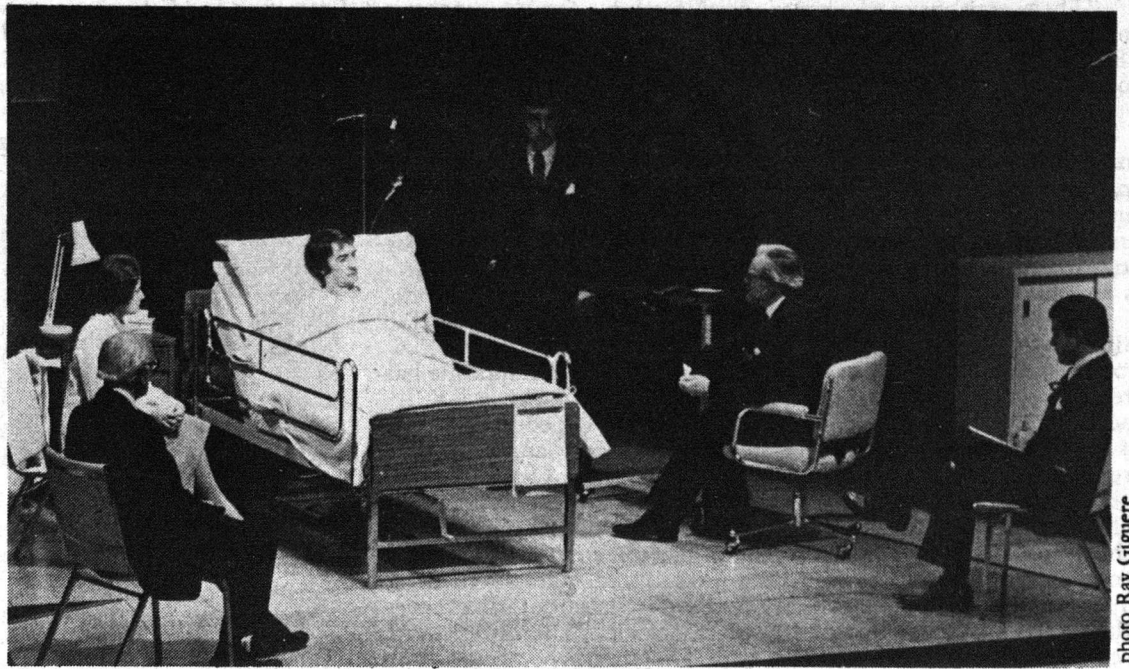
At the point at which the play opens, sculptor Ken Harrison (Eric Schneider) has been in the hospital for six months, the victim of a serious car accident. In most respects his recovery has been complete: the broken limbs and lacerations have healed, his mind is as alert and as intense as it ever had been. Yet Harrison will never be able to leave the hospital. He is per-

manently paralyzed from the neck down. His useless body is kept alive by a complex network of life supporting machines. Every day he must suffer the humiliation of catheter insertion and removal, and the indignity of an enema.

Early on in the play, Harrison decides that the "vegetable existence" is not for him. He requests to be released from the hospital. This, of course, is equivalent to asking for his death-ticket because without hospital technology, Harrison would rapidly die from the bodily poisons which would accumulate in his system.

Harrison is not a man obsessed with the idea of his own death. He wishes to prove a point. He resents the all-embracing power which the doctors and the hospital have over his life. He revolts. "I am in your power," he exclaims to Dr. Scott. Harrison argues that "it's his life" and "his choice to die in the most dignified manner he can muster."

Structurally the play is composed of fifty scenes all occurring in different parts of the hospital. Allan Stichbury's imaginative set and lighting create a feeling of tremendous space and fluidity which prevent the numerous scene changes from ever becoming jerky. Director Joe Shocter has extracted all the necessary bits from this rich, sharp and intelligent script. Still, his direction



Eric Schneider as Ken Harrison, paralyzed from the neck down, taking legal action after being force-fed Valium

remains conventional and "safe"; tending to limit the range of expression in the play.

Ken Harrison is on stage throughout the entire play. This, coupled with the fact that his body remains completely inert, places exceedingly difficult demands on the actor who portrays him. Schneider manages to give a fine performance in spite of his conditions. His speech about dignity of life and death was

particularly well delivered, exuding power, fervour, and penetration.

We cannot resist comparing Schneider's performance with Mary Tyler Moore's recent Broadway appearance in *Whose Life*. Moore delivered her lines with more bitterness and acrimony; her presentation was more erratic and uneven. Schneider, however, told us that his approach was to "lay the cards on the table, be less emotional, and show that Ken Harrison's decision is that of a rational human being with full control over his faculties."

The other actors in the play gave good, solid performances which should not be overlooked. Sister Anderson is appropriately acted by Joan Hurley with a "heart of stainless steel." Her maturity and dedication to her work come across well, as do Nurse Sadler's (Gwyneth Walch) naive and awkward bashfulness.

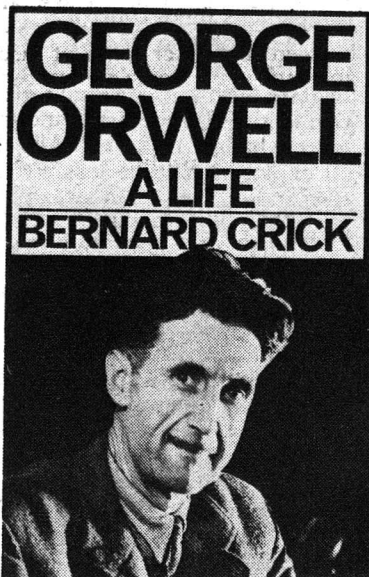
Blu Mankuma plays the orderly, John, who moonlights as a band musician. His natural cheerfulness and warmth provide a foil to everyone else's preoccupation with guilt and phoney professionalism.

UofA student Jim Dougall plays the considerate but not-very-helpful psychiatrist Dr. Travers with charm and vivacity.

Barbara Kyle particularly stands out as Mrs. Gillian Boyle, whose sole purpose in life is to cheer up hospital patients. Her inability to communicate with Harrison on a sincere, human level results in one of the best scenes of the play.

*Whose Life is it Anyway* is never boring. Playwright Brian Clark's talent at combining wit, sexual innuendo, and fresh one-liners with a theme of tremendous seriousness and relevance makes this play appealing to almost every kind of play-goer. The production is good. Try to see it.

## No doublespeak here



Review by Alison Thomson

This book is a splendid account of George Orwell's life and work; political scientist Bernard Crick's insights into the influences on Orwell's political development are unequalled in any discussions of Orwell I am familiar with.

One of Crick's greatest contributions to our understanding of Orwell is his continuing discussion throughout the book of the ambiguities between Orwell's actual experiences, and the liberties with the truth he takes as an author. Crick's careful discussion of "Such, such were the joys," an essay on life in Orwell's preparatory school, is very helpful, especially when one considers the outcry from people associated with the school at the time of the publication of the essay.

Crick discusses sympathetically Orwell's developing belief that truth in politics and clear, correct use of English are inextricably linked. This concept had a good deal of influence on Orwell's writing, and the theme is at its most pointed in 1984, with Orwell's invention of Newspeak.

In his discussion of 1984 and *Animal Farm*, seen by some reviewers and contemporaries as

Orwell's departure from socialism, Crick is insightful about the confusion arising from these books, which have often been used as apologies for conservatism. It is difficult for anyone to fall into this error who is familiar with Orwell's life and work, as Crick points out. He describes the evolution of Orwell's famous last two books in the light of Orwell's growing horror of all totalitarian regimes, and his increasing distaste for the similarities between the Stalinist Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

His distaste for the Communist Party (CP) had been growing since, he says, 1935, and was given a hefty boost during his time in Spain during the Civil War. The CP's betrayal of the workers' cause was seen clearly by Orwell, and described in his "Homage to Catalonia," a very fine piece of political journalism, which, incidentally, the Left Book Club refused to publish as it criticized Communist policies.

Orwell, Crick reminds us, never accepted apologies for totalitarianism from anyone. His rejection of the doubletalk and lack of respect for liberty of the communists leads people to assume 1984 was a rejection of socialism.

Orwell, Crick concludes, ended at a Tribunist position politically; that is, the position of a left-wing social democrat. Even when he had arrived at this position, however, he remained very open to political debate from all sides, although he was particularly sympathetic to anarchists, as Crick shows us through his correspondence.

It is the painstaking search of Orwell's lesser-known writing and his personal correspondence which makes Crick's book such a valuable addition to the writing on Orwell. That they share a similar view on politics and on writing allows Crick to portray Orwell with sympathy and insight, although never losing sight of the

flaws in Orwell as a human being and as a writer.

George Orwell: A Life, by Bernard Crick is well-researched, well thought out, and a thoroughly enjoyable discussion of the writer's life and politics.

## Devil in Big Dave's soul

*Has the harmonica been drinking?*

Big Dave MacLean concert  
at the South Side Folk Club  
Saturday, Jan. 10

review by Kent Blinston

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde performed at the South Side Folk Club last Saturday.

That is the only way to explain the change blues singer Big Dave MacLean went through between sets at what could have been the standard for SSFC concerts in 1981.

MacLean started the evening in the finest form. His howlin', growlin' style of Mississippi delta blues grabbed the audience from the first moment of the show. He played them as well as he played the guitar and harmonica; they roared with applause for the songs and they roared with laughter as he mugged for the photographers. MacLean left them clapping and stomping as he chanted, "You got to rise up children, shake the devil out of your soul."

But the devil took over Dr. Jekyll in the second set. MacLean returned very disoriented. It took him ten minutes and several false starts before he got into his first song. It was probably the wrong song too; it was the same as he did at the start of the first set. He was lethargic on the other songs he found his way through.

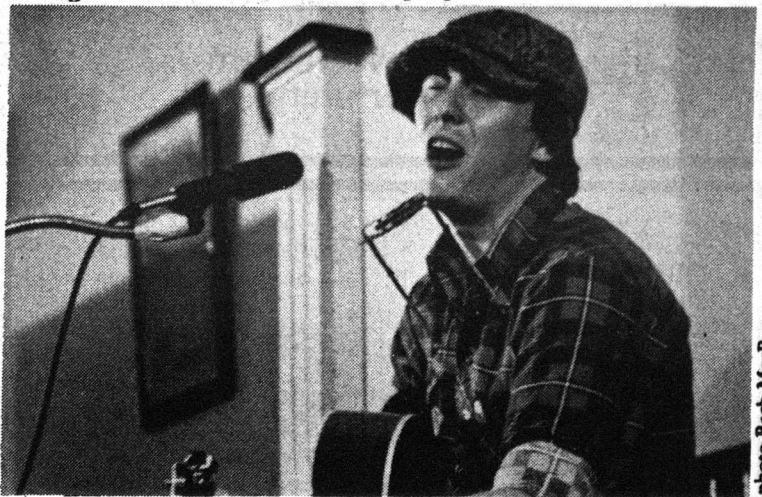
Howlin' and growlin' became moanin' and groanin'; the audience that had been roaring was starting to walk out. Merciful-

ly the houselights came up and the master of ceremonies told MacLean the show was over.

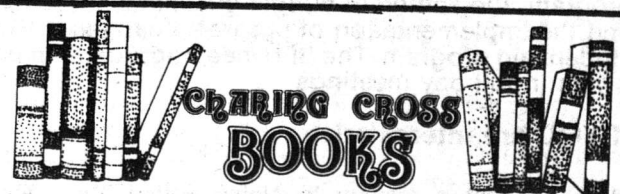
I do not know whether MacLean has a problem or if he just over indulged but it was obvious he was unable to perform and the management should not have let

nim on for the second set.

Both sets were opened by Ian Bowden. The South Side Folk Club should not have let him on stage either. He is a fair guitarist but his vapid, cloying singing is better suited to private parties where people drink too much.



Dave Maclean howls and growls, or is that moans and groans?



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